

# **Report of Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad**

**May 2017**

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# 1 General

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad herewith submit to Synod Soshanguve North 2017 their report for the period 2014-2017 and its recommendations for the period 2017-2020.

## 1.1 Deputies

Synod Bethal 2014 appointed the following sister and brothers as Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) (Art. 44.2.1): Rev FJ Bijzet, Rev DM Boersma (for the ICRC), br J Moes (convener), br R Raimond and sr G van den Berg. Br Raimond did not accept the appointment. In his place, deputies co-opted br A de Mooij. These four brothers and one sister have served as deputies for the full period of three years.

## 1.2 Mandate

The full mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014 to the DRCA can be found in the Acts of Synod 2014, Art. 22.§1.9 and Art. 25, §§ 3.2, 4.2, 5, 6, 7, 8.3, 9, 10 and 12. The mandate for each separate task is presented at the beginning of each section dealing with this task in this report.

## 1.3 Activities

To spread the workload, the deputies assigned geographical regions to the members as follows:

ICRC	: DM Boersma (as instructed by Synod Bethal 2014)
Europe	: FJ Bijzet, J Moes, A de Mooij
Australasia	: J Moes, G van den Berg
North America	: DM Boersma
secretary / minutes / admin.	: G van den Berg / J Moes

Deputies met 11 times, on 16 September 2014; 28 October 2014; 27 January 2015; 5 May 2015; 28 July 2015; 11 November 2015; 23 February 2016; 2 August 2016; 15 November 2016; 23 March 2017 and 2 May 2017 (“an email-meeting”). The meetings were attended by Rev Boersma through a skype connection.

In line with Art. 22.1.9.g of the mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014, the previous DRCA delegated Rev JA Breytenbach and br C Roose to attend part of Synod Ede of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN), from 16 to 17 May 2014, where synod dealt with “man-woman in the church”. Br Roose attended the synod meeting on 16 May 2014 and Rev Breytenbach attended the synod meetings on 16 and 17 May 2014. The report of br Roose is attached as Appendix A.1.

After considering the differences in application of hermeneutics between the RCN on the one hand and the FRCSA, FRCA and the CanRC on the other hand, it was decided by DRCA to send a letter to our three sister churches to sense their feeling with respect to a church-conference on hermeneutics, e.g. as part of an ICRC congress. These letters were sent out on 10 August 2015. The CanRC responded that an ICRC congress would indeed be a good forum. The RCN and the FRCA were moderate positive, while the RCN deputies would include it as a recommendation in their report to Synod Meppel.

In line with Art. 22.1.9.h of the mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014, the DRCA delegated Rev FJ Bijzet and br J Moes to attend the “Buitenlandweek” (Foreign Delegates Week) of Synod Meppel of the RCN, from 3 to 8 April 2017. Br Moes attended the full period and Rev Bijzet attended the synod meeting on “M/F in the office” on 6 April 2017. Their report is attached as Appendix B.1.

Additional meetings together with BBK representatives of the RCN were held on 29 June 2015 and on 4 July 2016, during visits of Rev Bijzet to the Netherlands. The reports on these meetings are attached as Appendix A.4. At the invitation of the CanRC, br Moes had a meeting with delegates of the CanRC, FRCA and the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, on 3 April 2017, just before the start of the “Buitenlandweek” in Mennorode, to coordinate their approach on “M/W in the office”. There was much agreement.

Rev Bijzet and br Moes had a meeting with representatives of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands, on 10 April 2017, in line with Art. 22.1.7 and 1.9.b+c of Synod Bethal 2014. The DGK had separated from the RCN in 2003. The minutes / notes of this meeting are attached as Appendix D.

Rev Bijzet also had meetings with representatives of the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), on 29 June 2016 and on 10 April 2017, the latter together with br Moes, in line with Art. 22.1.6, 1.8 and 1.9.d of Synod Bethal 2014. The GKN congregations had separated from the RCN and the DGK and formed a federation in 2013. The minutes / notes of these meetings are attached as Appendices E.1 and E.2, respectively.

In line with Art. 25.3.2.k of the mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014, the DRCA delegated br J Moes to attend Synod Baldivis of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), from 22 June to 1 July 2015. His report is included as Appendix F.1.

In accordance with Art. 25.4.2.m of the mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014, the DRCA delegated Rev DM Boersma to attend Synod Dunnville of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), from 10 to 16 May 2016 (the synod lasted until 19 May). His report is incorporated in the text of this report.

In line with Art. 25.8.3.u of the mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014, the DRCA delegated Rev Dr PG Boon to attend the ICRC conference in Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada, from 12 to 19 July 2017. Although this is the area of responsibility of Rev Boersma, he found it difficult in this period to cope with his ICRC and DRCA responsibilities. Rev Boon is a member of the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC. He would like to attend this ICRC meeting and had requested the DRCA for financial support to attend the meeting and associated diaconal workshop. This was approved by the DRCA. The report of Rev Boon will be submitted as an addendum report shortly before synod.

In accordance with Art. 25.12.aa of the mandate given by Synod Bethal 2014, Rev Boersma provided feed-back on progress with the work of the DRCA at the Indaba in Pretoria on 26 and 27 February 2016 and submitted an interim report, attached as Appendix G.

In line with the decisions of Synod Bethal 2014, letters were sent on 30 Oct. 2014 to all consistories of the FRCSA congregations specifying the synod decisions on the allowance of minister and members visiting us from the DGK and the GKN.

After a decision by Classis South in October 2015, a letter was sent on 13 Nov. 2015 to our three sister churches that, after a period of more than three years where no calls were made to him, Rev E Viljoen is no longer a minister within the FRCSA bond of churches.

Deputies RCA received a letter from the church of Johannesburg, dated 5 July 2015, with the request to ask the cooperation from our present three sister churches for setting up a shared retirement scheme for ministers. DRCA followed this up with a letter to our three sister churches of after which a response was received from the RCN and the CanRC. The FRCA had forwarded our letter to their retirement committee, but no response was received from them. These responses were reported to the church of Johannesburg.

#### **1.4 Meeting date of FRCSA Synods**

DRCA would like to suggest to move the meeting date of our synods to September / October. Sister church and ICRC meetings take place in the period April to July, which renders it difficult to provide quality feed-back to our synod in time. Furthermore, the period July / August is the summer holiday period in the northern hemisphere, which may make it difficult for delegates from the Netherlands and Canada to attend our synods in this period without sacrificing family holidays.

#### **1.5 Compilation of this report**

The main body of this report was compiled with inputs from all deputies, where each deputy focused on his/her specific area of responsibility. The appendices are the responsibility of the respective authors.

#### **1.6 General recommendations**

DRCA requests Synod to adopt the following general recommendations:

- 1) To appoint new deputies for the 2017 – 2020 period.
- 2) To honourably discharge Rev DM Boersma as a deputy after his service of 3 x 3 years from 2008 – 2017.
- 3) To honourably discharge Rev FJ Bijzet as a deputy after his retirement as minister and relocation to the Netherlands.
- 4) To instruct the newly appointed convening church to convene Synod 2020 during September / October.
- 5) To appoint the following sister and brothers as deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad for the 2017 – 2020 period: sr G van den Berg and br J Moes (as continuing members of the previous deputies) and Rev J Bruintjes, br JF Raimond, well as Rev P Kgatele (for the ICRC / Africa) as new members.

#### *Grounds*

- 1) According to Art. 9 of the Rules of Synod, as adopted by the FRCSA Synod 2005 (Art. 25), deputies should not serve for more than three consecutive terms. Continuity within the DRCA is important to maintain good sister church relationships and stay aware of each other's ecclesiastical developments.

- 2) The work of the DRCA is only useful for the churches (who carry the costs) if regular information / feed-back is given to the churches. This requires good reporting skills.
- 3) It would be good to appoint some more members than the minimum number, because it may appear that some members may not be available or remain available for the full period of appointment.
- 4) Rev Phineas Kgatle is a missionary minister and should be able to build good relations with Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Africa, e.g. through the ICRC structures.
- 5) The presently used time schedule for FRCSA synods of August / September makes it difficult to report back in time on the RCN synods and ICRC meetings, which are held in the same year as the FRCSA synods, and may have an impact on receiving delegates from the RCN and the CanRC.

## 2 Contact with sister churches

This chapter describes what deputies did to carry out the mandates of Synod Bethal 2014 to maintain relations with our sister churches and the ICRC.

### 2.1 Rules for sister church relations

DRCA are carrying out their tasks in line with the new version of the Rules for Sister Church Relations, as adopted by Synod Bethal 2014 (Art. 25, § 2.1).

### 2.2 Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.3.2)*

- 1) To continue sister church relations with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To send one delegate to attend Synod Baldivis 2015 of the FRCA and to instruct this delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

#### 2.2.1 Activities

Deputies delegated by J Moes to attend Synod Baldivis 2015 of the FRCA, held from 22 June to 1 July 2015, and to give a presentation on the FRCSA. Br Moes addressed the synod meeting on 29 June 2015 (text in Appendix F.2), where he transferred the cordial greetings of the FRCSA and showed a PowerPoint presentation on the mission work of the FRCSA on the Cape Flats. This synod meeting was also well attended by members from the FRCA congregations in the Perth area.

Matters that were focused on in his address to the synod are:

- The challenges of being one church federation with a multi-cultural and language diversity and significant ecclesiastical, social and income differences, based on the same reformed belief. In South Africa we presently live in a tumultuous political climate, with strong economic and cultural tensions.
- The increase in family ties and interaction between the FRCA and the FRCSA due to emigration to West Australia.
- The challenge of the church in finding a balance between “preserving the truth” (introvert) and “conformation to culture” (extrovert). In this struggle, which also impacts on our hermeneutics, we need each other as sister churches.
- The mission work of the FRCSA, which is strongly supported by RCN churches. We are grateful to the FRCA for the support of needy churches in South Africa.
- Like the FRCA, we also recommend ministerial students to be trained at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton. The FRCSA are also investigating possibilities of having this training in part by electronic communication.
- For good English Bible translation we rely on studies by the FRCA and the CanRC.
- The FRCSA have only three sister churches: the FRCA, the CanRC and the RCN. We are a member of the ICRC, which we find useful for ecclesiastical contacts in Africa. The FRCSA congregations have growing contacts with RCSA (GKSA) congregations.
- The next synod of the FRCSA will convene, the Lord willing, in Soshanguve in 2017.



The developments of the churches in Australia are being followed mainly via *Una Sancta*, the FRCA church journal that is being sent to us monthly in electronic format. Classis reports are published in this journal. It appears that the FRCA churches on Tasmania are investigating closer bonds with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church in Tasmania and Eastern Australia. The FRCA actively support the mission work and Christian training on Papua New Guinea and Sumba.

## **2.2.2 Decisions of Synod Baldivis 2015**

### **Relations with Churches Abroad**

After years of careful investigation and evaluation, synod decided, with joy and thankfulness to the Lord, to accept the First Evangelical Reformed Church (FERC) of Singapore and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) as sister churches.

Synod decided to continue sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Gereja Gereja Reformasi do Indonesia and the **Free Reformed Churches in South Africa**.

Synod decided to not pursue further closer relationship with the Reformed Churches of Brazil, mainly due to language problems. Closer contacts were to be made with the United Reformed Churches of North America, which have very close ties with the CanRC.

#### **a) Relations with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia**

Deputies RCA were instructed to consult with the Gereja Gereja Reformasi do Indonesia (GGRI), the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC) and the Canadian Reformed Churches to identify the obstacles on the path to unity between the GGRI and the GGRC, to work together with all parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles and to encourage the GGRC to plan and progress towards federal unity between themselves and the GGRI, and if possible, the mission work of CanRC Smithville in Timor.

#### **b) Relations with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)**

Synod decided to suspend the sister church relationship with the RCN and stated that the FRCA's sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if Synod Meppel 2017 of the RCN does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of Synod of Armadale 2012 to the Synod of Ede 2014. For the interim period the Rules for Sister Church Relationship between the FRCA and the RCN were amended.

#### **c) De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)**

Synod considers that the DGK and the GKN both recognized the need to separate from the false teachings and unscriptural practices in the RCN. Given the FRCA's concerns with developments within the RCN it is wise to monitor the developments. A proposal for formal ecclesiastical contact with the DGK and the GKN should follow the normal, orderly church route, that is, by way of a proposal from a minor assembly (CO Art. 30).

Synod instructs DRCA to maintain contact with both the DGK and GKN and be receptive to future contact with those who have already, or do withdraw from the RCN and report on further developments in this regard. Synod will await proposals from among the churches on how to proceed with these contacts.

#### **d) Training for the Ministry**

Synod instructed their deputies to investigate the feasibility of establishing an FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to next Synod. Such a study should consider:

1. The desire of the churches for such a seminary.
2. The potential student numbers that would attend such a seminary.
3. The impact the establishment of such a seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS in Hamilton.
4. The resources required for such a seminary and the availability of such resources.

This is based on the grounds that having only one theological training centre in the world does not prepare the FRCA well for the possibility, and may God graciously prevent it, if for any reason the CRTS becomes unavailable due to political, economic or other reasons. Article 17 of the Church Order states that the churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training of the ministry.

#### **e) Book of Praise**

Synod decided to encourage the churches to use the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise *for the interim*. They appointed new deputies with the mandate to develop an *Australian* Version of the Canadian Book of Praise that:

- i. contains the Psalms and Hymns of the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise that are approved for use in the FRCA and not to include any unapproved hymns;
- ii. incorporates changes to the creeds, confessions and liturgical forms as made by the FRCA, as well as the Australian Church Order;
- iii. to prepare two versions, one using the New King James Version (NKJV) for all Scripture quotations and capitalising all pronouns referring to God, the other retaining the English Standard Version (ESV) without capitalization.

#### **f) Bible Translation**

Synod decided to acknowledge that the ESV is suitable for use in worship services, but to leave it in the freedom of the churches to use the NKJV or the ESV in worship services. They decided to disallow the use of the NIV 2011 and to phase out the use of the NIV 1984 by July 2018. This decision is based on:

1. The deputy report and the supporting material from the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) Committee for Bible Translation shows that the ESV is a reliable, readable and understandable translation, and therefore suitable for use in worship services and for wider study and reading.
2. Synod may recommend one or more Bible translations for use in worship services, but leaves the final choice of one of them to the local churches.

3. The deputies' report has clearly demonstrated that the NIV 2011 is unsuitable for use in the churches on theological grounds.
4. The continued use of the NIV 1984 may cause confusion, and, inadvertently, lead to the 2011 version being used in error.

### **2.2.3 Conclusions**

It can be concluded from the decisions of Synod Baldivis 2015 and from other information on the churches that the FRCA want to remain faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

### **2.2.4 Recommendations**

DRCA recommends Synod to adopt the following:

- 1) To continue the sister church relation with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Bunbury mid-2018 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

#### *Grounds*

- 1) The FRCA give evidence of continued faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
- 2) Personal visits are an effective means of developing, maintaining and building good sister church relations.
- 3) Both the FRCA and the FRCSA are small church federations with a similar background and some similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and by learning from each other, both church federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.

## Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

### *Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.4.2)*

1. To maintain sister church relations with the CanRC according to the adopted rules.
2. To send a delegate to Synod Dunnville, Ontario, 2016 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

### **2.2.4 Activities**

Deputies maintained the sister church relationship with the CanRC by attending their synod and meeting with their deputies. The CanRC had a total membership of 18 679 on 1 Jan 2016, with 56 churches and with 59 pastors and 5 professors in active service. This is an increase in membership of 704 during the past three years.

### **2.2.5 Decisions of Synod Dunnville 2016**

In accordance with mandate 2 above, Rev DM Boersma was delegated to attend Synod Dunnville, which met from 10 to 19 May 2016. Rev Boersma attended from 11 to 16 May. He brought our greetings and addressed synod (see Appendix H). Unfortunately, it was not possible for him to organize presentations in the churches.

#### **a) Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)**

Dr. Ted VanRaalte was installed as the fifth professor (in the field of Ecclesiology) after he had been appointed by Synod 2013. He earned his Ph.D. with the thesis “Antoine de Chandieu (1534-1591): One of the Fathers of Reformed Scholasticism”. The Seminary was awarded a seven-year accreditation period in 2013. For several years now, two professors are suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and have been retired.

In his address to Synod, the principal, Dr. Gerhard Visscher, described the need for more students with a view to the many vacancies in the CanRC and FRCA. The FRCA financially support the CRTS and send their students there (see also Section 2.2.2.d under FRCA).

The CRTS held a strategic planning session in 2014. This yielded the following core values:

- Serving our supporting churches
- Pursuing academic excellence
- Cultivating pastoral effectiveness
- Promoting the Reformed heritage far and wide
- Growing in godliness
- Showing the fruits of the Holy Spirit in all conduct and communication
- Exercising good stewardship

Synod made a special decision regarding support in the training of theological students from the FRCSA (see below, under “Decisions regarding the FRCSA”). Synod noted with gratitude “that under the new admission requirements FRCSA students will be expected to attend the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS).” (Acts Art. 47).

### **b) Relations with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)**

The CanRC and FRCA enjoy a special relationship through the frequent exchange of pastors and students for the ministry and the common language. Regularly, pastors accept calls and move across.

Theological students from the FRCA receive their training at the CRTS. The FRCA contribute financially (equally per member) to the college. The CRTS professors regularly visit the Australian churches for teaching and speaking engagements. Even so, the FRCA are exploring the option of starting their own seminary.

Cooperation also exists regarding the *Book of Praise*. The FRCA have adopted the *Book of Praise*, but have developed their own version. The FRCA have not yet accepted all hymns in the CanRC *Book of Praise* and use slightly different forms (see also Section 2.2.2.e). The bonds between the two federations are valued and do not appear to show any problems.

### **c) Relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)**

Synod decided to continue the sister church relationship with the FRCSA and to mandate the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to send a delegation to our next synod, like they did in 2013. They look forward to even closer ties with the FRCSA and cooperation where possible.

Synod was positive towards our need for support in the training of theological students (citing the unique circumstances of our theological training program) and encouraged the CRTS to provide this support. Thankfulness was also expressed that the FRCSA mission churches are trying to become more independently sustainable, where our deputies have indicated that the CanRC contribution can be reduced.

### **d) Relations with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)**

The CanRC and URCNA were in “Phase 2” of federated unity. Synods from both federations had appointed committees to develop a combined Church Order and songbook and to investigate the unity of theological education. Each federation has made their own choices in these areas, resulting in differences that need to be addressed and overcome before unity can be realized. These differences have not been overcome yet. There was no agreement on the need to have synod supervision over a theological college (resulting in federational and independent training institutions). The URCNA and the CanRC have a different history in this matter. Progress in developing a combined Church Order and songbook also stalled.

URCNA delegate Rev. Bouwers described in his address to Synod how and why the relationship has not developed beyond Phase 2:

“Hindsight enables us to acknowledge as well that the original 2004 goal was naïve, and forging ahead then, as now, would have been unwise and unhelpful. The unity the Lord Jesus prays and works for, enjoins and envisions in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, is a unity that must be given from above. It cannot and should not be manufactured or foisted upon the churches except to our mutual detriment, long-term. We must be honest and real with regard to the challenges we face.” (Appendix 11 of the Acts of Synod Dunville 2016). Several differences have surfaced and have been addressed in the process.

The doctrine of the covenant in the CanRC has raised questions in some URCNA congregations. A colloquium was held between professors from both sides during URCNA Synod Visalia 2014. This resulted in a conclusion that, despite differences in expression, both positions were within the bounds of the confessions. This is a meaningful step towards understanding each other's background, even though unity will probably be a long-term process. Several URCNA Classes sent overtures to their recent synod to keep the relationship at the current level.

The CanRC has three congregations in the USA (officially, the church federation is called 'The Canadian and American Reformed Churches'). These congregations are found in Lynden, Washington, in Denver, Colorado, and in Grand Rapids, Michigan). There is concern in the URCNA that these three congregations have a narrow view of the church, possibly because of their isolation. These are the churches that are closest to many of the URCNA congregations and this influences their impression of the URCNA. For the future, the process of getting to know each other better continues, but without a clear timeframe.

### **e) Relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)**

In the case of the RCN, Synod Dunnville 2016 expressed "thankfulness and joy to the Lord for much faithfulness in the RCN, as well as grief and disquiet over tolerance of deviations from Scripture and confession." Because of Synod's concern about their Dutch sister churches, the decision was made to "continue ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCN, with the temporary suspension of the operation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship Rules 4 and 5." This decision means that the churches of the CanRC no longer automatically accept attestations from the RCN and no longer call ministers of the RCN without first seeking classical approval. The mood of Synod in coming to this decision was sombre. After more than sixty years of close association and cooperation, it was painful to feel this separation from what is historically their "mother church".

### **f) Relations with other churches**

At the request of the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America, Synod Dunnville decided that differences with churches that remained after entering into ecclesiastical fellowship did not need to be resolved. The following information is helpful in this regard:

"When we enter into ecclesiastical fellowship, we accept each other as faithful churches without qualifications." "Bringing up these issues repeatedly, without proper proof of necessity, is potentially damaging to sister-church relationships. Discussion of these issues may take place naturally in the course of ecclesiastical fellowship, but a specific mandate, identifying particular issues, need not be given." (Consideration 3.3 in Art. 49 of the Acts of Synod Dunnville 2016).

"Rule 1 of ecclesiastical fellowship states that "the churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy and be watchful for deviations. Within this context there is always room for brotherly discussion about differences in matters of doctrine and practice." (Art. 49, Consideration 3.2). The current rules for ecclesiastical fellowship of the CanRC are found in Appendix 31 of the Acts of Synod Dunnville 2016.

## **g) Book of Praise**

At Synod Dunnville 2016, Rev GPh VanPopta presented Synod with an official copy of the *Book of Praise*, published by order of Synod Carmen 2013. He gave a speech outlining the history of the various iterations of the *Book of Praise* and expressed thankfulness to God that the new edition was complete. Synod acknowledged with thankfulness the dedicated labour of the Standing Committee. The immense contribution of Dr William Helder in writing new versifications for most of the Psalms was also acknowledged. In regard to the future of the *Book of Praise*, Synod left the door open for future changes when it mandated the Standing Committee to “seek, receive, evaluate and recommend proposals for changes to the hymn section, to be completed for possible submission to a future synod.”

### **2.2.6 Conclusion**

What deputies have heard and is compiled in the Acts of Synod Dunnville 2016 and what has been observed of the practice of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, gives confidence that the CanRC remain faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

### **2.3.4 Recommendations**

- 1) To maintain sister church relations with the CanRC according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Edmonton 2019 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

#### *Grounds:*

- 1) The CanRC give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed confessions and the Church Order.
- 2) Personal visits are an effective means of developing, building and maintaining good relations.
- 3) Both the CanRC and the FRCSA are church federations with a similar background and some similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and by learning from each other, both church federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.

## 2.3 Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 22.1.9)*

- 1) To continue with a sister church relation with the RCN according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To closely cooperate with the deputies of the CanRC and FRCA in studying the developments on the Dutch ecclesiastical scene.
- 3) To call upon the churches and consistories to remember in their prayers to the Lord the problematic ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands when deemed necessary by deputies.
- 4) To send two delegates to the RCN Synod of Ede 2014.
- 5) To send two delegates to the next RCN Synod.
- 6) To inform the RCN in writing about the decisions concerning them.

### 2.3.1 Activities

#### a) Decisions by Synod Ede 2014

Br Kees Roose and Rev JA Breytenbach, although already retired deputies RCA, visited Synod Ede of the RCNL on 16 May 2014 and read the letter from Synod Bethal 2014. The report of br Roose is attached as Appendix A.1. It reflects some frustrations in not being able to discuss issues of concern at a proper forum.

#### b) Theological University Kampen

Synod Bethal expressed concerns regarding the upholding of the reformed doctrine at the Theological University (TU) in Kampen, based on certain publications by lecturers and/or researchers. These concerns are shared by numerous other reformed and presbyterian churches abroad. Synod Ede 2014 decided:

- a. to mandate the Board of Trustees of the TU Kampen to provide the synod with a draft letter which responds to the criticism levelled by churches abroad at publications by lecturers/researchers of the TU., and
- b. to advise the Board of Trustees to strive from within the TU Kampen to continue the scientific discussion with theologians connected to those churches that have indicated their concerns.

Deputies received a document from the Board of Trustees of the TU, dated 8 Nov. 2014, in which our concerns are addressed (Appendix A.2). This document does address all our objections, but also tries to give a placating explanation for each of them, without acknowledging any of the dangers lurking in the work procedures applied by certain lecturers. And after so many years the discussion is threatening to unravel. Therefore your deputies have requested the ICRC to (again) place the matter of hermeneutics, and how we relate to God's Word, on the agenda for the next meeting.

On 23 Dec. 2016, we received a letter from deputies BBK of the RCN with an attached document from the TU Kampen outlining their policy concerning a merger and relocation



with other theological training institutes in the Netherlands. These are attached as Appendices A.3.1 and A.3.2. Synod Meppel will have to decide on this matter.

### **c) Man / Woman in the offices**

Similar objections to those from our churches regarding the report by deputies *Man/Woman in the church* for Synod Ede 2014 were raised during Synod Ede by delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea, the United Reformed Church in Congo and expressed with circumspection by the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Synod Ede decided to ask seven professors, one of whom is from the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands, to submit written advice with regard to the report submitted by the deputyship for *Man/Woman in the Church*. All seven had problems with the manner in which Gods Word was referred to in the report. Synod Ede decided:

“not to agree with the foundation for the conclusion of deputies *M/V in the church* that it is acceptable within what is considered scriptural and reformed when besides men also women are admitted to serve in the offices of the church.”

But also:

“the vision that besides men also women are allowed to serve in the church offices should remain open for discussion as long as the point of departure remains the Word of God.”

Consequently a new deputyship *M/V and the offices* was appointed in order to study:

“how can the official structure be arranged so that women can be included and so use their energies in Gods kingdom. “

It was remarkable that in the decision making process and in the formulation of the decision with regard to this point, there were multiple references to the sister churches abroad. The new deputyship had to ask their advice and any recommendations were to be communicated in a timely manner to the sister churches abroad.

### **d) Delegation of female deputies to synods of sister churches**

The Synod Ede 2014 did decide, contrary to what our churches and the FRCA had requested, that there is no impediment for sisters to attend the meetings of sister churches abroad as fully functional delegates. They were of the opinion that deputies do not attend meetings of sister churches abroad as office bearers. They are allowed to enquire and advise, but do not have the mandate to take decisions in these meetings.

### **e) Approach to the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)**

Deputies RCA view with concern that, although Synod Ede did reject the most important conclusions of the report by deputies *Man/Woman in the church*, they simultaneously asserted:

“that through the agreement in the discussions on hermeneutics the obstacles that were in the way because of the decision by the NGK to open the church offices to the sisters in the congregation, have been removed. Despite the differences in practical outcomes with respect to the woman in office, it is apparent that we as

churches can trust each other concerning the recognition and acceptance of the authority of the Holy Scriptures.”

The decision was taken to continue contacts with the NGK and to progress from discourse to discussions with a view to church unity and amalgamation.

This is all the more concerning because a new hermeneutic in the NGK has led at least one of their congregations (Groningen) to admit a homosexual person, living together with another, to the church office.

Besides, there remains another serious point of concern with regard to the NGK. A previous synod of the RCN (Harderwijk 2011) had mandated deputies *Church Unity*, in their discussions with the NGK, to pay special attention to the concrete adherence to the reformed confession. This was as a result of functioning office bearers in the NGK who are unwilling to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and also that within the NGK differentiation is made between Christ as the foundation, and matters in the confession which do not have a bearing on the foundation. The NGK differentiates between unity in faith and church unity. It is impossible to build on the one foundation of Christ with different, sometimes mutually exclusive, confession material. From the report by deputies *Church Unity* to the Synod Ede 2014 it appears that there was no further attention given to this important matter! Synod Ede 2014 did not pay any regard to this. This topic did not even appear in the decision-making process.

Nevertheless the work towards church unity and amalgamation with the NGK is going ahead. This becomes apparent from the report deputies for *Church Unity* submitted to Synod Meppel 2017. From this report it becomes clear that the manner in which the NGK deals with the reformed confessions has basically been adopted by the deputies of the RCN. Deputies differentiate between a *unity in faith* and *unity in confession*. It is possible to have *unity in faith* while *variety in confession* is present.

In an appendix to their report they have even pleaded for the future use of the *Nicean Creed* as the basis for church unity. Because “should we only accept the reformed manner of understanding Scripture and faith we do not acknowledge the many colours of God. Lutherans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Baptists – just to mention a few – all in their own way have picked up something of Gods multi-coloured light and articulated and implemented this.” And “the reformed tradition is many-sided, colourful and powerful, but held up against the background of *Ephesians 3* (‘with all the saints’) it is also limited and in a certain way may be called one-sided.” In this report then, a plea is made for total unity with the NGK to be effective in 2017 and also that advances are to be made to the church communities that meet each other in the so called *National Synod*.

## **f) New Church Order**

The final draft of a new Church Order was accepted at Synod Ede 2014. This Church Order came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2015. Deputies RCA are of the opinion that with this Church Order there is no deviation from the reformed church law, but that it has become a very exhaustive document. The danger of this is that in the local churches it may rapidly become a largely unknown document that hardly functions at all and unwittingly will lead to more independentism.

## **g) Discussions after Synod Ede 2014**

On 29 June 2015 and on 4 July 2016 deputy Rev FJ Bijzet first met with deputy RCA of the RCN Rev JM van Leeuwen, and later also with Rev van Leeuwen and deputy PG Bakker. The reports of these meetings are included as Appendix C.

In both meetings the problems which the FRCSA has, which are the same as in the FRCA and the CanRC, with respect to the developments in the RCN were discussed. We acknowledged that between the RCN and their sister churches abroad there is a difference of opinion in what actually constitutes 'church correspondence'. According to Rev van Leeuwen churches abroad should not (want to) e.g. evaluate a thesis publication which may appear in the Netherlands. Correspondence should be more about taking note of things, empathising, concentrating on the main issues. Rev Bijzet pointed out that the smaller church federations abroad, in any case the FRCSA, were always very dependent on the RCN and their theological training. That is why they are extra critical of any developments which cause alarm.

The traditional view of the deputies for relations with churches abroad of the RCN was that sister churches may only convey their criticism if, in their eyes, wrong decisions have been taken at synods of the RCN. Sister churches were excluded from consultation and discussion of objections (with the TU Kampen and other deputyships) until a synod decision was taken. This view created much frustration in the sister churches. Deputy PG Bakker, after discussion with the CanRC, personally came to the conclusion that this traditional view must change and that indeed there can be discussions with sister churches while decisions are being considered and prepared. The other deputies of the RCN for contact with churches in North America also chose to adopt this more versatile approach. They have undertaken to raise the matter at the full meeting of the deputyship.

Deputies RCA have observed, and in the discussions in 2016 this was confirmed by deputies of the RCN, that one of the roots of the present problems in the RCN lies in the local congregations. Many congregations have advanced far further with alarming developments than approved by the last synods. There are, for example, congregations where the offices are already open for women, where church members living a homosexual lifestyle are not withheld from attending the Lord's Supper and where evangelical tendencies have gained a strong foothold and affect the vision of baptism.

## **h) Synod Meppel 2017**

It was not just a promise made by deputy PG Bakker and the RCN deputies. In the "Foreign Delegates Week" of Synod Meppel 2017, all delegates from sister churches abroad were given the opportunity to discuss the most important item on the agenda for this synod with members of the synod, namely, the report by the new deputyship *Man/Woman and the office*, including the applied hermeneutics. In this report, there is again a plea for opening all church offices to women. In the applied hermeneutics, differentiation is made in the Biblical record of the relationship between man and woman between a 'line of culture' and a 'line of grace'. With the 'line of culture' we have to think of all sorts of elements resulting from the 'broken reality' after the fall into sin, wherein women were suppressed and put in the background. In contrast to this, there is a steadily stronger line of redemption visible which

removes all inequality between men and women. It is with this last line that the RCN deputies concur.

Deputies RCA br J Moes and Rev FJ Bijzet were part of this discussion. The sister churches that at Synod Ede 2014 warned against a dangerous “new hermeneutic”, did so again. Subsequent to the “Foreign Delegates Week”, a list with questions was sent to sister churches of the RCN by the Advisory Committee on “Man/Woman and the office” of Synod Meppel (on 5 May 2017). To these questions, Rev FJ Bijzet and br J Moes formulated a response, which was sent to the Committee on 20 May 2017. This response document is attached as Appendix B.2. While this report was being compiled, there had not as yet been a decision taken on this matter by Synod Meppel. A synod decision is expected in June 2017 and deputies RCA will report on this in an addendum report.

### **i) Decisions of Synod Meppel 2017**

At the time of writing this report (May 2017), Synod Meppel 2017 had already taken a number of decisions on a range of subjects. The decisions can be found on the website of the RCN: [www.gkv.nl/organisatie/generale-synode/gs-2017/besluiten/](http://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/generale-synode/gs-2017/besluiten/). The most relevant ones for the FRCSA are briefly listed below.

#### *Reformed Theological University*

Synod Meppel decided to approve the formation of a Reformed Theological University (in Dutch: GTU), as a combination of a number of other reformed theological universities and seminaries, since it has been established that the reformed character of such a GTU will be guaranteed. “In this way, a strong foundation is laid to practice reformed theology, in debate and confrontation with theologians in general and to be of service to the churches and the world in which we now live.”

#### *Sister Church Relationships*

The RCN only accept a sister church relationship with another foreign church federation after having established that these churches not only formally have accepted the reformed confession of the Word of God, but also apply this in their church practice of doctrine, worship services, church polity and discipline.

A sister church relationship takes place according to specific rules, which are aimed at keeping each other at the confession of the Word of God and to assist, encourage and sharpen each other in being witness, in theory and practice, of Jesus Christ in this world. The following rules will be followed by the RCN in a sister church relationship:

- a. The churches support each other as much as possible in maintaining, defending and promoting the reformed confession in line with Scripture as related to doctrine, church polity, discipline and worship.
- b. The churches advise each other about the decisions of their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending the relevant Acts, or otherwise at least of the decisions relevant to the other churches (if possible in translation).
- c. The churches advise each other concerning relationships being established with third parties.

- d. The churches accept each other's attestations; they admit members of the other churches to the sacraments on the basis of a submitted attestation.
- e. The churches open their pulpits in principle to each other's ministers, within the conditions of their own church federation.
- f. In case of changes or additions to the confessions, Church Order or forms of liturgy which have a confessional character, the churches will alert the sister churches as much as possible in advance of this intention, so that as much consultation as possible can take place before a decision is taken.
- g. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as advisors, as much as will be possible.

If a sister church is concerned about a decision of a synod concerning doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy, they have to approach the general synod directly. If needed and if possible, deputies will have personal meetings and dialogue with the deputies of the sister churches concerned, to avoid that the concerns deepen to a crisis in the relationship.

The new deputies for relations with churches abroad are instructed, in consultation with deputies of sister churches, to organize conferences on important issues which concern the churches. This is in response to approaches from sister churches expressing a need for common reflection on actual issues such as hermeneutics and homosexuality. Conferences allow for a common reflection on issues which concern sister churches. This should contribute to forming a well-founded opinion on such issues and a better understanding of each other when differences of insight and opinion would appear.

New structure has been created for mission, support and training. A National Cooperation Structure ("Landelijk SamenwerkingsVerband" - LSV) has been established, which supports the Regional Cooperation Structures "(Regionale SamenwerkingsVerbanden" – RSVs) in striving for unity of ideas and consistency of policy. *De Verre Naasten* will resort under the LSV. Deputies of the FRCSA expect that our mission deputies will deal with this new Dutch structure in more detail.

### **2.3.2 Recommendations**

Deputies RCA recommend that Synod Soshanguve North, in line with what the CanRC decided in the Synod Dunnville 2016, decides the following:

1. To express thankfulness and joy to the Lord for much faithfulness in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN), but also sadness and alarm concerning the increasing acceptance of a new hermeneutics, also by lecturers at the TU Kampen, with the resulting consequences; about the minimising of the reformed confessions of faith in the contacts with the NGK; and about tendencies of independence by certain ministers and consistories.
2. To continue the sister church relationship with RCN, but with the temporary suspension of Rules 5 and 6 of the sister church relationship (see p. 52 of the Acts of Synod Bethal 2014). The local consistories of the FRCSA must exercise their own responsibility, after a discussion on the faith and way of life of visitors, in deciding whether church members from the RCN may participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper or to join the congregation. The consistories should also exercise their

own responsibility when deciding whether to allow ministers from the RCN to lead the worship services. A call to a minister from the RCN can only be extended after first gaining the permission of a classis within the FRCSA. The suspension of these two rules does not mean that the sister church relationship is at an end, but it does mean that it is under pressure. This is a temporary measure, in the hope that, with God's grace, this suspension may be lifted, if there is evidence of change within the RCN.

3. To mandate deputies to continue monitoring the developments in the RCN, especially in the areas of concern, and to participate in further direct dialogue with the RCN and other sister churches on these matters, if such opportunities arise (e.g. under the auspices of the ICRC or as part of a specific conference).
4. To mandate deputies to send two delegates to the next synod of the RCN.
5. To report to the next synod 2020 with recommendations on how to continue the sister church relationship with the RCN.
6. To send a copy of these synod decisions to deputies BBK of the RCN.

#### *Grounds:*

- 1) The RCN proclaim that they accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, accept the reformed confessions as standards and have a reformed Church Order.
- 2) Publications and developments in certain congregations and at the TUK give rise to concern about adherence to ground 1).
- 3) Tendencies of independence from synod decisions are noted in some congregations.
- 4) The FRCSA should protect themselves from teachings and influences that are undermining the authority of Scripture, as we hold it, and the well-being of our own congregations.
- 5) Personal visits are an effective means of maintaining brotherly relations and conveying our concerns and opinions.
- 6) Personal contacts and discussions at conferences provide an opportunity to debate common issues and work towards keeping each other as churches by the Word of God.

## **3 Contact with other churches**

### **3.1 Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)**

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.5)*

- 1) To maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level of exchanging information, so that we may remain informed about developments in their churches.
- 2) To remain informed about the ecclesiastical relations between the RCNZ and the FRCA.

#### **3.1.1 Activities**

Personal contacts were limited to discussions between br Moes with Rev Paul Archbald and Rev Leo deVos of the RCNZ while attending the Synod Baldivis of the FRCSA in 2015, as delegates from their respective churches. Further informal contact took place when br Moes was on a private visit to Wellington and met Rev Archbald again in the RCNA congregation at Silverstream. Other information about the RCNA has been retrieved from their website: [www.rcnz.org.nz](http://www.rcnz.org.nz) . Some of this has been included as Appendix C.1.

The RCNZ church federation presently consists of 20 congregations, with about 3 300 members, 18 ministers, 3 junior assistant ministers (“vicars”) and 4 theological students. They have the three ecumenical creeds and the Three Forms of Unity as their confessional standards, as well as the Westminster Confession of Faith as a sub-standard. Their assembly structure consist of sessions (local church councils), presbyteries (classes) and synods, which convene every three years. On synods, every church is represented by a minister and an elder. Their Church Order is based on the DKO.

The RCNZ have seven overseas sister churches (the FRCA, CanRC, OPC, URCNA, PCEA, RCN and the GKSA) and ecumenical fellowship with one other church federation (the CRCA). They are an active member of the ICRC. Quite a few ministers from the FRCA and the CanRC have visited the RCNZ during the past two years for a number of weeks / months. Based on practical considerations (distance, intensity of contact), the RCNZ have discontinued the sister church relationship with the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. They have expressed concerns about the approval of woman-deacons in the GKSA.

#### **3.1.2 Conclusions**

Based on the information obtained, the RCNZ appears to be a church federation which wants to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. When members of the FRCSA move to New Zealand, it can be recommended that they join one of the RCNZ congregations. Due to the workload of DRCA it would be practically difficult to enter in a sister church relationship.

#### **3.1.3 Recommendations**

- 1) To mandate DRCA to maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level of exchanging information, so that we may remain informed about the developments in their churches.
- 2) To send a letter of greetings to the next synod of the RCNZ.
- 3) To instruct the DRCA to remain informed about the ecclesiastical relations between the RCNZ, the FRCA and the CanRC.

### *Grounds:*

- 1) The RCNZ is a sister church of our own three sister churches.
- 2) With our limited resources, the FRCSA should focus on our own region for ecclesiastical contacts.
- 3) The FRCA and CanRC are in a better position to maintain more intensive contacts with the RCNZ and cooperate on mission work in Papua New Guinea and on Sumba.
- 4) For the sake of emigrants from our churches who wish to settle in New Zealand, it would be wise to remain informed about developments in the RCNZ.

## **3.2 De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands**

### *Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 22.19)*

2. Not to proceed with preparations for entering into an ecclesiastical fellowship with De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands.
3. To remain updated regarding developments in the DGK.

### **3.2.1 Activities**

An exchange of correspondence with the deputies from the DGK took place concerning the statement from their Synod Groningen 2014-2015, that the DGK, when initiating sister church relations, needs to consider *“that, whenever there is mention of relations with a third party, due caution must be exercised and it needs to be ascertained what this relationship means to the relevant church, so that the value, the purpose and possible manner of commencing and/or exercising of a sister church relationship can be properly judged”*. Furthermore: *“double relations do not advance the Christ-commanded unity”*.

Initially the secretary of the deputyship had written that their synod has stated: *“it is not possible to have a sister church relationship with more than one church federation in the same country”*. So your deputies pondered whether there was any purpose in continuing discussions with the DGK because our churches have as yet not severed the sister church relation with the GKN and remain sister churches with the CanRC. The DGK consider the congregation of Abbotsford, which “liberated” from the CanRC in 2007, as the true continuation of the CanRC. The correspondence explained and clarified their position so that they were prepared to pursue further orientating discussions with our churches.

There was one meeting, on 10 April 2017 (meeting notes in Appendix D). The discussions were held in a friendly, brotherly sphere, but DRCA are of the opinion that not much has changed in the DGK compared to what DRCA reported to Synod Bethal 2014. From our side we reiterated what our churches have said in the past, namely that the secession by the DGK from the RCN in 2003 was premature and based on insufficient grounds. The brothers from the DGK disagreed with this assessment and were of the opinion that current developments in the RCN substantiated their previous decision. It is also indicative that they could agree with the reasons for the church of Abbotsford seceding from the CanRC, these reasons for the DRCA are unconvincing.



A start has been made with discussions on the rift between the DGK and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN). The latter seceded around 2013 from the RCN. Synod Groningen 2014-2015 of the DGK has made statements regarding these discussions:

- *With regard to the handling of the Church Order (CO), where it determines engagement in church life within the federation, we have certain queries to the GKN, particularly with respect to the authority of greater assemblies (art. 35 CO) and the functioning of art. 31 CO and art 67 CO.*
- *In a publication of 2010 (“The reformation of the church and the gospel of free grace”), that until now has not been recalled and which remains posted on the site of the GKN Zwolle, there are statements which elicit questions about the confession of the abovementioned foundation. These statements refer to :*
  - *the doctrine about the church (Art. 27-29 Belgic Confession of Faith (BCF))*
  - *the authority of office bearers and of church meetings (Art. 30-32 BCF, Art. 35 CO)*
  - *the doctrine of covenant and sanctification (Art. 24 BCF)*
- *A number of ministers from the GKN have given signs of pluriformity when it comes to church vision. In one of his publications, Prof.Dr J. Douma, who is now a member of the GKN, has left room for the evolution theory and developed a deviant view of the sabbath rest.*
- *In the above mentioned brochure, the rightfulness of the Liberation of the DGK in 2003 is brought into question (see also the brochure “Refutation” on the website of the GKN Zwolle). The same must be said about statements made by Rev E Hogendoorn. In this statement the synod also decries the RCN as “a schismatic church”.*

In the meeting of 10 April 2017, we discussed agenda items related to the RCN, as proposed by the DGK. They stated that these agenda items were solely meant as points for informative discussion and not as a judgement or condemnation of the RCN. Neither were they meant to be seen as terms and conditions for the discussion.

### **3.2.3 Recommendations**

- 1) To mandate DRCA to maintain contact and to continue discussions with De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands, but not to progress to ecclesiastical fellowship with this church federation.
- 2) In case of members from this federation coming to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord’s Supper – should they make this request – only after a conversation with them.
- 3) To instruct DRCA to inform the DGK in writing on the decisions concerning them.

#### *Grounds:*

- 1) At this time the FRCSA have a responsibility towards the RCN.
- 2) The FRCSA denounce the precipitate “liberation” in 2003 and detect a repeat of this in the secession from the CanRC by the church of Abbotsford, while the DGK see this secession as the work of God.
- 3) The FRCSA wish to observe the developments in the discussions between the DGK and the GKN.
- 4) The fact that members of the DGK were in a sister church relation with us not long ago and since they did not leave the RCN because they wished to leave the reformed line –

rather, they wished to preserve it – necessitates us to continue to strive for restoring unity.

### **3.3 Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)**

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 22.19)*

1. To continue investigating the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN).
2. To acquaint themselves with the evaluations and judgments of GKN's major assemblies with regard to congregations and ministers now belonging to the GKN federation.
3. To formulate a substantiated proposal to the next synod whether the Lord expects the FRCSA to enter into a sister church relationship with this federation.
4. In the meantime, in case of members from this federation coming to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests to the Lord's Supper – should they make this request – only after a conversation with them.

#### **3.3.1 Activities**

There have been two meetings with a delegation from the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), on 29 June 2016 and on 10 April 2017 (meeting notes in Appendices E.1 and E.2, respectively). Besides these meetings, there was an initial discussion with Prof. and Mrs J. Douma after they had joined the GKN (Appendix E.3). In the meantime Rev Rob Visser, previous minister to Pretoria, has also joined this church federation.

In our most recent discussion one of the ministers of the GKN also indicated that the 'liberation' of the DGK in 2003 was too hasty and decided upon insufficient grounds. The RCN was formed partly through later splits from the DGK, because members found the sphere there too radical, and through direct transfers from the RCN. Because of this diversity in background, there are, more than in the DGK, differences in liturgy. There was a conscious choice that church decisions taken before the church federation was established in 2009 should not be reviewed again.

In their Synod Ede 2014 the RCN stated that:

*“The small differences in practice between (GKN) churches at present, namely, the use of liturgical forms at public profession of faith and solemnization of marriages, the singing of a number of hymns, and the manner in which sisters of the congregation are included in the election of office bearers, are no hindrance to accepting one another as churches of Christ and living together as a federation of churches.”*

It can be concluded that there are no big changes compared to what DRCA reported to Synod Bethal 2014. On the one hand we are happy that discussions between the GKN and the DGK have commenced after all, but on the other hand deputies from the GKN fear that continuation of these discussions could be more laborious than was anticipated, considering the rigid points of view in the DGK.

#### **3.3.2 Recommendations**

1. To mandate DRCA to maintain contact and to continue the discussions with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), but not, as yet, to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with this church group.

2. In case of members from this federation coming to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord's Supper – should they make this request – only after a conversation with them.
3. To instruct DRCA to inform the GKN in writing on the decisions concerning them.

*Grounds:*

- 1) At this time the FRCSA have a responsibility towards the RCN.
- 2) De FRCSA wish to observe any developments in the discussions between the GKN and the DGK and whether a change for the good within the RCN will make a return to these churches possible.
- 3) The fact that members of the GKN were in a sister church relation with us not long ago and since they did not leave the RCN because they wished to leave the reformed line – rather, they wished to preserve it – necessitates us to continue to strive for restoring unity.

### **3.4 Churches in North America**

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.6)*

To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in North America via the CanRC.

#### **3.4.1 Activities**

DRCA delegates to the “Foreign Delegates Week” of Synod Meppel of the RCN met with two ministers delegated from the Reformed Churches of North America (RCUS). It was good to note that on the point of hermeneutics, the RCUS was very much in line with the FRCSA and the CanRC. And we could support each other in the discussions.

#### **3.2.2 Conclusions**

There are no issues for consideration by Synod Soshanguve North 2017 related to reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America.

#### **3.2.3 Recommendations**

To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in North America, mainly via the CanRC.

*Ground:*

According to the policy adopted by Synod Bethal 2000, the FRCSA should focus on our own region. It is better to leave more intensive contacts related to reformed churches in North America to the CanRC.

### **3.5 Churches in Africa**

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art.25.7)*

Synod Bethal 2014 did not give DRCA a specific mandate but decided (art. 19.7):

- 1) To instruct DRCA to remain in contact with the ICRC regarding future mission conferences;
- 2) To instruct DRCA to ask the mission boards of the FRCSA to delegate at least one of the missionaries to the next Africa mission conference;
- 3) To remind DRCA of the decisions of previous synods to deal with the existing contacts in Africa mainly via the ICRC regional conferences and the sister churches.

### **3.5.1 Activities**

DRCA tried to remain in contact with churches in Nigeria and Uganda regarding a regional ICRC conference. A regional ICRC conference was organised by the Reformed Church of Uganda in August 2016, but due to communication problems, unfortunately, no delegate from the FRCSA did attend.

### **3.3.2 Regional ICRC Conferences in Africa**

New contacts will be made with churches from Africa during the 2017 ICRC conference in Canada. The FRCSA delegate, Rev Boon, will make contact with the ICRC delegates of African churches and receive information on plans for a future regional ICRC conference in Africa.

### **3.3.3 Conclusions**

- 1) Contacts with churches in Africa should mainly be made through the ICRC or sister churches. Especially the RCN has several sister churches in Africa.
- 2) The FRCSA should support regional ICRC conferences as a mean of mutual encouragement and strengthening of ICRC member churches.

### **3.3.4 Recommendations**

- 1) To instruct DRCA to remain in contact with the ICRC and churches in Africa regarding future regional conferences.
- 2) To instruct DRCA to ask the mission boards of the FRCSA to delegate at least one of the missionaries to the next Africa mission conference.
- 3) To share the cost for attending this conference with the appropriate mission board.
- 4) To instruct DRCA in cases of possible contacts with churches in areas where ICRC member churches or sister churches are not active, to consider the feasibility of actions by the FRCSA.

### ***Grounds:***

- 1) The missionaries are the people who profit most from the ICRC regional missions conferences.
- 2) Since the missionaries / mission boards profit from sending a delegate, it is reasonable to share the cost.
- 3) The FRCSA and its members have a responsibility to promote the proclamation of the Gospel wherever reasonably possible.

## 4 ICRC

### *Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.8)*

Mandate regarding contacts with the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC):

1. To continue ICRC membership.
2. To authorise DRCA to send one delegate to the ICRC 2017 meeting in Canada.

#### **4.1 ICRC 2017 conference in Canada**

Based on above mandate 2, DRCA appointed Rev PG Boon as delegate to attend the meeting in Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada. Rev Boon will, the Lord willing, report on the proceedings and decisions of this conference in an **addendum report in July/August 2017**.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

- 1) To continue ICRC membership.

##### **Grounds:**

- a. The ICRC is an organisation which adheres to its Reformed basis.
- b. The ICRC provides a platform to maintain contacts with Reformed churches all over the world.
- c. The ICRC provides us with opportunities to co-ordinate and structure our mission activities in a more effective way.
- d. The ICRC offers opportunities to promote the proclamation of the gospel in our African continent.

- 2) To uplift the ICRC profile in the FRCSA.

##### **Grounds:**

- a. The FRCSA are not fully utilising the opportunities provided by our ICRC contacts.
- b. Attending ICRC conferences is a rather costly exercise and can only be justified if the FRCSA utilise the opportunities provided by the ICRC contacts.

- 3) To authorise DRCA to send two delegates to the ICRC 2020 conference.

##### **Grounds:**

- a. Representation at ICRC conferences is important in order to be aware of the opportunities the ICRC offers.
- b. FRCSA delegates found that the input by two delegates to the conference was far more effective than in the case of one delegate.
- c. In cases where voting was required, consultation between the two delegates led to a more responsible voting behaviour.

- 4) To authorise DRCA to maintain contacts with African ICRC member churches and to find ways to support the proclamation of the Word of God and leadership training by those churches in their home countries, in co-operation with other ICRC member churches.

##### **Grounds:**

- a. The African member churches expressed their need for help to remain Reformed and to proclaim the Gospel in their home countries, as well as a need for leadership training in newly formed congregations
  - b. The FRCSA and the RCSA, as African church federations, are in a better position to provide certain forms of support to those churches, than churches from other continents.
- 5) To consider moving the normally accepted meeting time of May for FRCSA Synods, to September/October for Synod 2020.

**Grounds:**

- a. A possible clash between meetings of the FRCSA Synod and the ICRC 2020 could in this way be avoided.
- b. Relevant information from ICRC 2020 could in this way be handled by Synod 2020, instead of three years later.

## **5 FRCSA Information Booklet**

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.9)*

To keep the booklet *Introducing the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa* up to date and to adjust it periodically and when specific needs arise.

### **5.1 Activities**

Deputies tried to update the details of churches. However, DRCA were unable to get access to the FRCSA's [www.vgk.org.za](http://www.vgk.org.za) website and learned from the webmaster (br. Gerard Byker) that the website was being overhauled. Therefore, there was no use in placing new documents on the present website and this should wait until the new website was finalised. Sister churches tried to get hold of Acts of FRCSA Synods on the FRCSA website, but only the Acts from 2000 to 2008 were available on the website.

### **5.2 Conclusion**

- 1) Deputies could not execute their instruction of Synod Bethal 2014 due to inaccessibility of the FRCSA website.
- 2) Relevant information on the FRCSA on the new website should be kept updated, including Acts of Synods.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

To instruct DRCA to keep the booklet *Introducing the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa* up to date, to adjust it when specific needs arise, and to publish it electronically through the FRCSA website.

*Grounds:*

- 1) Since the booklet contains details on local churches as well as on the FRCSA church federation, it should be kept up-to-date for easy and reliable information to interested persons.

- 2) Several churches use the information contained in the booklet in their own publications. It is therefore not necessary to provide printed copies.

## **6. Liaison for the Churches**

*Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.10)*

- 1) To provide the FRCSA church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 2) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.

### **6.1 Activities**

Deputies RCA received a letter from the church of Johannesburg, dated 5 July 2015, with the request to ask the cooperation from our present three sister churches for setting up a shared retirement scheme for ministers. It is general practice that the church from where the minister retires is responsible for his full retirement support. In line with Art. 25, §10.z of the mandate, it was decided to respond positively to this request, as this was an initial investigation to serve our churches in general. Deputies did send out letters to deputies RCA of our three sister churches on 10 August 2015.

Deputies received feedback from the RCN on 30 Sept. 2015, stating that the RCN's "Vereniging Samenwerking Emeritering" (VSE), as from 1 Jan. 2015, covers the years that ministers have been in active service of one of the RCN churches, also when they retire elsewhere. This also holds for the Dutch "AOW" state pension fund, to which the VSE payments are supplementary. The CanRC responded on 23 Oct. 2015, stating that their retirement funding is interwoven with the Canadian state retirement fund and tax rules and would therefore be difficult to share with foreign churches where ministers may retire. They have tried this already with the RCN and the FRCA, but to no avail. No response has been received from the FRCA, but on the FRCA website their present retirement funding is outlined, which is similar to that of the FRCSA.

These responses were reported to the church of Johannesburg and this terminated the involvement of deputies RCA on information gathering. No other requests for information were received from the church councils.

### **6.2 Conclusion**

DRCA was able to respond to a request from the church of Johannesburg to obtain information from our sister churches on retirement of ministers.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

- 1) To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 2) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.

*Grounds:*

There is an on-going need for the liaison function of DRCA since they gather information regarding churches abroad.

## 7. Budget

	Item	ZAR
1	One delegate to attend Synod FRCA in Bunbury mid-2018	15 000
2	One delegate to attend Synod CanRC in Edmonton 2019	15 000
3	Two delegates to attend Synod RCN 2020 @ R14 000 pp	28 000
4	Two delegates to attend ICRC Congress 2020 and/or a special conference on hermeneutics, @ R 15 000 pp	30 000
5	One delegate to attend Africa Regional ICRC conference 2018/2019 (task shared with Mission delegate at mission expenses)	6 000
6	ICRC membership fee 2017-2020	2 000
7	Reporting / attending Indaba 2019 and/or FRCSA synod 2020	2 000
	<b>Total 2017-2020</b>	<b>98 000</b>

## 8. Proposed Mandate for 2017-2020

We list all the recommendations mentioned in this report in this chapter for the convenience of Synod. The relevant paragraph numbers for these recommendations are indicated.

DRCA respectfully recommend that Synod Soshanguve North appoints new Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad with the following mandate / instructions:

- 1) To maintain sister church relations with the FRCA according to the adopted rules. [§2.1] / instructions
- 2) To send a delegate to FRCA Synod Bunbury 2018 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA. [§2.1]
- 3) To maintain sister church relations with the CanRC according to the adopted rules. [§2.2]
- 4) To send a delegate to CanRC Synod Edmonton 2019 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA. [§2.2]
- 5) To continue the sister church relationship with the RCN according to the established rules. [§2.3]
- 6) To subject the sister church relationship to the following restrictions: [§2.3]
  - a. In case of pastors, missionaries and candidates from the Netherlands coming to minister in the FRCSA, the Classis of the respective church will conduct a *colloquium doctum*, during which it will be determined whether the person involved is heartily committed to the doctrine of Holy Scripture, as



summarized in the Three Forms of Unity and expressed in the Church Order. Those elements of Reformed doctrine that are especially at stake within the RCN at present, should not be avoided.

- b. To call upon consistories, when RCN members hand in attestations, to talk with them about their willingness to subject themselves to the Reformed doctrine.
  - c. To call upon the consistories when issuing attestations to members leaving for the Netherlands, to make them aware about the concerns we have about the RCN and to prepare them for the complicated ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands.
- 7) To call upon the church councils to remember in their prayers to the LORD the problematic ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands and to pray in particular for the RCN. [§2.3]
  - 8) To communicate our ongoing concerns with regard to the matters mentioned in §2.4.1 to the deputies RCA of the RCN.
  - 9) To participate in and provide inputs to a possible conference on reformed hermeneutics which may be organised by the ICRC or the RCN.
  - 10) To cooperate closely in the coming years with the deputies of the CanRC and the FRCA in studying the developments and addressing our concerns with the RCN. [§2.3]
  - 11) To inform the RCN in writing about the decisions concerning them. [§2.3]
  - 12) To enable Deputies RCA financially to attend the next Synod of the RCN in 2020, as well as to attend to the activities as described in recommendation 5 above. [§2.3.6]
  - 13) To maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level of exchanging information, so that we may remain informed about the developments in their churches. [§3.1]
  - 14) To continue to acknowledge the brotherhood with members of the DGK. [§3.2]
  - 15) To investigate in the coming years whether there are sufficient reasons to consider a sister church relationship with the DGK. [§3.2]
  - 16) To report in writing about this investigation to the next Synod and make recommendations. [§3.2]
  - 17) To inform the DGK in writing about the decisions concerning them. [§3.2]
  - 18) To acknowledge the brotherhood with members of the GKN. [§3.3]
  - 19) To investigate in the coming years whether there are sufficient reasons to consider a sister church relationship with the GKN. [§3.3]
  - 20) To report in writing about this investigation to the next Synod and make recommendations. [§3.3]
  - 21) To inform the GKN in writing about the decisions concerning them. [§3.3]
  - 22) To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in Northern America through the CanRC. [§3.4]
  - 23) To remain in contact with the ICRC regarding future mission conferences. [§3.5]
  - 24) To ask the mission boards of the FRCSA to delegate at least one of the missionaries to the next Africa mission conference. [§3.5]
  - 25) To share the cost for attending this conference with the appropriate mission board. [§3.5]
  - 26) To continue ICRC membership. [§4]
  - 27) To authorise DRCA to send one delegate to the next ICRC meeting. [§4]

- 28) To keep the booklet *Introducing the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa* up to date, to adjust it when specific needs arise, and to publish it electronically through the FRCSA website, in co-operation with the webmaster. [§5]
- 29) To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad. [§6]
- 30) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad. [§6]
- 31) To report to the next Synod and propose recommendations according to article 11 of the Synod Rules.

## Appendices

### Appendix A.1 - Report on visit to Synod Ede 2014 of the RCN

Synod Bethal 2014 decided to send two delegates to Synod Ede 2014 of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands (RCN). Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) appointed Rev. Dr. J. A. Breytenbach and br. C. Roose as delegates to attend the RCN synod, during the period in which the concerns of some of the RCN's sister churches were discussed. Br. Roose attended only the meeting on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> May, while Rev. Breytenbach attended the meetings on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> May and Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2014.

The main agenda items for those days were the following:

- 16<sup>th</sup> May: Discussion of letters from concerned sister churches.  
Discussion of letters from the Reformed Churches of Bunschoten-Oost and Katwijk regarding the appointment of Dr. Paas at the TUK, by Synod Harderwijk, 2011.
- 17<sup>th</sup> May: Discussion of Report of Deputies Man/Woman in the church.

#### Meeting on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014

##### - *Welcome to representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Uganda*

The RCNL has accepted the PCU as a new sister church. Two representatives of this church were present and were welcomed by the chairman. On invitation by the chairman, they conveyed greetings from their churches to the synod meeting.

##### - *Letters from concerned sister churches.*

Letters were received from the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI), the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) and the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.

These churches were represented by the following delegates:

- CanRC: Revv. J. de Gelder and J. Moesker, br. G. Nordeman and Prof. C. van Dam.  
EPCI: Rev. A. Lucas.  
FRCA: Rev. P.K.A. de Boer  
KPCCK: ?

The letter from our Synod Bethal was considered as *not admissible* as it was received far past the closing date for correspondence. We were however allowed to read the letter in the full meeting and it was recorded electronically by the secretary. The fact that our letter was inadmissible was not a serious matter, as our concerns were also addressed in the letters from the other sister churches, but DRCA should in the future be aware of closing dates for correspondence and act accordingly. Synod Bethal indicated two main issues of concern in their letter to Synod Ede. During the discussion of these issues the following was revealed:

#### 1. Guarding the Reformed Doctrine at the Theological University (TU) in Kampen

Synod Ede did not agree with the reasoning for the concerns regarding this issue. They were of the opinion that the issues were fully addressed and that the reasons for the concerns, as mentioned in the letters from the sister churches were proven to be unfounded. They also indicated that this issue was closed and that the sister churches should accept that fact.

## **2. Women in the special ecclesiastical offices**

One of the reasons for our concerns regarding this issue was the Report by the majority of Deputies *M/W in the church*. The discussion on this issue was however planned for Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> May and is therefore reported later in this report.

### **- Letters from RC of Bunschoten-Oost and Katwijk**

These letters revealed that some churches are not happy with the way in which complaints about lecturers at the TU Kampen are handled. They claim that questions concerning lecturers, which were appointed by synod, should be answered by synod and should not be passed on to the Board of Directors of the TUK for further handling.

A draft statement was proposed in which was stated that synod is not responsible for answering such questions, as that is regarded as the responsibility of the TUK.

The final synod decision regarding this issue is not known to us at this stage.

## **Meeting on Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

### **- Report of Deputies Man/Woman in the church**

This part of the synod meeting was attended by Rev. Dr. Breytenbach, but no detailed summary of the discussions has been received. The evaluation below should suffice in covering all days attended.

### **Evaluation**

In the news bulletins from Synod Ede of the RCN it was reported that the concerns of the sister churches were discussed and that the representatives of the sister churches were encouraged and reassured of the good intentions of the RCN.

In our opinion that statement is somewhat misleading. We were indeed encouraged by the fact that we found indications of a greater willingness to consider the argumentation by the sister churches more seriously, as compared to previous occasions, but we also found enough reasons not to be reassured of the good intentions of the RCN.

We are grateful for the decision to reject the deputies' proposals concerning *M/W in the church* and to appoint new deputies to study what the Bible really says about the offices in the church.

We are however disappointed about decisions concerning the guarding of the reformed doctrine at the TUK and concerning the promotion of unification with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, regardless of the doctrinal differences between the two church federations.

### **Recommendations**

We recommend to the newly appointed DRCA:

1. To study the 'Acta' of the RCN's General Synod Ede 2014 and formulate proposals to Synod 2017 concerning issues which may affect our churches.

2. To consider a regulation to make a '*colloquium doctum*' compulsory for ministers from the RCN (and perhaps other sister churches) who accept a call to serve in the FRCSA.

## Appendix A.2 - Theological University: response to foreign sister-churches

### 1. General

In this document the Board of Trustees (BoT) of the Theological University in Kampen (TUK) seeks to fulfill the request of the Synod of Ede, 2014, to formulate a response to the criticism from our foreign sister-churches concerning publications by lecturers and researchers at the TUK. In its request, the Synod stated that this response should take the form of an extensive exposition, accessible to a broad audience, and that it should address the various letters which have been sent. By foreign sister-churches are meant the Reformed Church in the United States, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the Free Reformed Church of Australia. We gladly comply with this request.

The Synod of Armadale, 2012, of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia mentions in its letter dated April 22, 2013, the names of Dr. K. van Bekkum, Dr. S. Paas, Rev. J.J.T. Doedens, Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne, and Dr. G. Harinck. These brothers were also mentioned in the letters from other foreign sister-churches in the past few years, in connection to objections to publications by TUK lecturers. Most of these objections have been replied to in the past. The General Synod of Ede, 2014, judged it important to address the issues raised by the foreign churches, and to give a clarification concerning the way these objections have been addressed. The BoT desires to cooperate in this endeavor, but also wants to emphasize that this clarification cannot provide legitimate grounds to reopen a procedure concerning matters that have been addressed in the past. The purpose of this letter is to give a clear description of how the objections have been handled, and how, according to our firm conviction, they have been answered adequately. The BoT wants to give a description that is clear to all, and the BoT also hopes that the foreign sister-churches will come to the conclusion that the churches in The Netherlands, and in particular the Theological University in Kampen, have handled the criticism of the past fourteen years with integrity and thoroughness. Since the beginning of the discussions about these matters, the brothers involved have also made new and significant contributions to the development of Reformed theology. The paragraphs that follow discuss: 2.1. the appointment of Dr. S. Paas; 2.2. the dissertation and appointment of Dr. K. van Bekkum; 2.3. Rev. J.J.T. Doedens; 2.4 Prof. Dr. G. Harinck; and 2.5. Prof. Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne.

#### 2.1 The Appointment of Dr. S. Paas

The letter from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, mentioned above, states that, although many serious objections to the dissertation and appointment of Dr. S. Paas had been made, these objections were never addressed by a Synod, and that for solely formal reasons. But this assessment can be shown to be incorrect. In a letter dated March 26, 2012, we explained to the Canadian Reformed Churches how the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011, and the Board of Trustees and the Board of Directors dealt with the objections. The letter was a response to the letter of the Canadian Reformed Churches of March 9, 2011. In line with the letter of March 26, 2012, we make the following statement:

The appointment of Dr. S. Paas as lecturer at the university was discussed at the General Synod of Harderwijk, 2011. No objections to this appointment had been submitted to the Synod, but at the request of the moderamen of the General Synod, the Board of Trustees presented an additional confidential report, which addressed the main considerations in the appointment of Dr. S. Paas as lecturer at the university. We highly value a good relationship with the churches in Canada and with the sister seminary in Hamilton, but it would be asking too much to give you access to a confidential report written only for the Synod.

As Board of Trustees and Board of Directors we believe we should give you a response to some of the key points.

1. First it must be noted that Stefan Paas received his doctorate from the University of Utrecht. His dissertation was written according to the guidelines of that institution. He received his doctorate in 1998, many years before he was appointed in Kampen. The grounds for his appointment in Kampen included his publications in the field of missiology, which were all written after his dissertation. The dissertation of Paas is a contribution to the field of the history of religion, rather than theology (even though his doctoral study took place in the Department of Theology). In this work he opposes, on history-of-religion grounds, the common Higher Critical view concerning the historical origin of belief in God as Creator in Israel. At the request of the Board of Trustees, the Kampen Old Testament professor, Prof. Dr. G. Kwakkel, addressed the various issues that could be raised about this dissertation. In doing so, he concluded that Paas had written his dissertation within the framework of the academic study of the history of religion, without making explicit his personal faith commitment. He has done the latter in other publications, which shows clearly that he is willing to be

guided by the language of Scripture. Paas declared that Kwakkel's articles give a fair representation of his position. Naturally, Paas's choice for a purely history-of-religion approach is open to criticism, but given this approach and his explicit justification of it, there is no ground for the accusation of adhering to Higher Critical theories. On the contrary, one should appreciate his courage to show, in a Higher-Critical setting, and in a manner acceptable to Higher Critical scholars, that Israel's belief in God as Creator is much older than is generally claimed by such scholars.

2. The failure to adequately take into account the context within which Paas wrote his dissertation, and the limited scope of the focus of his study (that is, the prophets, not the Torah), is evident in some of the objections raised to the way in which Paas speaks about the historicity of the Exodus and the conquest of Israel in the book of Exodus. On the basis of texts that are generally regarded as old, and archeological digs, Paas concludes that there are good reasons to view the Exodus as an historical event. He did not subject the Biblical texts about the Exodus to historical analysis, and therefore did not cast any doubt on them either. Rather, he wanted to contribute to the defence of the historical reliability of the Old Testament at one specific point, namely the dating of the conceptions of God as the Creator.
3. The same can be said for language about God in Israel. The thesis that "Yahweh was probably a branching off from the Canaanite king-god El" is supposedly in direct contradiction of God's self-revelation in his Word. Paas's treatment of this matter in his dissertation is the maximum which an academic historian of religion is able to say on the basis of the principles and methods of this field of study. It says nothing about the theological issue as to whether Yahweh really is the one true God, and whether He always has been that. Every orthodox Bible believer affirms that God is the only true God, and Paas does the same in heartfelt faith. Nor does it say anything about the issue as to what the *historical* process may have been. Rather, it only speaks to what people believe they can say *within the framework of a specific methodology, with all its limitations*. History-of-religion research deals with religion, not with God. In his dissertation, Paas adopts the scientific jargon common among the academic audience for whom he wrote this work.
4. You write: "We would have expected that as a Reformed scholar he would have stated clearly that although he does not adhere to the religion-historical approach, he will use this approach in order to show that even on the basis of those presuppositions one can defend a creation belief in eight century prophets." (p. 3) The point is that this is precisely what Dr. Paas wanted to do, according to his own testimony. He wrote this even more emphatically in the revised and translated version of his dissertation in 2003, in which (among other things) he forcefully criticizes the literary-critical method. One may debate whether Paas should have made this more explicit in 1998 within that context, but from his own declaration it is perfectly clear that this was his objective. Naturally, he could not have known what role his dissertation would play in the later discussions in the GKv (of which Paas is not a member), and with what questions in mind people would read his dissertation many years later. The context of his dissertation and the people for whom he wrote are entirely different from the context of the later debate surrounding his dissertation in the GKv and its sister churches.
5. On p. 5 you also mention the article by Paas in *Wapenveld*. In the context of his appointment, we had a thorough discussion with Paas about this. This conversation showed to our satisfaction that Dr. Paas wants to understand Scripture according to God's intention, also concerning Genesis 1 and 2. That does not remove the possibility of disagreement about the concrete way he does this in this article. Such disagreements have always existed among orthodox Reformed theologians.

The Board of Trustees and Board of Directors concluded that the Theological University in Kampen had welcomed in Dr. Paas a valuable lecturer, who has deep reverence for the Scripture as the Word of God, and who knows himself bound to the Reformed Confession. By opposing Higher Critical theories on their own turf he actually supported scholarship that is faithful to the Bible.

In addition to this letter from 2012, the BoT emphasizes that the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011, deliberated in closed session about the objections to the appointment of Dr. S. Paas, which had been raised in letters to the BoT as well as in public articles. The clarification and defense of the BoT and BoD concerning this matter was approved by the Synod as part of the reports from the Theological University. In this way justice was done to the objections coming from the churches, and at the same time to Dr. Paas, who in 2008 was appointed by the Board of Directors.

## 2.2. Dissertation and appointment of Dr. K. van Bekkum

The letter dated April 22, 2013, from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia also mentions the 2010 dissertation of Dr. K. van Bekkum, as well as his 2011 appointment as lecturer at the university by the Synod of Harderwijk. The BoT points out that Prof. Dr. H.G.L. Peels, professor of Old Testament at the

Theological University in Apeldoorn, had previously published a very favorable review of this dissertation in *Theologia Reformata*. (1. H.G.L. Peels, *Bijbeltekst, geschiedenis en archeologie* [Bible text, history, and archeology] in *Theologia Reformata*, vol. 54, issue 3, 306- 314). This document of the BoT focuses on the way in which the university and the churches have dealt with Van Bekkum's dissertation and his subsequent appointment. In the aforementioned letter of March 26, 2012, to the Canadian Reformed Churches, the BoT and BoD also addressed this matter, and in line with this letter we would like to say the following:

In your letters you also make some remarks concerning the dissertation of Dr. K. van Bekkum. In particular, you write that the distinction Van Bekkum makes between a "truth claim" and a "truth value" "does not reflect a high view of Scripture and should be rejected."

For the sake of clarity: a Board of Trustees of a university does not evaluate dissertations; neither does the Curatorium. The scholarly evaluation belongs to the thesis committee and the university senate. This includes the assessment as to whether the dissertation fits into the confessional framework of the university. In academic publications discussions are held about the results of academic investigations and methodological principles. Dissertations defended in Kampen must likewise be able to stand the test of such academic criticism. Hypotheses and models that are defended can also be attacked in that academic debate. The articles about Joshua 10:12-14 by E.A. de Boer and P.H.R. van Houwelingen, which you mentioned, were not published in an academic journal, but are illustration of a discussion that may be had about results of academic investigation. On a side note, they also state that Van Bekkum does not deny that God performed a miracle in response to Joshua's prayer.

The BoT and the Curatorium seek to be informed about the criteria and principles used by the supervisor of a dissertation and the senate of the university. To respond your questions concerning the dissertation by Dr. van Bekkum, we include in this letter the statement by his supervisor, professor of Old Testament Dr. G. Kwakkel:

1. At the core of Reformed theological study of the Bible—in agreement with the Bible passages quoted by the Canadian brothers as well as Belgic Confession, art. 3-7—is the question, "What does the text mean?" What do the texts intend to say? Following the Old Testament scholar Long, you can formulate this as the question regarding the "truth claim": what exactly is the "truth" the text "claims" to communicate? This comes with the question of the nature of the "truth claim"; for instance: does the text intend to communicate a historical or ethical truth, a combination of those, or perhaps something else? That question, regarding the content and nature of the "truth claim," you may discuss together as long as you want, as long as you are willing to listen carefully to the texts.
2. For me as a Reformed theologian it is *a priori* evident that anything belonging to the actual truth claim of the Scripture must therefore be received as true, directive, and normative, because God himself teaches it to us. In that respect a discussion about the "truth value" is really no longer necessary, for I assume from the start that the "truth claim" is correct.
3. Still, in some cases it can be useful to investigate this "truth value" after all, for instance by comparing the Scripture's testimony about historical data to the results of archeological research. Regarding this additional research, for example, in a dissertation, I do not need to convince myself of the factual "truth value" of the concrete text of Scripture. Its use is of a different nature and twofold:
  - a. In a discussion with others who do not share my *a priori* convictions concerning the "truth value" of a text, I can show them, to some extent, that there is more support for this "truth value" than they think. This is what Van Bekkum does in his dissertation. Or, if I fail to say more about the "truth value," I realize even more that I really take Scripture and nothing else as my starting point, and that therefore faith is truly the only, all-decisive factor.
  - b. A potential *occasion* to check my view concerning the nature and content of the "truth claim." For instance, if it appears that archeology presents a very different picture from what I think the Bible text presents, then I do well to check once again whether I have really understood the intention of the Bible text. If so, then I make peace with the (for me) unresolvable difference between Bible text and extra-Biblical academic research. If not, then I am grateful for my increased understanding of the Scripture. But in all this it remains so that I believe and accept the claims of Scripture "for their own sake," not on the basis of other evidence. (Here ends the statement by Prof. Dr. G. Kwakkel.)

As has been stated before, the BoT of the TU does not evaluate dissertations; nor do the churches at their Synod. The academic evaluation belongs to others. The BoT considers the statement above of Prof. Kwakkel a sufficient answer to the objections from the churches, in particular on the matter of the



authority of Scripture and the relationship between what Scripture says and the results of archeological research.

A separate point of interest is the appointment of Dr. K. van Bekkum as university lecturer on the Old Testament. An appointment at the TU in Kampen follows a certain procedure, in which the evaluation of the Curatorium is also asked. In this situation, in part because of some critical reviews of the dissertation, there was a conversation between the Curatorium and Dr. K. van Bekkum, which also concerned his dissertation. This conversation resulted in a positive advice from the Curatorium to the Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees regarding the planned appointment at the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011.

Our conclusion is that the Synod itself did not give an elaborate assessment of the objections from the churches. These objections were not on the agenda of the Synod, either. But in the entire process leading up to the appointment by the Synod, careful consideration was given to the objections that had been published. In the closed session at Synod, the BoT gave an account of this; the Synod subsequently approved the plans of the BoT.

Additionally, Van Bekkum interacted extensively with expressed criticism early in 2014, with the approval of the Board of Directors. (2. <http://oud.tukampen.nl/uploads/documents/389.pdf>. Also published in *Lux Mundi* 33.2 (2014), 44-50.)

### 2.3. J.J.T. Doedens

The name of Rev. J.J.T. Doedens is brought up regularly. In 2002 he published the article *Taal en teken van trouw, over vorm en functie van Genesis 1* [Speech and sign of faithfulness: on the form and function of Genesis 1.] The article is part of *Woord op schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel*. [Word inscripturated: theological reflections on the authority of the Bible.] At the time of publication, the Curatorium established that Rev. Doedens was not connected to the TU, so that the Curatorium had no responsibility for this publication.

Individual church members did try to obtain an ecclesiastical decision. The Synod of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, declared the letter of objection to be inadmissible. Grounds for this decision can be found in the Acts of Zwolle- Zuid, 2008, Art. 54.

### 2.4. Prof. dr. G. Harinck

In your letters you mention the name of Prof. Dr. G. Harinck, in connection with a number of statements in the press about a controversial approach to Scripture dealing with homosexuality. These statements were made in a radio interview with Dr. G. Harinck, part of which was published in the *Nederlands Dagblad* of January 26, 2008. On February 6, there was a conversation between Prof. Harinck and all those involved with his position as professor. This resulted in a declaration, which was also published in the *Nederlands Dagblad*. The BoT includes the second part of this declaration in this letter:

#### **The Bible**

In the conversation about dealing with the Bible and the way in which Reformed Christians use the Bible, Dr. Harinck declares that he certainly acknowledges the normative character of God's Word and the force of specific texts. This applies both to living with trust in the Lord, and to theological and ethical reflection. His comments on the Bible passages that deal with women were not meant as a personal hermeneutic, but as a reflection of his personal position in this matter. Earlier in his life he had arrived at an opinion about "woman and church office" on the basis of Scripture. Naturally this involves more than the one text he mentioned in the interview. He wanted to say that he is personally not interested in revisiting that kind of debate, with a repetition of mostly the same arguments. Although he has his own view, he accepts that in the churches to which he belongs women cannot be office bearers. As for the male homosexual friendships that Dr. Harinck called unobjectionable, he declares that he meant a relationship of friendship, and not a relationship comparable to that between a man and a woman. On this point, Dr. Harnack agrees, the Bible clearly rejects homosexual behavior.

#### **Roman mass**

In the conversation about "partaking" in a Roman Catholic mass, Dr. Harnick states that he did not mean participation in the Eucharist, but rather visiting a Roman Catholic service. "If that is convenient," he added in the interview, referring to a situation where it is impossible to attend a different church service.

#### **Careless**

Initially the university understood the interview very different than Dr. Harinck intended, according to his later explanation. They were not the only ones. Some reactions to the interview were quite disturbed and vehement. Under pressure of these reactions Dr. Harinck wrote his further explanation in the paper of February 5.

The next day a conversation took place in Kampen, in which we spoke to one another in a vigorous but brotherly manner. By means of this candid discussion, we found one another in our love for the Word of the Lord and for the churches. In this setting Dr. Harinck acknowledged that his careless formulations and lack of consideration of the ecclesiastical context had led to misunderstandings concerning his views. He regrets this, and it was not his intention.

### **Trust**

Together we realize that the current situation calls for much trust in the churches. These are important matters that have harmed the name of the Lord and of the churches, as well as the name of the university and of Dr. Harinck himself.

We emphatically expressed to one another the intention to proceed together in subjection to the Word of God and in adherence to the Reformed Confession. We also want to relate this renewed commitment to Scripture and confession to the churches.

There is homework to be done on both sides. We have concluded that the mutual fellowship in Kampen needs strengthening. We hope that, having learned from the intensive process of the previous weeks, we may be able to continue in a more united way in our concrete tasks in the service of church and society. This intention we have clearly expressed to one another. And we also express it to the churches. We ask that you give us the necessary trust, as well as your support through prayer and words of encouragement.

May our gracious God help us through his Spirit.

This declaration was signed by Professor G. Harinck, by Rev. P. Niemeijer on behalf of the Board of Directors, by Mr. J. Messelink on behalf of the Committee for Archives and Documentation, by Rev. E.A. Boer on behalf of the Board of Trustees for the lecturing position of the ADC, and by Prof. Dr. C.J. de Ruijter as the director of the Theological University.

The letter from the churches of Australia calls this declaration unsatisfactory. While a foreign sister-church may certainly evaluate critically an event that took place in the churches in The Netherlands, that same church ought to accept the judgment of the Dutch churches that the case has been resolved. In the same year, 2008, the National Synod of Zwolle-Zuid decided to reject the objections to Dr. Harinck's statements, with a reference to the Declaration quoted above (Acts Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, Art. 105, decision 3). Moreover, at the request of the Curatorium of the university, a decision was made to continue at the TUK the special lecturing position originating in the Center for Archives and Documentation (ADC) of the Reformed Churches. This lecturing position has been extended for another six years. In 2014, the Synod of Ede-Zuid adopted a similar proposal. The continuation of the lectorate also implied the continuation of the appointment of Prof. Dr. G. Harinck. Looking back on the 2008 declaration, the BoT wants to state that the trust expressed at that time has been confirmed. Our Lord has heard the prayers addressed to Him at that time, and He gave restoration and renewal.

### **2.5. Dr. A.L. Th. De Bruijne**

The contributions of De Bruijne to *Woord op Schrift, Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de bijbel* [Word inscripturated: theological reflections on the authority of the Bible], ed. Dr. C. Trimp, Kok Kampen, 2002, were the occasion for many objections. The letter from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, dated April 22, 2013, says that these objections were rejected on the grounds that the matter had already been dealt with by

the Board of Trustees of the Theological University, and also because the objections were submitted too late. It is indeed the case that the Synod of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, did not itself deal with the objections to these teachings.

In 2003 the Curatorium dealt extensively with the four objections submitted against the contributions of De Bruijne. The Curatorium wrote a lengthy response to all four of them. On May 17, 2003, a conference was organized by the magazine *De Reformatie* and the TUK (cf. *De Reformatie*, vol. 78, issues 33-41). At that conference De Bruijne was able to clear up a number of misunderstandings.

The Curatorium did not receive any further reactions to this response from the authors of the objections. No objections to the response of the Curatorium were sent to the General Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum,

2005. Neither did the Synod receive complaints concerning the way in which the Curatorium had defended the confessional character of the education and research at the university.

Although no objections to the actions of the Curatorium in this matter were before the Synod, the synodical committee dealing with matters related to the TUK was asked to give special attention to the way in which the Curatorium had handled the objections to De Bruijne. The committee received the letters of objection and the responses of the Curatorium, and was able to gather information from Kampen. From this information they concluded that the Curatorium had carefully dealt with the matter. The Synod granted the proposal of the Drenthe committee to approve the actions of the Curatorium, and to discharge them from their duties. That this included their handling of the objection to De Bruijne is clear from the second ground of decision 1: "Deputy Curators have carefully and adequately handled the submitted objections" (Acts Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005, Art. 122, decision 1).

Subsequently the Synod of Zwolle-Zuid, 2008, rejected as inadmissible a letter of objection by certain brothers to the statements of the Curatorium concerning publications of Dr. De Bruijne. The ground for this was that the appeal against the statements of the Curatorium should have been submitted to the next meeting of its supervising body, in this case the General Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005 (Acts Zwolle-Zuid, Art. 105, decision 1, ground 1).

The BoT would like to point out that the Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, 2005, already had arrived at an explicit conclusion concerning the dealings of the Curatorium of the university concerning the objections to the articles by De Bruijne. This can also be gleaned from the minutes of the discussion in the Acts of Synod.

### 3. Conclusion

In an additional document (Appendix 3) sent to the foreign churches, you will find a description of how the General Synod attempts to ensure that the education given in Kampen is Reformed in character. You will also find instructions concerning how to submit an objection, as a church member or consistory, to the writings of a professor. Such a document makes clear how the responsibilities are structured.

The BoT hopes to have made clear in this letter how the university and the churches have dealt with objections to publications and appointments of lecturers in the past 15 years. Even when the objections had not officially been submitted, the various Synods of the Reformed Churches have always dealt with those objections. Once every three years, the BoT and its predecessors gave an account of the way in which they had responded to objections of concerned church members. And the Synods discussed these accounts and approved them.

The BoT sincerely hopes that this document makes clear to you, as foreign sister- churches, how the churches in The Netherlands have responded to objections that you have raised in previous years. Even if this overview does not change your evaluation of the matters involved, the BoT hopes to be able to terminate the discussion with you regarding matters of the past. The university in Kampen is certainly willing to continue the academic debate with theologians connected to the churches who have expressed their objections. The continuation of that debate will serve the development of Reformed theology worldwide.

The Synod asked us to formulate a response to the foreign churches that would have the character of an extensive exposition, accessible to a broad audience. By means of this extensive overview we as the BoT believe we have fulfilled this request. Moreover, the BoT would like to point out that the TUK continually gives an account, also to a broader audience, of the developments in education and research as it takes place in Kampen. Anyone interested in further information can consult the Annual Reports published on the university's website. We also refer to the Hamilton publication *Correctly handling the Word of Truth* which was recently published, and the projected publication of a collection of articles on hermeneutics in the middle of 2015.

The BoT hopes that you will receive this letter with an open heart, and that it will serve to terminate the discussion about matters of the past. The BoT also hopes that you will find an occasion, at your convenience, to encourage the professors and researchers at the university in Kampen. Like everyone else, theologians, too, need now and then to hear positive words of appreciation. That would also help create space for mutually edifying conversation, including the occasional critical questions.

Rest assured that we have written this letter in cordial union with you in Christ.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Theological University,

Zwijndrecht, 8 november 2014

Rev. J. Ophoff, president

E.W. Evers, clerk

## Appendix A.3.1 - Letter to concerned sister churches



Deputaten **B**etrekkingen **B**uitenlandse Kerken

Committee on relations with churches abroad of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands

To the sisterchurches of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

Zwolle, 23 December 2016

Esteemed brothers,

At this moment the Theological University in Kampen is involved in a process of exploring the possibilities of constituting a Reformed Theological University together with different reformed denominations in The Netherlands.

In the past several sisterchurches have expressed their concerns regarding the biblical standards of the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Therefore we would like to be transparent and provide insight to our sisterchurches in the Biblical confessional and basic principles of theological education and research which are endorsed by the Theological University in Kampen. Please, find enclosed an English translation of chapter 2 of the report

'Moving forward together, in His service, to a Reformed Theological University'. The reformed identity described in this document can be seen as the hermeneutical principals of the Theological University in Kampen.

By sending this document we hope to serve you and your churches.

Wishing you a merry Christmas and the blessing of our Lord in the new year to come!

Yours in Christ,

With warm greetings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M.H. Oosterhuis', written over a faint, light-colored background.

ds. M.H. Oosterhuis, general secretary BBK

deputaten **B**etrekkingen **B**uitenlandse **K**erken

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## Appendix A.3.2 - “Moving forward together, in his service, to a Reformed Theological University”

### Chapter 2 of Steering Group report on GTU – November 7<sup>th</sup> 2016

#### Identity

##### A new start on the same foundation

In the Reformed Theological University reformed denominations, each with its own colour and origin and each with its own distinct church-life, come together. Despite differences in style and perception they all belong to “the reformed tradition” and within this tradition, share a common bond in their heartfelt confession of faith based on the Bible and the Three Forms of Unity. Members of the churches concerned have long since met and recognised one another, in various contexts: in education and in welfare, in political and in social organisations. During the last decennia there has also been a strong growth in the exchange between churches such as through pulpit exchange, as well as various forms of cooperation in theological areas. There has been an intensive and fruitful cooperation between the TUA, TUK and the NGP by way of research groups that were integrated 15 years ago. Theologians from the Gereformeerde Bond and the Hersteld Hervormd Seminarie have been involved in joint publications, congresses and cooperative projects. A clear sign of the increased trust and mutual recognition is the cooperation there is with regards to the publication of The Netherlands’ largest theological magazine, *Theologia Reformata*. For some time now an awareness has existed of a connection in faith and a mutual responsibility for reformed theology in our country.

In the initiative of the Reformed Theological University the lines mentioned cross each other. The Reformed Theological University is introducing a new, and further reaching phase in the process of interuniversity and inter-ecclesiastical cooperation on reformed grounds, and will give this cooperation more body. The goal hereof is to create a stimulus for the practice of theology in the full spectrum of the reformed tradition. Under God’s blessing the Reformed Theological University wishes to give a new élan to the training and equipping of theological students for their task in the church, the academic world and society. A first condition that needs to be met is a mutual and shared conviction concerning the identity and foundation of the Reformed Theological University. All of the parties that support the Reformed Theological University, accept completely and without reservation the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God and commit themselves to the reformed confessions, as being an apt putting to words of truth given in the Bible. In this, the Holy Scriptures have the ultimate authority. Basing ourselves on this foundation has consequences for the way we deal with the Bible, and for our vision concerning theology and the meaning theology has for the church and for society. This is elaborated further in the preamble of the Reformed Theological University. The framework texts in this preamble explicate distinguishing coordinates of reformed scriptural examination and hermeneutics, coordinates that define the way theology is practiced at the Reformed Theological University.

## **Preamble**

### **Positioning**

The parties involved in the Reformed Theological University are aware of their unity through their faith in Jesus Christ, as God given Saviour and Redeemer of this world. We share the calling and desire to live in the service of the proclamation of the Gospel, to God's glory and for the salvation of our fellow men. By the power of the Holy Spirit this Gospel remains a trustworthy and living Word of God, even in our day and age and in our society, also with our culture's degree of secularisation. It is our joy, and we see it as our calling, to work on the progression of this Gospel by working together in a reformed university. We hope and pray that this university will, under God's blessing, through its courses of study, its research and its knowledge dissemination, serve the churches and society, both in the Netherlands and abroad. The Reformed Theological University's academic practice goes hand in hand with a living profession of belief in the Church of ages. Historically and theologically the Reformed Theological University follows in the footsteps of the Reformation, the Further Reformation, the Secession and of Neo-Calvinism. Within the broad bedding of this reformed theology the Reformed Theological University seeks to research, further articulate and teach the importance and meaning of this reformed theology for our churches and for our society in this day and age.

### **Reformed tradition and the Holy Gospel**

The Reformed Theological University aims to be a place where the different reformed traditions, coming forth out of the Reformation, meet. Piety is experienced here and academics practiced out of a heartfelt consent for the reformed confessions concerning the Holy Gospel as expressed in articles 2 – 7 of the Nederlands Geloofsbelijdenis (Belgic Confession).

The Bible is the Word of God, written down by people as inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Bible testifies unto itself of its own authority. We accept the Scriptures before examining them and we let our questions not only be answered by the Bible, but also let them be corrected through it, in order to let it determine our thinking and our insights.

In communion with the Church of all times and places we confess the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as the life-giving Word in which God makes himself known. In all of their diversity, the books of the Old and the New Testament together, form a spiritual union in the Bible. The Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that the Scriptures were given by God to direct our faith to, to found our faith on and to confirm our faith by. We believe that God's Word is the truth and that we, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are led by this truth.

For an understanding of the Scriptures a theologian needs a head and a heart. In order to discern the meaning of the Scriptures a theologian is reliant and dependant on the work of the Holy Spirit, the "first Author". Word and Spirit are inseparable.

## **The practicing of Reformed Theology**

Theology is, in faith, contemplating God as he has revealed himself. We practice this theology as an instrument in our praise of God. The Reformed Theological University and the associated church office studies, educate their students by teaching them to listen to the Scriptures. Herein also lies the prime task being the forming and equipping of future ministers of the Word. In researching and interpreting the Scriptures, reverence for the text, as the Word of the God who speaks, comes before traditional, cultural or personal preferences. This implies the wish to do right to the unique nature and style of the Bible text, in order to so completely respect the way of the Holy Spirit in putting the Word to writing.

Every Bible text is part of a larger whole: the Biblical message that is connected to and supported by salvation history, God's path with mankind and the world through creation, the fall, redemption and restoration. The salvation historical and eschatological perspective is essential for the reformed exegesis, as it provides insight into the unity of the Old and New Testament. Time and again, when interpreting the meaning of a text, both the direct and the broader context of the text are taken into consideration. The canon as a whole serves as a sounding board for the individual texts.

God, who has revealed himself in Christ, is also the creator of heaven and earth. Because of this we also incorporate the vision of the created reality, in which God's multicoloured wisdom is reflected, into our practice of theology and, where necessary and possible, try to find ways to discuss this with other academic fields. Theology as a contemplation of God, His creation and the meaning of the redemption in Jesus, chooses not for isolation but rather for its place amongst other academic fields. The Reformed Theological University wishes to serve the church and society together with Christian academics working in other academic fields. In this, God's revelation, through his path with Israel and in the coming and work of Christ, is for us the exploratory and innovative perspective in which we see reality and the standard for the truth.

We bring ourselves along when we read the Scriptures, with our own way of thinking and our own presumptions, within the reality in which God has placed us. We cannot simply take ourselves out of the equation. The message of the Scriptures seeks to land specifically in the reality of our lives, including our culture, but can, more than once, also have a critical affect on it. In every time and place disciples of Christ may retrieve old and new things from the treasury of the Scriptures.(Matt. 13:52) The Scripture itself always has the last word in this, and not our traditional and cultural preferences or moral intuitions. The pointing out of God's lasting regulations for our lives requires, also in our culture, scripturally secured wisdom and sensitivity.



## **Meaning for our time and society**

Because we receive the Gospel in the context in which we live, we practice a Reformed theology that enters into conversation with, and is fruitful for, our time, culture and society. A Reformed theologian turns to the Scriptures with questions from various domains: faith, ethics, society and science. In his quest for answers he will endeavour to understand the Scriptures as well as possible in order to interpret them as purely as possible. In this, decisions made will not always be the same for all parts of every reformed tradition. Even in a framework that is based on a heartfelt adherence to the Scriptures and our confessions, our explanations and understanding of the Scriptures when dealing with modern day questions will weigh text evidence differently, inevitably causing tension. In the realisation that our understanding will always be incomplete and that our academic knowledge is limited and temporary in character, theologians should always be transparent in their research questions and methods, and must always be willing to give accountability. In this way the mutual understanding is served and furthered.

The understanding and interpretation of the Scripture can present us with many questions to which there are not always uniform answers. It is therefore all the more important to engage in a mutual and precise manner of listening to the Scripture itself, in the realisation that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit. This prime task given by the Scripture to the practice of theology ensures that the Bible does not become a "paper pope". Sola scriptura is directly connected to solus Christus. Christ is the heart of the Scripture, it revolves around him. Reformed theology listens to the scriptures through Christ and to Christ. Thus, again and again, it presents, and answers, questions in every age and in varying contexts.

## **Mission and profile**

The Reformed Theological University is aware of its calling with regards to the preservation, thinking through and further expansion of the heritage of reformed theological practice in the today's world. We wish to effectuate this mission by giving the input of both orthodox and neo-Calvinistic spirituality their full share and where possible bring them together in the practice of theology. The core value is "learning by meeting one another". In this, pietas et scientias, are ever closely connected. Continuing in this line the mission and profile of the Reformed Theological University can be worded as follows, whereby the Preamble is presumed to be its base.

## **Mission**

The Reformed Theological University endeavours to be a home base for reformed theology in the Netherlands, a recognisable address for church and society. The spiritual forming and the academic and practical enablement of theologians, both future ministers of the Word and those who will serve God's church and Kingdom in other ways, are given a high priority.

Starting from various church backgrounds, the Reformed Theological University endeavours to be a meeting place for those who wish to reflect on theology, academics, church and the Christian presence in today's society, in line with the reformed tradition. To enable this, cooperation is sought with like-minded institutions, both foreign and domestic. The Reformed Theological University wishes to be an inspiring university for students and employees, a university that motivates the practice of theology at an academic level, in a context of spiritual forming and enablement. To make this possible the university offers various (part-time) studies: Bachelor of Theology, a Master of Theology (general), among others a Master of intercultural reformed theology, and a research Master. Besides this the Reformed Theological University is also home to a Master of Divinity for the education of pastors for the CGK, the GKv and the NGK. As comprehensive reformed theological university the Reformed Theological University guarantees good education and innovative research of the highest quality. The university develops activities in the field of knowledge valorisation for a wide audience in both church and society. Besides this the Reformed Theological University desires to be of meaning to Christians employed in other academic fields.

### **Profile**

The basis of the Reformed Theological University lies in the desire to strengthen the practice of Reformed theology with the intent of building the churches with which we are connected, both in the Netherlands and abroad. While praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and drawing from the source of the living Word of God, confessional academics dedicate themselves to the spreading of the Gospel, in a desire to make a contribution to all the work required in the Kingdom of God. Piety and academics, doctrine and life, study and church are all entwined. The practice of theology at the Reformed Theological University is rooted in the confessions of the Church of Ages and in Reformed Theology, as developed since the Reformation. With respect for every person's uniqueness and input the Reformed Theological University seeks to make the practice of reformed theology, in its full breadth and colour, fruitful for today's church and society.

## **Appendix A.4 - Verslag gesprek met ds Jan Matthijs van Leeuwen, deputaat BBK van De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKv), Maandag 29 Junie 2015**

Hierdie gesprek was 'n semi-amptelike ontmoeting, aangesien ek en ds Van Leeuwen altwee nie 'n opdrag en agenda van ons deputaatskappe saamgekry het nie.

Die ontmoeting was veral 'n wedersydse kennismaking noudat die deputaatskap BBK van die VGKSA na die sinode van Bethal 2014 'n heeltmal ander samestelling gekry het.

Ek het ds Van Leeuwen bietjie bygepraat oor die ontwikkelinge in ons kerke, soos de samesprekings met die GKSA, eers in Pretoria maar nou ook in Kaapstad.

Op my vraag of ons in Suid-Afrika nog 'n amptelike antwoordbrief van die Sinode van Ede op ons brief aan daardie sinode te wagte is, het Ds Van Leeuwen geantwoord dat dit nie die geval is nie. Maar juis daarom wou hy baie graag die sinode van Bethal verlede jaar bygewoon het. Want hy meen dat ons behalwe skryf veral ook met mekaar moet praat. Hy het sy mede deputate verlede jaar versoek om 'n besoek aan Suid-Afrika toe te staan, maar hulle het besluit om hulle reel te handhaaf dat daar in die jaar wat hulle sinode vergader geen besoeke aan die buitelandse kerke gedoen word nie. Ds Van Leeuwen het dit ernstig betreur.

Verder het ons gepraat oor die moeites wat daar in die VGKSA, soos ook in Australie en Kanada, leef m.b.t. ontwikkelinge in die Nederlandse kerke. Daarby het ons vasgestel dat daar tussen die Nederlandse en die buitelandse kerke 'n verskillende siening is op wat 'kerklike korrespondensie' moet behels. Volgens ds Van Leeuwen moet buitenlandse kerke bv. nie proefskrifte wat in Nederland verskyn (wil) beoordeel nie. Korrespondensie moet meer 'n meelewe met mekaar op hooflyne wees.

Ek het daarop gewys dat die kleinere kerkverbande in die buiteland, in elk geval die VGKSA, altyd sterk afhanklik van die Nederlandse susterkerke en hul teologiese opleiding was. En daarom ook ekstra krities kommerwekkende ontwikkelinge dophou.

Ons het mekaar as 'huiswerk' gegee dat ons weer 'n slag ernstig sal kyk na ons reels vir kerklike korrespondensie en dit duidelik aan mekaar sal stel wat ons daarmee beoog en wat ons daarvan verwag.

Ferdinand Bijzet

## **Verslag van 'n ontmoeting met twee deputate BBK van die GKv in Nederland 4 Julie 2016**

Namens die Nederlandse deputate was aanwesig ds Jan-Matthijs van Leeuwen en br Peter Bakker. Br Bakker maak deel uit van die seksie Kanada van die deputaatskap en was by gevra aangesien hy onlangs aanwesig was in die Sinode van die Canadian Reformed Churches.

Ons gesprek het hoofsaaklik gegaan oor die ontwikkelinge in die GKv en die veroordelende besluite van inmiddels die kerke in Australië en Kanada.

Op my vraag of ons nog 'n antwoord mag verwag op ons brief van al 'n hele ruk terug mbt die hermeneutiese issue, het ds Van Leeuwen laat weet dat hy probeer het om 'n internasionale konferensie oor hierdie issue georganiseer te kry. Hy het die Theological College van Hamilton daarvoor benader, maar hulle het volgens ds Van Leeuwen nie kans gesien nie. Toe het sy inisiatief in 'n doodloopstraat beland. Ds Van Leeuwen het verskoning aangebied dat hy steeds versuim het dit na ons kerke toe te kommunikeer. Hy belowe om asnog 'n brief te skryf.

Ons het saamgestem dat die verskil in hermeneutiek grondliggend is vir die meeste groot geskilpunte wat die laaste tyd die kerke verdeeld hou. Self het ek laat weet dat ons deputaatskap vir eenderse internasionale konferensie gevra het en daarvoor die ICRC benader het.

Die Nederlandse deputate BBK wat die sinode van die CRC besoek het, besef dat die kontak met die buitelandse kerke aansienlik geïntensiveer sal moet word. Die liefste in mondelinge gesprekke. Hulle is op die oomblik besig om Kampen en Hamilton met mekaar in gesprek te kry. Ds Van Leeuwen en ek het daarop aangedring dat die kring van gespreksgenote wyer getrek moet word. Dit gaan hier nie net oor 'n probleem van die Nederlandse kerke met 'n paar immigranterkerke nie. Hoekom ook nie Brasiliaanse, Koreaanse en so meer kerke laat saampraat nie?

Die Nederlandse deputate erken dat, alhoewel daar nie duidelike ongereformeerde synodeuitsprake van hul kerke lê nie, die ontwikkeling in party plaaslike gemeentes en klassies wel kommerwekkend is. En dat dit op die duur ook die sinodebesluite sal gaan beïnvloed. Hulle worstel met die vraag hoe om hierteen wal te gooi. As die buitelandse kerke die Nederlandse kerk wil help, moet hulle veral op hierdie saak fokus.

Ds Van Leeuwen meen persoonlik, anders as br. Bakker, dat ons wedersyds baie meer mekaar se eie verantwoordelikheid moet respekteer. Buitelandse kerke moet slegs kommentaar lewer op wat in sinodes besluit word en moet nie wil inmeng in plaaslike kommerwekkende ontwikkelinge nie. Ek het daarop gereageer dat, indien dit die standpunt van die Nederlandse kerke sou word, hulle dit dan nie vir die buitelandse kerke kan verkwalik dat dié nie meer sommer enige predikant of lidmaat uit die GKv aanvaar nie, maar eers deur gesprekke wil toets of daardie persoon nog in alle opsigte die gereformeerde belydenis liefhet nie.

Tenslotte: die GS Ede het nie die korrespondensiereëls aangepas nie, maar slegs vir die Nederlandse deputate BBK gevra om 'n slag te kyk na die praktiese nalewing van die korrespondensie met so veel verskillende susterkerke in die buiteland. Is 'n deeglike kontak oefening met almal nog haalbaar? Die deputate het hiering nog nie tot 'n standpunt gekom nie.

Die ontmoeting is met gebed afgesluit.

Ferdinand Bijzet

## Appendix B.1 - Verslag bywoning “Buitenlandweek” van Sinode Meppel van die Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Nederland

As lid van die deputaatskap vir Betrekkinge met Buitelandse Kerke (BBK) van die VGKSA het ondergetekende die “Buitenlandweek” van die Sinode Meppel van ons susterkerk, die Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) (GKv) in Nederland bygewoon. Vir die “Buitenlandweek” is al 32 buitelandse susterkerke van die GKv genooi en 21 het dit bygewoon. Dit het plaasgevind van Maandag 3 tot Saterdag 8 April. Die sinode, asook die “Buitenlandweek”, is gehou op die konferensieoord “Mennorode”, naby Elspeet op die Veluwe, midde-in ‘n pragtige bosgebied.

Die deputate BBK van die GKv het ‘n interessante program vir die “Buitenlandweek” opgestel. Op Dinsdag was daar ‘n besoek aan Amsterdam waar kennis gemaak is met ‘n aantal interkerklike evangelisasie-projekte, met die *Stichting “Tot heil des volks”* (hulle werk al vir 160 jaar onder sosiaal swakkes en verslaafdes), die *Shelter Jordan* (opvang van en Bybelstudie met jeugdige wat die stad besoek) en *Scarlet Cord*. Die laaste organisasie probeer om vroue weer uit die prostitusie te kry en het ‘n kapel (aanbiddingsplek) op die “walle” (Oudezijdsachterburgwal). Die naam kom van Ragab die hoer van Jerigo wat die Israelitiese verspieders onderdak en beskerming gebied het en later deur die “skarlaken koord”(rooi lyn – Jos. 2:18) uit haar venster gered is. Meer as 80% van alle prostitute op die “walle” is van buite Nederland en ‘n hele aantal word met “werkenaanbiedings” na Amsterdam gelok en gedwing om as prostitute (seks-slawe) te werk.

Op Woensdag was daar ‘n besoek aan Kampen, waar die *Theologische Universiteit* (TUK) van die GKv gevestig is. Daar is ‘n aantal lesings aangebied, soos deur die rektor prof Roel Kuiper en die lektore dr Egbert Brink, dr Kees van Dusseldorp en ds Jos Colijn. Prof Kuiper het ‘n oorsig gegee van die akademiese werk op die TUK, die studie- en navorsings-programme, asook planne vir die toekoms om uit Kampen na Utrecht te trek en daar saam te smelt met ander protestantse teologiese instellings en opleidings (as die sinode die groen lig daarvoor gee). Dr Brink het ‘n lesing gehou oor die algemene beginsels van Bybelse prediking en dr van Dusseldorp oor homiletiek (preekkunde). Ds Colijn (voorganger van ds Erik van Alten in die Oekraïene) het ‘n lesing gehou oor “Gereformeerde getuïenis in ‘n multi-religieuse wêreld”. Na die lesings is ‘n besoek gebring aan die biblioteek en is ‘n rondwandeling gemaak deur die ou stad.

Op Donderdag het ds Bijzet by ons aangesluit vir die dag as tweede VGKSA afgevaardigde. Tydens die oggend is ‘n aantal lesings gehou oor die moontlike Bybelse begroning vir toelating van susters tot die besondere kerklike ampte (diaken, oudeling en predikant), waarvoor die sinode ‘n besluit sal moet neem. Lesings is gehou namens die *Free Reformed Churches* in Australië deur ds Dean Anderson, namens die *Kosin Presbyterian Church* in Korea deur prof Hae Moo Yoo en namens die *Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church* in Kenia deur ds Daniel Kithongo. Al drie sprekers het hulle uitgespreek teen die toelating van susters tot die amp van ouderling en predikant op grond van Bybelse gegewens.

Na hierdie lesings het dr Erik de Boer die argumentasie van deputate “M/V en die ampte” van die GKv uiteengesit, waar hulle tot die gevolgtrekking gekom het dat susters wel in die ampte kan dien. Die verskille lê in die interpretasie van die rol van vroue in die Bybel (“insidente” of “argumente”?) en die stelling dat Bybeltekste nie juis op sigself ‘n “voorskriftelike gesag” het nie, maar dat eerder uitgegaan moet word van die “oorkoepelende gesag” van die Skrif. Verder speel die beoordeling van ons huidige kultuur,

waarby vroue en mans gelykwaardig is, 'n belangrike rol in die toepassing van die Bybel in ons tyd. Daar is ook duidelik twee lyne in die Bybel: *die lyn van sonde en vloek*, waaronder die vrou sedert die sondeval in die meeste kulture gebuk gaan, en *die lyn van verlossing en genade*, wat ook die vrou nou uiteindelik bevry van die vloek deur geloof in Jesus Christus (met gebeurtenisse wat did aanwys, soos by Debora, Maria en Priscilla).

God werk in ons moderne westerse kultuur aan bevryding van verdrukking (“algemene genade”?), waar slawerny afgeskaf is en die vrou inmiddels haar gelykwaardige posisie in die samelewing gekry het. Volgens deputate kan daar, op basis van bostaande argumente, nie onomstootlik uit die Bybel aangetoon word dat susters nie in die besondere ampte mag dien nie en beveel hulle dan ook aan dat die sinode tot oopstelling van alle besondere kerklike ampte vir susters besluit. Die teks van die vier referate is beskikbaar by br J Moes).

Tydens die middag is, soms emosionele, groeps-besprekings hieroor gehou. Maar die meeste van die buitelandse afgevaardigdes was nie oortuig deur die argumente van deputate “M/V en de ampte” nie (die verslag was al maande vooraf beskikbaar). Die sinode het 'n drie-man advies-kommissie benoem wat die sinode oor 'n besluit oor hierdie saak moet adviseer. Op Vrydag-aand is nog afsonderlik in groepe met hierdie advies-kommissie verder gepraat en weereens het die meeste susterkerke die gesag van Paulus se uitsprake in 1 Kor. 14:34 en 1 Tim. 2:11,12 oor die stil wees van susters in die gemeentlike samekomste / eredienste (die sogenaamde “swygt tekste”) beklemtoon as gesaghebbend, ook vir ons tyd en kultuur.

Daar is wel erken dat susters 'n baie groter en aktiewer rol sou kan speel in die gemeente, maar dit val dan binne die bereik van die amp van alle gelowiges en dalk die amp van diaken, maar dit betref nie die besondere ampte van ouderling en predikant nie. Waar nuttig en nodig in gemeentes kan gesoek word na middele om susters meer te betrek. 'n Waarskuwing is ook duidelik gegee dat die benadering van deputate “M/V en die ampte” tot Skrifgesag ook konsekwensies het vir ander etiese sake (soos homoseksualiteit, eutanase, abortus, seksualiteit buite die huwelik) of vir kinder- en groot-doop. Deputate stel dat verskil van insig tussen die GKv en haar susterkerke oor hierdie saak nie tot 'n kerkskeiding behoort te lei nie.

Daar kan vasgestel word dat hierdie soort intensiewe besprekings oor kontroversiële onderwerpe nuttig is om standpunte duidelik te verwoord en daaroor te praat. Dit lyk egter nie of die susterkerke die GKv deputate “M/V en die ampte” kon oortuig van hulle standpunt nie. Maar die hoop is wel dat die sinode se advies-kommissie en die sinode-lede kennis geneem het van die tradisioneel-gereformeerde hermeneutiek en standpunt van die meeste susterkerke en dat hulle besluit (waarskynlik op 16 Junie) daardeur positief beïnvloed sal word.

Op Vrydag is 'n formele sitting van Sinode Meppel gehou oor die BBK verslag, met al 36 sinode-lede aanwesig. Daar was vir ons bekende persone aanwesig as sinode-lede soos ds Ruard Stolper en ds Marco Buitenhuis (sending Drachten), asook BBK-GKv lid br Henk van der Linden. Die verslag van deputate BBK van die GKv is bespreek. Hoewel daar alternatiewe voorstelle was is al die aanbevelings van hierdie deputate onveranderd aanvaar. 'n Susterkerk-verhouding met die RFCP op die Filippyne word beëindig en ' susterkerk-verhouding met die PCU in Oeganda word aanvaar en hulle word verwelkom. Vir die VGKSA was 'n belangrike besluit, behalwe die voortsetting van die susterkerk-verhouding, dat daar meer interaksie tussen susterkerke moet kom oor sake van

gemeenskaplike belang, sodat die onderlinge samewerking en vertrouwe bevorder word. Dit kan gedoen word deur bi-laterale kontakte of byv. deur konferensies. Hoewel die huidige BBK-lede aftredend is en die gewone sinode-reëls dit nie toelaat nie, het hulle wel onderneem om tog 'n afgevaardigde te stuur na ons eie Sinode Soshanguve-Noord in Augustus.

Op Saterdag-oggend is die "Buitenlandweek" afgesluit met feestelikhede, soos 'n toespraak deur die PCU (Oeganda) afgevaardigde en deur BBK- en sinode-lede en met welluidende musiek deur 'n sangkoor van sinode-lede.

Hans Moes

## Appendix B.2 - Response of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa to questions of the Advisory Committee of Synod Meppel 2017 on M/W in the offices

### Approach to the Bible and the relation to culture

1. *The exegetical and/or hermeneutical method employed in the report has been criticized. Can you indicate how this method differs from the reformed way of explaining Scripture? Can you point out where exactly in the report this is the case?*

In historical reformed hermeneutics, the text, biblical context, the whole of Scripture and the cultural context in which the original message was written at the time was taken into consideration in order to reach understanding and apply this in our time. In the “new hermeneutics” this has been extended by taking into consideration whether the derived message fits into the present 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture. The origin of the presently experienced “pijnpunten” in the RCN is the conflict between the results of the historical reformed hermeneutics and the modern cultural experience in the Netherlands. The present culture now even becomes dominant and ultimately prescriptive for our understanding and application. See M/W Report Ch. 4 and Section 6.3.2. If this approach would be valid, we should not accept Biblical ethics or regulations based on the historical hermeneutics if these are in conflict with our modern culture (thus leading to “pijnpunten”). If this approach becomes established as part of reformed hermeneutics, it will have wide implications, not only for the role of sisters in the church, but also for marriage, sexuality, euthanasia, abortion, etc. Some RCN ministers have also elaborated on the weaknesses of the “new hermeneutics”, as applied by Deputies “M/W in the offices” (see e.g. Nader Bekeken, of Febr. 2017 – Rev P Boonstra – and of March 2017 – Rev D te Velde).

2. *Where is the boundary between the normal exegetical principle that the text is explained within the context of the time and culture (the ‘Umwelt’) in which the text was written and the inadmissible exegesis of a text by making assumptions about time and culture?*

The cultural context could play a role in better understanding the meaning / message of the text. But if the cultural context is based on (subjective) speculation and not on clear intra- and extra-biblical evidence, it should be treated with great circumspection and rather be ignored. The acceptance of perspicuity of Scripture (Art. 7 BC) is an important gain from the Reformation. The boundary can be drawn using the word ‘assumptions’: they are speculative ideas assumed to be present in the past. There is a high chance of them being subjective and based on the desires of the current reader. Maybe a good test is, to see if this exegesis yielded any results that we don’t like because they don’t fit our culture.



3. Concerning the interpretation of prophecy, the issue of cessationism plays a role. What is your opinion on this? Could the eschatological prophecy quoted in Acts 2:17-22 point to the "last days" that last until "the great and glorious day of the Lord" (verse 20, NIV)? Could this promise of sons and daughters prophesying as well as Paul's call to eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1), apply to this entire period?

According to the explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism (LD12), **all** believers should be prophets, in confessing and proclaiming the gospel in their social structures. Therefore, after Pentecost the specific calling of individual prophets has (gradually) transferred to a sharing and calling by all believers. There is no "cessation", but rather a transformation. This transformation to all believers (including children) does not imply that the special offices in the church are now open for women. The special offices are subject to special directives from the Bible. E.g. when women complain about their treatment in the church, **men** are appointed to resolve the issue, as described in Acts 6.

4. How can we reflect biblically on our own culture and time? Is every influence of culture suspect necessarily? In our discussions it was mentioned that the Bible sometimes simply adapts to the prevailing culture whereas at other times it opposes the culture (see e.g. the Letter to the Colossians). Does God not reveal his wisdom in creation, and could not this wisdom sometimes also be seen in developments in society (Belgic Confession, art. 2)? Could this also apply to the growth of opportunities for women to develop themselves?

We are embedded in our surrounding culture ("we are **in** this world – but not **from** this world"). Progressing culture can be seen as the development of men in God's creation and men's development of creation (our "cultural mandate"). These tasks and developments have not been repealed after the fall. Creation and culture have fundamentally and structurally been impacted by human sin, although we can still see God's creative power, greatness and wisdom in nature and experience his blessings. When e.g. general clothing or living habits change or when technology produces new means of transport, we can accept this. When new developments in medical treatment become available, we can gratefully use this. The culture developing around us often comes with ethical questions, but we always have to submit to what the Bible, as God's revealed will, instructs us. If God's Word instructs us different from what the world / our specific culture tells or offers us, we should obey the first. Biblical judgement of all things is essential. This also holds for the position of women in the special church offices. As prophets and through the church we (should) be the "conscience" of and have a healing message to the world, for all to adhere to and to obey God's revealed will.

### **Creation order as basis and as argument for silencing women**

5. *'Creation order' is neither a biblical nor a confessional term. It is a phrase referring to God's order and purpose with all his creation. Because of the fall, it is only in Christ that we start to recognize again God's good intentions and structures with respect to the nature and relationships of human beings (1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 3:8; 1 John 3:2). How do you view the nature and relationship of man and woman from the creation order that we read about, especially in Genesis 1-3 and how do you connect this to the official tasks that function in the Reformed Churches?*

Man and woman have been created to honour God, to support each other in living as God's children, to assist each other in their "cultural mandate" and for procreation. God has created man first and out of him the woman as his helper / companion / supplementary person. Men and women are not similar, they have been created with physical and mental characteristics that complement each other. Such differences may lead to different tasks and challenges. Even the world recognizes this, e.g. in having different sport categories for men and women. In Christ, men and women are equal, but in function there can be distinction. The revelation in God's Word, if this is given for specific tasks, are ultimately normative (such as the ruling tasks in the congregations).

It would be helpful for the church to resist the idea in our culture, that excluding a category of people (in this case: women) from leadership, means that they are lower in status or incapable to carry out this task. It should also be kept in mind that the New Testament has several passages in which respect value and honor is given to women, which is clearly not according to the ancient culture, while this does not lead to the clear application that they should be in leadership.

6. *In section 2.2.4 of the report the authors posit a motive for distinguishing layers in Scripture. They mention the reformed principle of 'God's educational progression', which implies that every text needs to be explained within its own context and time. If this 'relief' in Scripture is not recognized, any text could easily be assigned a normative force that is foreign to it (see also the first paragraphs in 2.3.3).*

*A striking example of this is the fact that the curse in Genesis 3:16 (husbands ruling over their wives) was interpreted as a divine command in our reformed marriage form that was used until 1975.*

- *Are you aware of the fact that the marriage form that RCN have used since 1975 does not refer to Genesis 3:16 anymore? Do you consider that as correct?*

Yes, and we have also seen much more divorces and marital problems in the RCN. We think more study should have been put into formulating the new form of marriage of the RCN and in discussing the roles of men and women in Christian matrimony. That a woman's desire will be for her husband and that he will rule over her (Gen.3:18c) is not in itself a curse – on the contrary - but the curse is in the way in which this will function from then on: both the desire and ruling will often derail.

- *Could it be that the image of ‘man as the head of woman’ was interpreted too much as ‘man ruling over his wife’? And could it be that, as a consequence, this (erroneous) view of the relationship between husband and wife also influenced the view of the relationship between men and women in general? Does the biblical image of man being the head of woman apply to the same extent to both marriage as well as to all other relationships (i.e. within the church and outside of it)?*

Women often become oppressed in cultures where the strongest person rules. In Christian marriages and men-women relationships love (agape) should be a strong characteristic. Being head-in-love is not a “curse relationship” of a man over his wife or men over women, but should reflect love, respect and cooperation. The apostle Paul compares a man-woman relationship in marriage with the relationship between Christ and the church (Ef. 5). There is no instruction in the Bible for specific roles of women in society, but we could learn e.g. from the “alphabet” poem of the mother of King Lemuel in Poverbs 31.

The church must be careful to draw a straight line from marriage to the general relationship between men-and women in society. It is not wrong to conclude that men are the head of women in general, or that everywhere where a man is involved, women must step down. Reformed churches never drew that conclusion. For that reason, the Dutch churches never had a problem with a queen being the head of state. When one keeps this distinction in mind, one can explain the relationship between men and women better to unbelievers.

- *Interpreting Genesis 3:16 as belonging to the ‘layer’ of the fall will affect the exegesis in the sense that you no longer read it as a command but instead as a curse from which Christ came to redeem us by graciously restoring relationships between men and women. Could you see the distinction of these layers in exegesis as an application of the reformed redemptive-historical hermeneutic?*

In reformed redemptive-historical hermeneutics, Gen. 3:16 has not exclusively been read as a curse. In the side notes (“Kanttekeningen”) in the “Statenvertaling” the translators mention that God has indeed administered a punishment, but in this way also directed man and woman back to the original relationship of before the fall (Kanttek. 32 and 33). This “layer” in die M/W report is artificial. See above on this “curse”, where we would not maintain that Christ has redeemed women from desiring their husbands (in the same text). We consider this in itself as commendable. Christ also has not redeemed women from childbirth-with-pain. This, God has graciously given in the development of anaesthetics. When deputies only separate the “ruling’ component of this text as a curse from which women should be redeemed, this appears as an artificial separation. The early church

apparently did not see this “curse” as to be redeemed by Christ but still appointed men in ruling offices.

7. Regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15 :

- *As for Paul referring to creation: is it possible that Genesis 1-3 has a much wider scope with respect to the nature and functioning of men and women than the purpose Paul has here in quoting Genesis?*

Indeed, Gen. 1-3 has a much wider scope than only as a reference / reasoning base made by the apostle Paul for the relationship between men and women in the church. See our comment under point 6 on the RCN’s new form of marriage. The relationship between husband and wife is crucial in a Christian marriage and more treasures could possibly be delved out of the creation section of the Bible. But in the context of the Scriptures, it should also be read together with what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Tim. 2:11-15, without reading an opposite meaning into it.

- *As for Paul referring to the fall: could it be that the way Paul refers to Eve as having sinned first is for rhetorical reasons if you compare this text with Romans 5:12? There Paul says: through one man sin entered the world, and in verse 14 it appears that Adam is the transgressor. In other words, does this comparison of texts not show that the argument that Eve sinned first should not become a doctrine when it comes to the relationship between men and women in general?*

This reference is not for rhetoric reasons. In 1 Tim. 2 the apostle Paul indicates that sin started when the right relationship between man and woman, as intended by God, was disregarded and the woman took control over from her husband and listened to satan. As head of his wife, Adam was held responsible by God. He should have communicated clearly to his wife concerning the eating of the forbidden fruits and should have refused to eat the fruit when she offered it to him

8. *If the so-called ‘silence texts’ did not contain arguments from Genesis 1-3, would this not mean that an important basis is lacking for the conclusion that, according to Scripture, the offices should remain closed to women? If not, is there another conclusive argument in Scripture?*

This is hypothetical. In a number of cases, Paul gives his personal opinion. But then he clearly says so. For the instruction that women should not speak in the congregational meetings and accept their husband as having authority over her, as given in 1 Cor. 14:34, Paul draws his motivation from “the law”, i.e. the Old Testament, which is wider than Gen. 1-3. But besides the Scriptural texts on speaking in the congregational meetings and the ruling of the congregation, we see no reason to exclude sisters from other roles and responsibilities in the church.

## **Biblical Texts in which women do speak**

9. *What about the texts in Scripture in which women do speak, and are thus allowed to speak? What is your opinion on the exegesis in the report of Priscilla's role (cf. section 2.3.2 and also the conclusions in 2.5.1)?*

There are quite a few events mentioned in the Bible where women speak and sometimes with authority (see below). The exact role of Priscilla is largely speculative, as the information from Scripture on her role is sparse. However, a good explanation on Priscilla's role has been written by prof. J van Bruggen in his book: "*Emancipatie en Bijbel*" (Ton Bolland, Amsterdam 1974, pp 22-88, esp. p 84). Nevertheless, the same apostle that mentions her role as teacher has also written the "silence texts" and we have no reason that Priscilla would have been excluded from his instructions for the congregational meetings. Here too, the rules of Reformed hermeneutics are helpful: we should observe the difference between *prescriptive* and *descriptive* passages. This should make us very cautious in reading a confirmation of a practice into descriptive passages, when there are prescriptive passage that forbid this practice.

10. *As exceptional as it may be, does not Deborah's performance as a female judge, an office for which apparently she was called and ordained according to God's rule, illustrate that it is not an explicit transgression against God's will if a woman exercises authority over men?*

The time of the judges was a period of unfaithfulness and apostasy of the covenant people. Deborah's instructions to Barak are mentioned in Judges as a particular event where men neglect their responsibilities (see again van Bruggen, *op cit*, p 83). In the Reformed Church in Japan there are / were not enough male members to fill the offices. In certain German congregations immediately after the Second World War there were not enough men, so women filled the offices. In Brazil, in one of the Dutch colonies, there was for years no visiting minister. So one of the elders baptized a child. In exceptional circumstances, after prayerful consultation of God's will or upon God's direct instruction, exceptions to the instructed or agreed rule can be accepted. Such an exception confirms the general rule. We do not consider the present situation in the RCN as "exceptional".

## **Office and practice**

11. *If it is your opinion that women should not have an office in church, could you indicate what tasks they should be able to fulfill? Please think as much 'out-of-the-box' as possible, irrespective of your own church practice. What do you think conceivable? To give some examples: is it conceivable that a woman speaks an edifying message in a worship service? Or that she fulfills all pastoral duties of an elder, without exercising*

*'ruling power'? Or that she teaches catechism to young people or gives a training course for the council of elders?*

Many women have gifts in education and teaching: children, evangelism groups (new members), catechism classes, youth clubs. Women have a good feel for managing households and can advise families who struggle with financial planning, budgeting, controlling family expenses, family education, healthy food. If they have special professional skills (e.g. in the medical field, in financial management, in architecture) they could make their services available to the church community. Sisters could form special study groups e.g. on family education or support groups and visit people in distress (people who are sick, old, or have problems). Older sisters could be used for the Biblical tasks of instructing the young sisters in the church (1 Tim. 5). Van Bruggen (*op cit*, p 84) mentions that leadership by men in no way excludes cooperation by women.

Both "inside and outside the box" there are many tasks where sisters can contribute extensively, using their particular skills. However, in proclaiming the Word in congregational meetings and in ruling the church, we should adhere to the Biblical instructions and leave this to brothers. It would, however, be incorrect to blur the separation of tasks of men and women to such an extent that women execute the tasks of the elders and ministers, but without a formal ordination. The church should aim to draw the lines between the tasks of men and women clearly and in agreement with the mainline of the Bible. In this way, it can also be justified both for people outside the church and for future generations.

12. *How do you assess historical data such as the leading role of women in the monastic movement or the initial sympathy of Calvin and the first Reformed synod in the Netherlands with women as deaconesses?*

We can find ourselves in the reasoning on this point in the study of van Bruggen (*op cit*), that the diaconal task (in church polity and in practice) should be organised under the supervision of the elders. The deacons will then no longer be members of the church council. Alongside the brothers deacons there can then also be a place for sisters as deaconesses.

13. *The Reformation abolished the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church (cf. Matthew 23:8-12), which was a huge leap from authoritative ecclesiastical structures to the office of all believers, as described in Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Moreover, in the sixteenth century the special offices of elder and deacon were set up in a totally new way, based on Scripture. After sixteen centuries of being used to priests, deacons, bishops, popes and laymen, we have now for four centuries been used to elders, deacons and preachers (and formerly also doctors in theology). We are accustomed to the mediation of Christ's authority in a special way through the offices of elder and minister. Is it conceivable that we today, living in quite different times and obediently responding to God's Word, view the notion of the Christian's threefold office as taught*

*in our Catechism as a stepping stone towards the concrete deployment of women, also in official ecclesiastical service (cf. report, p.28)?*

As fruit of the Reformation, and after fresh Biblical thinking, the present offices in the reformed churches have been established, within a (con-)federation of independent churches. We should be free to develop better / different solutions for the special offices, if the need would arise. This holds for the type of offices as such, as well for the tasks within the offices. In all cases, Biblical directive should be followed. This means that we cannot now, in our “special times” (really ??), push the “silencing texts” aside or interpret them to now say something different than their clear meaning.

### **Relevance, Christian conversation and consequences**

14. *What do you think of the sense of urgency around this theme in the RCN? In the last decades many women have taken up all sorts of tasks in church (e.g. teaching, leading committees and work groups, etc.) that used to be part of the duties of the official office bearers. The result is that increasingly a tension is felt between the practice of employing gifts and tasks (shared by men and women) and the official status of the offices (which they do not share). Do you have any ideas on how to handle this sense of urgency? (cf. also the report *Mannen en vrouwen in de kerk* (transl. *Men and women in the church*)).*

We suggest that the RCN firstly take an honest look at the presently experienced pressures and developments. Does it follow from a better understanding or a deeper study of Scripture or rather from a more superficial look at the Word of God? Did this development not start with talking about “mutual pastoral care” (“*onderling pastoraat*”), as if all believers are “pastors” of the flock and was this not the start of the gradual undermining of the special offices? Was this development really an improvement and did it lead to an intensification of the life of the congregation with Christ? Did it lead to growth in sanctification? Why are fewer and fewer brothers available to serve as elders? How diligent do the present elders work in their districts in edifying the church members? How faithful are they in admonishing and administering church discipline in case of serious sins? Such an analysis would be very valuable in discovering the background of the presently experienced discussions.

Secondly, the identified “*pijnpunten*” and its associated urgency are typically Dutch, they are hardly felt in other parts of the world. Why can people (of all gender) not just serve in the church without being “ordained”. Is “ordination” still a remnant of the OT “anointment” or the Roman Catholic practice? In some churches office bearers are just “appointed”, even for life. Many men also are never ordained and function actively in the church. One should try to identify the motives behind the “*pijnpunten*”. If it is related to personal honour, official recognition, more valuable for God, etc. then these are wrong motives and should be rejected. If the motive is that in all detail brothers and sisters in the church should receive equal treatment,

irrespective of then creating “pijnpunten” for others who consider Biblical directives as valid, this would not be brotherly / sisterly. The only reason for urgency we can see is the pressure of the radical Dutch society, which cannot accept that there are differences between men and women, also not in the church. The recommendation of your deputies mean a radical break with the past and should be assessed with extreme care and not be dealt with under pressure or urgency. This should include the other consequences if this “new hermeneutics” would be accepted (see our comment under 1).

15. *In their first report to Synod (23-D-o Pijnpunten rond vrouw en ambt (transl. Painful areas in the debate on M/F and office)) deputies point to Galatians 6:2 “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” The question they ask is:*

*“Are you who is in favor of opening the offices to women willing to really listen to the concerns of opponents about faithfully reading the Bible when it comes to the ‘silence texts’? And vice versa: Are you who want to preserve the current situation, in which the offices are only open to men, willing to really think along with those who criticize that situation because they want to make it possible for women to exercise their God-given gifts in church?”*

*On both sides of the debate, the authority of the Scripture is at stake. Would you agree that this is a biblical way of trying to reach each other, even with big differences in viewpoints?*

If we uphold the authority of Scripture, both sides should be willing to subject to this, after honest reading what the apostle Paul says. On such an important aspect of church life there should not just be a “democratic” approach where the majority decides. There should be a clear conviction by all that: “The Holy Spirit and we are convinced that...” (ref. Acts 15:28). It would be good if the RCN would get a study team together where both traditional and new viewpoints are equally represented and this team be tasked with studying the subject in detail, based on an agreed hermeneutics.

It would be a bad solution, as proposed by deputies, that each congregation could decide on their own whether they want to admit woman to the special offices. Apart from possible practical problems within the church council and the congregation, this would be incorrect on principle. If it would indeed be the will of the Lord to open the special offices for sisters, this cannot be optional. The church would then have to confess its common guilt about the wrong understanding of the Word of God during the past millennia and all should repent to the new view point.

16. *Looking back at these questions, can you point out where the RCN deviate from the Reformed Confessions, if they decide in favour of the proposed decisions in the report? Is this an issue where a sister church relationship should be at stake because of deviation of Scripture and confession?*

The tradition that only brothers are ordained in the special offices is directly related to the understanding of Scripture and the traditional reformed hermeneutics.



Allowing sisters into the special offices would indeed be a point of separation between the RCN and most of its sister churches. In addition, the further negative developments that are possible with the “new hermeneutics”, as indicated under point 1, will most likely also be evaluated. Whether it is considered of such a severity that this would lead to a termination of the sister church relationship would be a decision of the churches convened in a national synod.

The discontinuation of a sister church relationship should not be used as a threat from the side of us, your sister churches. Since we are brothers and sisters, we should address any deviation out of love, as we have done here, and show an obligation towards each other, instead of cutting the ties as soon as possible.

In addition, could the GKv not utilize the existing relationships more fruitfully? Perhaps the discussions about M/W have been carried on in isolation of the sister churches and the perspective of fellow Christians and churches in other parts of the world might help members of the the GKv to ask the question whether they have developed a certain blind spot in relation to their culture.

FJ Bijzet, DM Boersma en J Moes

Members of the DRCA of the FRCSA

22 May 2017

## Appendix C - Information on the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Information downloaded from the website of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) ([www.rcnz.org.nz](http://www.rcnz.org.nz)).

The RCNZ are a federation of churches spread throughout New Zealand whose aim is to faithfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We [believe](#) the truth of God's word as expressed in the Holy Bible. This is reflected in our churches' motto:

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and the light shines in the darkness."*

Our understanding of the Bible is summarised in the [creeds](#) and confessions of the Protestant Reformation, and we seek to apply the word not only to matters of faith, but to all of life.

Please click on the icons on the left of this page to find out more about us, and to access various resources that may be of use to you.

### The Gospel : Overview

The Gospel is good news! The Bible tells us that it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). It is God's way of making us right with him, so that we can live the blessed life he created us to live. It is God's answer to our guilt and sin.

The Gospel can be summarised in three words: sin, salvation, and service. These words pack a lot of meaning, and tell the most important story you will ever hear. Click [here](#) to find out more.

#### • In more detail

As Christians we believe that there is a God who made the world. We also believe that humankind has rebelled against God, and is under his curse (Ephesians 2.1). In a nutshell, the gospel tells us about our misery, God's mercy, and our response to this.

#### • OUR MISERY: SIN

God leaves no doubt about our condition. While we set our standards of right and wrong by society's values, God's standard is His own holiness. How do we measure up? "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It is only fair that God demands holiness of us; that is how he first created us. We have rebelled against him as a race and as individuals.

Our pathway away from God has brought its consequences. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). The Bible compares sin to a cruel slave master. There is no mercy in suffering, no freedom from bondage, no lasting joy, no hope for the future. Most frightening is the final consequence of sin. The Bible warns that without God's salvation, death is the doorway to eternal punishment (Hebrews 9:27). It is from this that we need to be saved. From our own sin. From its bondage. From its consequences. "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3).

#### • GOD'S MERCY: SALVATION

God is holy and God is love. His holiness demands that our sin be punished in full. His love provides a way for us to be saved from this punishment. How is this possible? Someone was willing to suffer what we deserve. Our substitute had to be a sinless man, able to suffer the full wrath of God against our sin. The only one able to take our place was God's Son.

The greatest display of God's love unfolded as his Son left heaven to become a man. Born of a virgin 2000 years ago, the Lord Jesus Christ lived with his creation. He was unable to sin, yet he showed

compassion to sinners all around him. Men hated Christ because his holiness exposed their sinfulness. They decided to remove him by crucifying him. He willingly allowed them to nail him to a cross of wood outside Jerusalem. They suspended him so they could sit and watch him die. The climax of God's plan of salvation had arrived as God covered the earth with darkness. The Bible tells us that for three hours he laid on his Son the full punishment we deserve to receive for our sin. The darkness was broken when Jesus Christ called out with a loud voice, "It is finished". He had accomplished the mighty work, God's great plan of salvation.

After three days in death, Christ Jesus rose from the dead. This is evidence to all who saw him and to all who read God's word that Christ's suffering completely satisfied his father. He was victorious over death itself - the ultimate consequence of our sin.

God's plan of salvation brings us into the good of Christ's suffering, death, and victory. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

## • OUR RESPONSE: SERVICE

God now calls us to believe on Jesus Christ. He calls us to confess that we are sinners, and are worthy of his wrath and punishment. He also calls us to accept the sacrifice that Jesus Christ suffered on our behalf. Finally, he calls us to respond to his mercy with thanks, serving him as he commands us to in his word, the Bible.

## Who we are : In short

The Reformed Churches are groups of Christian believers who confess that by nature they are sinners, but who have been saved by Jesus' sacrifice, and who desire to serve God together.

We meet together on the Lord's Day, Sunday, to [worship](#) God. Our worship services are public meetings - you are most welcome to join with us in worshipping our God. In our services we sing praises to God and pray to him. We also hear God speak to us from his word, and are encouraged in our Christian lives as this word is explained to us.

We believe that Christian fellowship is important. As believers we share in Jesus Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Since this is so, we consider it our duty to use our gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members of the church.

Click [here](#) to find out where and when we meet for worship, and the contact details of our individual congregations. If you would like to know more about our churches, click [here](#) for contact details.

The membership of our churches represent a variety of nations and cultures, reflecting both our [history](#) and the diversity of the population of New Zealand.

## Our worship

Our churches hold worship services twice each Sunday and generally also on Christmas Day and Good Friday. Preaching from the Bible is the central element of worship. Preaching is by ordained ministers, or alternatively sermons written by an ordained minister may be read by a lay male Session appointee when a minister is not available.

Sung praise and corporate prayer are the next most significant elements of worship. The Christian Reformed Church in North America's Psalter Hymnal is the main source of hymnody, however the compilation and evaluation of a denominational psalter/hymnal is [currently in progress](#). The singing of the Psalms features strongly in the hymnody.

Corporate confession of sin and the assurance of God's pardon are an integral part of Sunday morning worship, while in the second service one of the creeds is usually recited in unison.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper (or Holy Communion) is celebrated at least three-monthly. The sacrament of baptism is administered to the infant children of church members.

## Our history

Reformed churches trace their history to apostolic times (Matthew 16:13-20, Acts 2) and before (e.g. Psalm 122). They trace their history through the [16th-century Protestant Reformation](#) (when Catholicism was challenged by leaders such as [Martin Luther](#)) to today.

More recently, in the late 1940s migrants from the Netherlands settling in New Zealand expected to find their spiritual homes in existing churches of Reformed persuasion. Instead they found departures from Reformed doctrine and practice that they could not overlook.

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand were officially established in 1953 at a meeting (synod) in Wellington where churches from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch were represented. Over the years further congregations have been established, and the denomination now comprises about twenty congregations.

Despite the Dutch background of many of the members of our churches, the Reformed Churches strive to be a New Zealand church. Our focus is not on ethnic origin, but on God's calling. We strive to practice Paul's words: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).

## • Main beliefs

The Reformed Churches obtain all their [doctrines](#) from the Bible. We confess that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments fully contain the will of God, and that whatever we ought to believe for salvation is sufficiently taught in them.

- We believe in one God, eternal in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only living and true God, the creator of heaven and earth.
- We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only inspired and infallible record of the revelation of God to man, and are the supreme authority in all matters of life and faith.
- We believe in the universal sovereignty of God over all that he has created and maintains.
- We believe in the providence of God whereby he sustains the universe, governs the world, supplies the needs of his people and brings his will to pass.
- We believe that we were created in the image and likeness of God to have dominion over the earth and to do all things to the glory of God.
- We believe in man's universal fall into sin through Adam's transgression and in his subsequent disobedience, guilt, condemnation and judgment before God.
- We believe that God by his grace, and according to his good pleasure, restores to himself and to his service, all who in true faith call on the name of Jesus Christ.
- We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of the Father: that he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, crucified as a ransom for many, died and was buried, was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. He is presently at the right hand of God the Father, and will personally return to earth in power and glory to judge the living and the dead.
- We believe in the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to apply the benefits of Christ's redemption to individual sinners, working in them regeneration, faith, repentance, sanctification and glorification.

- We believe one holy and universal church which Christ the Lord and head, gathers, preserves and defends for himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race.

Click [here](#) to find more detail on the beliefs of our churches, which may be found in our creeds and confessions.

## In more depth

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand hold to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired and infallible word of God. We confess that these Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, fully contain the will of God, and that whatever we ought to believe for salvation is sufficiently taught in them. Our creeds and confessions, which are summaries of biblical teaching, provide summaries of what we believe the Bible teaches so that it may be clear for all.

Creeds and confessions are useful in a number of ways. They assist in answering the question, "What do the Reformed churches believe or teach?" They provide a common standard, uniting the members of our churches in a common confession. They also provide a standard for discipline for all the office-bearers in the church, and enable the church to guard its members from false doctrine and to maintain the purity of the truth taught by its members (2 Timothy 1:13,14).

Our churches have adopted the following creeds and confessions, which are derived from and always subject to the teaching of the Bible.

### Creeds:

- [Apostles' Creed](#)
- [Nicene Creed](#)
- [Athanasian Creed](#)

### Confessional statements:

- [The Belgic Confession](#)
- [The Heidelberg Catechism](#)
- [The Canons of Dort](#)
- [The Westminster Confession](#)

## Congregations

We have 21 churches around New Zealand.

Hamilton  
 Hukanui  
 Hastings  
 Masterton  
 Wanganui  
 New Plymouth  
 Palmerston North  
 Foxton  
 Nelson  
 Oamaru  
 Dunedin

### **Auckland:**

North Shore  
 Avondale  
 Pukekohe

Bucklands Beach

**Christchurch:**

Dovedale  
Bishopdale  
Christchurch

**Wellington:**

Wellington  
Wainuiomata  
Silverstream

## Missions and evangelism

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand, in obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), are committed to the priority of mission work both at home and overseas.

See also...

- [Interested in Missions?](#)
- [Missions Handbook](#)

If you have any questions concerning our churches' mission work, please contact the Overseas Mission Board:

Email: [omb@rcnz.org.nz](mailto:omb@rcnz.org.nz)

### • Missions at home

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand are committed to the spread of the gospel through the work of local evangelism and church planting. In order to help facilitate gospel outreach, our Synod has established two committees; the Home Missions Committee and Church Extension Committee.

The task of the Home Missions Committee is to evaluate evangelism resources, investigate means of spreading the gospel, facilitate the sharing of information and resources and encourage churches in their task of local evangelism. Many of our local churches are actively involved in regular outreach programs such as religious education in State schools, Prison Fellowship, playgroups and children's holiday programs.

The Church Extension Committee is the body authorised by Synod to provide financial assistance where necessary for those churches engaged in home missions and church planting. Within the last ten years two new churches have been planted: Hukanui in Hamilton, and Dovedale in Christchurch. The Reformed Churches of Hukanui and Dovedale have since become instituted churches within the denomination. The Reformed Church of Palmerston North has also recently established a mission church at Wanganui.

### • Missions overseas

Our churches' Overseas Mission Board supervises and regulates our overseas mission work on behalf of the churches.

Among various initiatives, our churches are co-operating with the Canadian Reformed Churches in Papua New Guinea and have contributed towards the construction of the Reformed Churches Bible College near Port Moresby.

- **MISSIONARIES IN THE FIELD**

- *Janice Reid*  
*South East Asia*

Janice Reid has served in missionary radio for over twenty years, working first for [FEBC Radio International](#) and then under the name Radio Training Services, an organisation formed by Janice and her French colleague, Jean-Luc Lebrun.

Janice lived in the Philippines for eight years, where she produced radio programmes for shortwave broadcast on FEBC's Overseas English Service. Since 1997 she has been involved in training radio announcers and station managers, holding workshops in various Asian countries.

Next, Janice spent two years in Cambodia, developing and conducting training courses for radio announcers, and for programme directors of Christian radio stations. She is now living in South East Asia and working with Reach Beyond as their radio trainer for that sub-region. The [Hamilton](#) congregation is Janice's sending church.

- *Alan Douma*  
*Papua New Guinea*

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand cooperates with the Canadian Reformed Churches in PNG and the Free Reformed Churches in Australia as we together partner with the Reformed Churches of PNG in the work of carrying out the Great Commission of our Lord (Matthew 28:19,20).

Rev Alan Douma, and his wife Odette, moved to [Papua New Guinea](#) in 2009 to commence work as a missionary and teacher at the Reformed Churches Bible College near Port Moresby. They serve with Reformed Ministries PNG who are supporting the Reformed Churches of PNG as they seek to grow into a federation of churches. The [Hastings](#) congregation is the Douma's sending church.

- *Uganda*

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand have also assisted the equipping of the local church by periodically sending a pastor to help with theological training within the OPCU, in Uganda.

- **Diaconal**

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) our Lord teaches us how we are to treat our fellows, and how we are to regard the gifts he has entrusted to us. The sessions of our churches include deacons, in keeping with the pattern found in Acts 6.

Article 24 of our [Church Order](#) spells out that their task is to collect charitable contributions and to distribute them to those in need, to comfort the distressed, and to encourage the congregation to show christian mercy to those in need at home and overseas. So this work of mercy involves the whole of the congregation.

Besides the day to day work of mercy carried out by our members for those in need [locally](#), our churches are also involved in a number of [overseas](#) projects.

- **Diaconal at home**

The work of mercy is the responsibility of the local church. Inspired by the example of the believers in Acts 4, we believe that our possessions are not our own but are to be shared. Deacons in each church collect the tithes and offerings for the work of the church and for the support of those in need.

Although in New Zealand, the state welfare system has to a large extent supplanted the charitable work of the church, opportunities still exist for believers to help needy brothers and sisters and to support the work of mission with tangible gifts of love.

## Diaconal overseas

Overseas aid on behalf of the churches within the denomination is coordinated by the National Diaconate Committee, based in Auckland. The committee has the difficult task of assessing competing needs, each of which is deserving of assistance. Unfortunately, the resources of a small denomination must of necessity be relatively small and NDC has chosen to support a smaller number of projects where a difference can be made.

Recent and current projects include:

- a Christian boarding school for deaf children in Zimbabwe
- relief for people affected by cyclone damage in Myanmar
- partial support for a full time diaconal worker in Uganda
- medical and IT training assistance for a Christian hospital in Pakistan
- provision of medical and other supplies in support of the missionary outreach in PNG
- provision of medical and other supplies to the Solomon Islands
- funding for a Christ-centered diaconal mission to prostitutes and HIV victims in Chennai

All projects are under constant evaluation and the Committee is always ready and willing to receive suggestions for new projects.

### • Online sermon collection

The sermons on our website have been prepared by ministers of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. They may be used freely, provided the author is acknowledged.

When you browse our [written sermon](#) or our [audio sermon](#) collections, by default the sermons are sorted by the date they were added to our website, but you can also sort by author, series or text.

### • Youth work

Our churches recognise the importance of the education of our children and young people in the ways of the Lord. The Psalmist tells us that children are a reward and a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:4).

Our children are baptised as infants as a sign and seal of God's covenant promise to them. They participate in the worship services of our churches. Many attend christian schools or are home-schooled.

In addition our churches provide the following activities for our young people:

- *Cadets and GEMS*

A scouting-type movement for children aged from 8 to 15. This involves Bible study, badge work and camping.

- *Youth Groups*

The youth, 15 years and older, of our churches meet together periodically for Bible study, but also for social activities. The local congregation can provide more information - click [here](#) for contact details.



- *Regional Youth Committees*

Each of the three Reformed Church Presbyteries has a youth committee which regularly meets to organise events for the youth. These include regional camps on Queens Birthday, Easter or Labour weekends, as well as ski-trips, youth balls and other events. These committees also take it in turns to organise the annual National Youth Camp.

The committees are:

- Auckland Regional Youthwork Committee (Upper North Island)

Website: [www.aryc.org](http://www.aryc.org)

Facebook: [facebook.com/ARYCNZ](https://facebook.com/ARYCNZ)

Email: arycnz [at] gmail.com

- Wellington Regional Youth Committee (Lower North Island)

Website: [thewryc.wordpress.com](http://thewryc.wordpress.com)

- Mainland Reformed Youth Committee (South Island)

- *National Youth Camp*

These week-long camps held every summer provide an opportunity for Bible study, as well as socialising and activities in a christian environment.

## Leader Resources

At present, this page serves to host resources for Cadet & GEMS leaders.

[Cadets and GEMS Constitution](#)

[Cadets and GEMS Letterhead \(.doc format\)](#)

### Training Material

- Equipped to Lead
- Cadet Counsellor Certificate Course
- Financial Assistance Application Form & Criteria
- Flag Knowledge with Quiz and Answers
- GEMS Open Book Exam

**Badge Ideas:** These are some ideas/information that have come from other clubs to assist you in badgework.

- New Zealand Flag Knowledge Badge Report
- Hamilton Hiking Badge Information
- NZ Citizenship Requirements
- NZ Flag Knowledge
- NZ Giving
- Reformed Church Knowledge
- NZ Small Game

- **Main contacts**

- **INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES**

Use the [contact details](#) given for each congregation.

- **STATED CLERK**

Email [Mr Pieter van der Wel](#) with questions about our churches.

- **WEBMASTER**

Email [Dimitri Mucznik](#) with technical feedback about this website.

- **MINISTERS, VICARS AND EMERITUS MINISTERS**

You will find the contact details for our Ministers, Vicars and Emeritus Ministers on [this page](#).

- **PRESBYTERY CLERKS**

Email the clerks of the [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#) or [South Island](#) Presbyteries.

- **SYNODICAL TREASURER**

Email [Mrs Alice Saathof](#) with synodical funding queries.

- **MINISTERS CURRENTLY SERVING**

[Rev John Rogers](#)

North Shore, Auckland

[Rev Peter Moelker](#)

Avondale, Auckland

[Rev John Haverland](#)

Pukekohe

[Rev Leo de Vos](#)

Hukanui, Hamilton

[Rev Michael Willemse](#)

Hamilton

[Rev Hans Vaatstra](#)

Wanganui

[Rev Peter Kloosterman](#)

Masterton

[Rev Paul Archbald](#)

Silverstream, Wellington

[Rev Pieter van Huyssteen](#)

Wainuiomata

[Rev Ben McDonald](#)

Wellington

[Rev Daniel Wilson](#)

Nelson

[Rev Andrew de Vries](#)  
Bishopdale, Christchurch

[Rev Robert van Wichen](#)  
Bishopdale, Christchurch

[Rev David Waldron](#)  
St. Albans, Christchurch

[Rev Andre Holtslag](#)  
Dovedale, Christchurch

[Rev Erik Stolte](#)  
Dunedin

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- **MINISTERS NOT SERVING FULL-TIME**

The following men are ordained ministers of the RCNZ who are not serving in a congregation.

[Rev Ralph Adams, Emeritus](#)  
Australia

[Rev John Goris, Emeritus](#)  
Wellington

Rev Dirk van Garderen, Emeritus  
Bucklands Beach, Auckland

Rev Barry James, Emeritus  
Canberra, Australia

- **Music**

Music has always been an important part of the worship of Gods people. In the Reformed Churches both the Psalms and hymns are sung.

The official songbook of the churches is the [Sing to the Lord](#) psalter hymnal.

## Church government

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand are a federation of local churches. Each local congregation is ruled by elders and deacons who together form the session of the church. Matters that are of common interest to our churches are discussed at a regional level (presbytery), which meets quarterly.

Every three years two representatives of each church's session meet together for a national synod. Our most recent Synod took place in September 2014, and our next Synod is scheduled to take place in 2017.

Christ has commanded his church to maintain unity, not only within the congregation but also among the churches. It is our duty to maintain close fellowship with our brothers and sisters in other congregations of Christ. In order to do this in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40) we have adopted an agreed set of rules called the "Church Order".

The Church Order specifies how we have agreed to regulate our organisation and activities so that we may fulfil our calling according to the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. The topics covered in the Church Order include: the offices of the church, the assemblies of the church, the supervision of public worship, and christian discipline.

The following publications may also be of interest to you:

- [Church Order](#)
- [Minutes of Synod 2014](#)

## Faith in Focus

Faith in Focus is the denominational magazine of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. The magazine seeks to promote biblical Reformed thinking as it applies to all areas of life.

It contains articles that are theological in nature as well as on pastoral subjects and general areas of christian living. Both young and old will find interesting reading material in its pages.

Faith in Focus is published each month except for January and the magazine is available by way of subscription. To subscribe, please contact [the Editor](#).

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## • Sister churches

Since they were first established, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have sought to develop and maintain relationships with other churches that share similar doctrine and practice.

The mandate to seek and express this unity arises directly from our Lord's high priestly prayer in John 17. When the church of Jesus Christ is divided, whether in doctrine or in practice, she is unable to express the oneness that our Lord prayed for and the love that will show that we are his disciples (John 13:34,35).

But there are sometimes factors which make it either impossible or unwise to merge with other churches, even those of similar doctrine and practice. Geographical distance, language barriers, and even cultural and historical factors, must all be taken into account when relating formally with other churches.

For this reason, our churches use a structure called a sister church relationship. Our churches have adopted a set of rules for sister church relationships. Within this structure, we are able to have meaningful ecumenical contact with a number of [churches](#) around the world.

In addition our churches are members of the [International Conference of Reformed Churches](#).

## • Our Church relations

- *Sister Churches*

- [Free Reformed Churches of Australia](#)
- [Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia](#)
- [Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA](#)
- [Canadian and American Reformed Churches \(CanRC\)](#)
- [United Reformed Church in North America](#)
- [Reformed Churches of South Africa \(GKSA\)](#)
- [Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands](#)
- [Reformed Churches of the Netherlands \(Liberated\)](#)

- *Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

- [Christian Reformed Churches of Australia](#)

- *International Ecumenical Body*

- [International Conference of Reformed Churches](#)

- *Other Churches we have contact with*

- [Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia](#)
- [Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand](#)

- **Resources**

The following resources may be of use to you:

- **GENERAL RESOURCES**

- [Holiday Bible Club Resources](#)

A list of resources available for loan from our churches  
(Updated Nov 2008)

- [The Elder Teaches](#)

A guide and resource to help when leading a worship service

- [Reformed Liturgy](#)

A short guide to Reformed liturgy, helpful both for the worshipper and for the worship leader.

- [With Pack and Planet](#)

A guide to maintain your spiritual health while overseas

- **CHURCH GOVERNMENT**

- [Church Order](#)

- [Church Order Commentary](#)

- [Office Bearers Handbook](#)

- **MISSIONS**

[Interested in Missions?](#)  
[Missions Handbook](#)

- **SING TO THE LORD HYMNAL**

[Sing to the Lord](#)  
[Indices for Sing to the Lord](#)

- **Creeds, Confessions and Liturgical Forms**

- **ENTIRE BOOK**

- [Microsoft Word](#)
- [PDF](#)
- [Amazon Kindle \(azw3\)](#)
- [EPUB](#)
- [Mobi](#)
- [HTML](#)

- **CREEDS**

- [Apostles Creed](#)
- [Nicene Creed](#)
- [Athanasian Creed](#)

- **CONFESSIONS**

- [Heidelberg Catechism](#)
- [Belgic Confession](#)
- [Canons of Dort](#)
- [Westminster Confession and MESV](#)

- **LITURGICAL FORMS**

- [Baptism of children of believers: form 1](#)
- [Baptism of children of believers: form 2](#)
- [Baptism of children of believers: form 3](#)
- [Baptism of adults](#)
- [Profession of faith](#)
- [Lords Supper: preparatory form A](#)
- [Lords Supper: preparatory form B](#)
- [Lords Supper: form 1](#)
- [Lords Supper: form 2](#)
- [Lords Supper: form 3](#)
- [Excommunication](#)
- [Readmission](#)
- [Ordination of elders and deacons](#)

- [Ordination of ministers](#)
- [Marriage](#)
- [Funeral](#)

- **MISCELLANEOUS**

- [Church Order](#)
- [Form of Subscription](#)

## Appendix D - Meeting DGK - FRCSA on Monday 10 April 2017. Notes by Rev FJ Bijzet

Present: Rev Siem De Marie (presiding), Rev. Koster, br Albert van der Net, br Joop Houweling = Dep BBK van de GKv: Rev Ferdinand Bijzet, br Hans Moes = Dep RCA of the FRCSA.

Prayer, sing Ps 118:9, reading Rev. 5

Concept agenda sent by DGK. Comment HM: too much emphasis on GKv, merely discussion to exchange mutual information.

Personal introduction of participants.

DGK presently: 11 preaching points, 9 congregations, 1200 members, Ministers: Revs Heres, De Marie, Koster, Smeets.

Journals: *De Bazuin* (Dutch) + *Reformed Continua* (English - international)

Opleiding predikanten: nie meer in Apeldoorn, nou: in-house, dosente: Di De Marie + van Gulp (96 jaar !), Ds Smeets: resultate is goed.

Buitelandse kontakte DGK: Australie, Kanada, Skotland, Noord-Ierland, Korea, Duitsland

DGK sinode opdrag: intensiewere kontakte met de Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) om tot toenadering te komen, daar was skeurings en skorsings wat ook bespreek moet word, daar was 1 x informatief samesprekings wat vervolg sal word.

Groei meestal van binnenuit, daar word nie verwag dat GKv lede massaal sal aansluit na M/V besluit nie (“padda in warmer water”)

Speek-avonden waar DGK oproep tot bekering en aansluiting, evangelisasie: gemeente en persoonlik, zending: te weinig mannekrag, preke word uitgesaai op “kerkdienst gemist”, Lansingerland (Berkel, Bleiswijk, e.o.). Volgende DGK sinode: Febr. 2018

VGKSA: Buitenlandweek: info naar GKv: waarkuwing oor M/V en hermeneutiek, vervolg: homoseksualiteit, etc. Sedert Sinode Bethal 2014: selektief beleid oor toelating.

Opmerking: Ds Bijzet oor GKN by vorige bespreking oor “vroegtijdige skeur”, plaaslike toestand moet rol speel by “verlating kerk”. Besluit Sinode Zuidhorn (m.n. 4e gebod + echtscheiding aangetrek) in Berkel “van harte” geratificeer.

Koster: citaat uit Acts Bethal 2014: erken VGKSA bestaansreg van DGK ? Wil VGKSA DGK terugdwing na GKv ? VGKSA erken broederskap in DGK en hoop op terugkeer na eenwording en samesprekings. GKv meen daar is geen ruimte vir verdere gesprek.

Waarneming: in GKv veel independentisme, sinode besluite word nie in erns opgeneem nie.

Verdere vrae in email Ds Koster. Br van der Net / Baldivis: Abbotsford as susterkerk nie skeidend. VGKSA: skeiding in Abbotsford vroegtydig of ongeregverdig ? Toelating tot nagmaal: strak-kerklik (ware/valse kerk) of breed-kerklik.

Sendingwerk VGKSA: Suid (Kaap) en Noord (Gauteng), 2 klassas, GKSA kontakte nou “bottom up”, op sinode: adviserende stem, “top down” het oor 40 jaar hoegenaamd nie gewerk nie.

HM sal Acts Synod Bethal 2014 aanstuur (inmiddels gedoen)

Sluiting: Ds Bijzet



## **Appendix E.1 - Verslag gesprek deputaat VGKSA, ds. F.J. Bijzet, met afvaardiging GKN**

*Datum: 29 juni 2016 . Ten huize van ds. E. Hoogendoorn in Kampen.*

*Aanwezig ds. F.J. Bijzet, deputaat van de VGKSA.*

*Namens de GKN: br. J. de Bruijne, ds. L. Heres (voorzitter) en ds. E. Hoogendoorn (verslag)*

Ds. Heres vervult de taak van voorzitter. Hij leest met ons Handel. 28:11-31 en gaat daarna voor in gebed. Hij wijst op de bemoediging die apostel Paulus op zijn weg ontving door de ontmoeting met broeders in Italië. Hij spreekt de hoop uit dat zo ook deze ontmoeting tussen de broederschap in Zuid-Afrika en ons in Nederland ons wederzijds tot bemoediging mag dienen met het oog op de zaak van Gods kerk en koninkrijk.

Hij bedankt ds. Bijzet voor zijn verzoek om deze ontmoeting en heet hem – evenals de andere broeders - hartelijk welkom.

Ds. Bijzet dankt voor de gelegenheid die op zijn verzoek hem geboden is met deze samenkomst. Hij verkeert enige weken met vakantie in ons land. Van deze gelegenheid wilde hij graag gebruik maken om als deputaat voor buitenlandse kerken van de VGKSA enkele afgevaardigden van de GKN te spreken.

Hij vertelt een en ander over zijn persoonlijke situatie.

Hij heeft, na eerst in 2013 een half jaar hulpdiensten verricht te hebben in Kaapstad, een beroep naar deze gemeente (onze gemeente bevindt zich in een van de voorsteden) om daar de kerk de jaren, die hem gegeven zouden worden tot aan zijn emeritaat, te dienen en vervolgens weer naar Nederland terug te keren (hij heeft dit jaar zijn emeritaatsgerechtigde leeftijd bereikt).

Hij wijst er op hoe de continuïteit in het deputaatschap van de VGKSA enigszins geleden heeft door diverse omstandigheden.

Hij verklaart wat zijn bedoeling is met deze ontmoeting. Het deputaatschap zou namelijk graag wat meer toelichting willen ontvangen over ontstaan en ontwikkeling van de GKN. Niet alleen feitelijk, maar ook inhoudelijk, vooral inzake de verhouding met de DGK en de gevoelens over en weer.

Hij weet van de nieuwe vrijmakingen (van de DGK) destijds. Hij refereert ook aan de interne conflicten op meerdere plaatsen, die mede geleid hebben tot de oprichting van het kerkverband van de GKN. Hij informeert er naar hoe wij, als GKN deputaten, dat zelf beleven.

Ds. Heres legt uit hoe slechts een deel van de DGK (en die nieuwe vrijmakingen dus) door een breuk met de DGK een onderdeel van de GKN zijn geworden. Een ander deel van de GKN is rechtstreeks uit de GKv voortgekomen.

Hij wijst er ook op, dat bij de totstandkoming van het kerkverband van de GKN is opgemerkt dat men geen verantwoording neemt voor het verleden van de conflicten die zich hebben afgespeeld zoals in Zwijndrecht en Hardenberg bijvoorbeeld. Van beide kanten zijn er beschamende dingen te noemen die niet goed zijn gegaan. Zonder verder over dat verleden te oordelen hebben wij als GKN elkaar gevonden en aanvaard op basis van de Heilige Schrift en de gereformeerde belijdenis, alsook de gereformeerde kerkorde.

Op dit moment is er verdrietig genoeg verschil tussen de DGK en de GKN. Vanuit de DGK is een uitnodiging gekomen tot de GKN om een gesprek met elkaar aan te gaan. De GKN is daar op ingegaan en heeft een deputaatschap opgedragen om in contact met de deputaten van de DGK te treden. De opdracht en instructie die de deputaten van de DGK hadden meegekregen was echter van dien aard, dat er naar het inzicht van de GKN geen open gesprek mogelijk was.

Allerlei details uit het verleden zouden besproken moeten worden en getoetst. De wijze waarop de DGK de kerkorde toepasten in de praktijk van het kerkelijk samenleven, alsook de gereformeerde confessie (met name op het punt van de artikelen over de [ware] kerk), getuigde niet van een katholiek gereformeerde opstelling. De indruk van de synode van de GKN (in maart 2016) was, dat de DGK de meetlat van hun eigen kerkelijk verleden en van hun interpretatie van de kerkorde aan de GKN oplegde. Officieel worden wij door hen als scheurmakers gezien, waarom het ons verbaasde dat men desondanks contact met ons wilde zoeken.

Wij zijn ons bewust van het feit dat ook startpunten in het verleden bij verschillende gemeenten van ons kerkverband geen schoonheidsprijs verdienen en ons tot ootmoed hebben te stemmen. Maar wij willen met elkaar gewoon gereformeerd verder gaan.

Het doet verdriet dat er tot nog toe zo weinig toenadering is tussen de DGK en de GKN; terwijl velen verlangen naar een toenadering op een gezonde gereformeerde basis.

Ds. Bijzet ziet in deze informatie zijn eigen interpretatie van de DGK bevestigd, namelijk dat zij destijds een scheur getrokken hebben door een al te rigoureuze opstelling.

Ds. Heres wijst vervolgens op de situatie in de GKN en op de koers die de laatste synode heeft uitgezet (die voor een belangrijk deel ook al bij de totstandkoming van het kerkverband zo was afgesproken). Binnen de GKN zijn enkele verschillen zoals in de liturgie: het zingen van enkele gezangen en enkele liturgische formulieren van buiten het gereformeerd kerkboek) en het wel of niet gebruiken van het vrouwenstemrecht.

Er wordt afgesproken dat ds. Bijzet het jongste synodebesluit ter zake zal ontvangen alsook de correspondentie tussen DGK en GKN.

Ds. Bijzet vraagt ook hoe het zit met de theologische opleiding van studenten in de GKN. Hem wordt duidelijk gemaakt dat studenten in Apeldoorn studie gevolgd hebben/volgen. Ook wordt gewezen op de theologische begeleiding van zulke studenten door deputaten van de GKN. Canada heeft ook de mogelijkheid geopperd om daar de theologische studie afrondend te volgen. Ds. Bijzet beseft hoe dat toch een probleem kan worden, zoals ze ook in Zuid-Afrika ervaren. Het probleem dat studenten (soms al verloofd) dan jarenlang buitenslands moeten verkeren. Met het risico dat ze dan ook nog eens een beroep elders, bijvoorbeeld in Canada, krijgen (en opvolgen) in plaats terug naar Zuid-Afrika te gaan.

Van onze zijde is aan ds. Bijzet gevraagd hoe de VGKSA staan ten opzichte van de GKN. Ds. Bijzet noemt dat de VGKSA niet erg onder de indruk zijn van het verwijt van de deputaten BBK van de GK(v) dat de Zuid-Afrikaanse kerken eigenlijk geen contact mogen zoeken met de GKN. Nota bene: de VGKSA zijn ontstaan omdat de Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (Dopperkerke) na de Vrijmaking in 1944 en volgende jaren weigerden met de beide kerkengroepen in Nederland contact te zoeken om zich een oordeel te kunnen vormen over de ontstane breuk. En nu zouden de VGKSA dat zelf na de onlangse breuk opeens niet mogen?!

Wat de opstelling met betrekking tot de GKN betreft, zien de VGKSA het als een roeping te praten met de beide groepen die niet met de GKv kunnen verder gaan, dus zowel de DGK als de GKN.

Ook de VGKSA hebben moeite met de ontwikkelingen in de GKv; zoals Australië en Canada die uitgesproken hebben. De kerken in Zuid-Afrika delen die zorgen. Met name m.b.t. de zogenaamde “nieuwe hermeneutiek”. En het groeiende independentisme in plaatselijke kerken.

Ds. Bijzet wijst er op hoe die zorgelijke ontwikkelingen binnen de GKv niet in alle gemeente spelen. Het is nog het wachten op duidelijke uitspraken van de synode van de GKv zoals over de vrouw in het ambt.

Naar aanleiding van deze laatste opmerking is door onze afgevaardigden er op gewezen hoe de ontwikkelingen in (heel het verband van) de GKv heel snel doorgaan. Ook aan de invloedrijke theologische opleiding in Kampen. Verder dat er toch genoegzame duidelijkheid wordt gegeven door de synode, zowel door wat ze wel heeft uitgesproken, maar ook door wat ze *niet* heeft willen zeggen, bijvoorbeeld ten aanzien van de vrouw in het ambt. Dat is indringend meegegeven.

Omdat ds. Bijzet aan tijd gebonden was moesten we het gesprek afronden. Hij dankt voor de informatie die hij op zijn vragen heeft gekregen en hoopt daarmee zijn winst te doen.

Over en weer hebben wij onze dankbaarheid uitgesproken over deze ontmoeting en over de eerlijke en open manier waarop we de dingen konden uitwisselen.

De hoop wordt uitgesproken dat ds. Bijzet met deze informatie de VGKSA kan dienen.

Alsook dat de contacten tussen de VGKSA en de GKN mogen worden voortgezet.

Tenslotte gaat ds. Bijzet ons voor in dankgebed.

## **Appendix E.2 - Verslag van gesprek tussen afgevaardigden van de Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) en deputaten van die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke (VGKSA) gehouden op 10 april 2017 bij ds. Heres thuis, te Papendrecht.**

Aanwezigen:  
VGKSA:

Ds. F.J. Bijzet (FJB)  
Br. J. Moes

GKN:

Ds. L. Heres (LH) (Voorzitter)  
Ds. E. Hoogendoorn (EH)  
Br. de Bruijne (KdB)  
Br. J.M. van Wijk (JvW) (Notulen)

Ds. Heres opent de vergadering met het lezen uit Mattheus 9:35-10:12 en gebed.

Hierna wordt iedereen verwelkomd. Vorige onderlinge gesprekken hebben plaatsgevonden in 2014 en 2016.

Er is van tevoren geen agenda vastgesteld. De broeders van de VGKSA hebben van hun laatste synode (Bethal 2014) de opdracht gekregen contact te onderhouden en/of zoeken met de zusterkerken (waaronder de GKv); ICRC en speciaal de GKN en DGK.

### **1. Wat zijn de veranderingen in de GKN sinds ons vorige gesprek?**

In 2016 werd een nieuwe start gemaakt binnen het kerkverband. Vanaf die tijd (oktober 2016) komen de kerken 2x per jaar samen als **Synode** (Maart en Oktober). Dit duidt op een betere structuur binnen het kerkverband. Om dit te bereiken is samen vastgesteld dat onderlinge verschillen in liturgie en regelgeving (vanuit het verleden) de verantwoordelijkheid van de desbetreffende gemeente zijn en dat we elkaar daarin vrijlaten. Dit bestaat uit: formulieren Belijdenis en Huwelijk; het zingen van een 30tal gezangen uit het LvK; en het stemrecht van vrouwen.

De afgelopen GKN synode (Maart 2017) werd gekenmerkt door broederlijkheid en openheid. Er zijn consulenten benoemd en visitatie regels zijn ingevoerd.

Vanwege het kleine kerkverband zijn geen classis en/of PS.

Sinds onze vorige bespreking is ds. J.R. Visser predikant geworden van de gemeente Zwolle (afkomstig uit GKv Dronten); Prof J Douma en ds. E Hoogendoorn zijn met emeritaat. Dit brengt het aantal actieve predikanten op drie: L Heres; R van der Wolf en JR Visser. Er is een student die zijn studie volgt aan de TU Apeldoorn.

Het aantal gemeenten is 7: Boerakker; Hardenberg; Dalfsen; Zwolle; Kampen; Ede; Zwijndrecht.

Verder zijn er nog een aantal preekplaatsen (wijkgemeenten): Assen; Borne; Gorssel; Amersfoort; Goes en vanaf 6 juni 2017 Harderwijk.

Gesprekken en contacten zijn er met verontruste GKv leden in o.a. Barneveld; Hoogeveen en Urk.

Het tijdschrift “Weerklank” is een privé-initiatief en geen officiële uitgave van het kerkverband van de GKN.

Regelmatig ontvangen we bezoekers (uit de GKv) maar geen grote aantallen.

Er wordt gesproken over de publicatie “Hij en wij” uitgegeven door een aantal verontruste emeritus predikanten uit de GKv. EH merkt op dat de oproep te laat komt. Er is (menselijkerwijs) geen weg terug.

## **2. Wat is de stand van zaken in de verhoudingen/gesprekken tussen GKN en DGK?**

FJB merkt op dat de breuk die de DGK (in 2003) veroorzaakte veel te vroeg was.

LH vat het verloop van de contacten in de afgelopen tijd samen. De generale synode heeft een deputaatschap benoemd om met de deputaten van de DGK (ACOB) te praten. In het begin liep dat moeilijk. De Acta van de DGK-synode van Groningen 2014 speelden daarin een grote rol. Daarin werden de GKN bijvoorbeeld schismatische kerken genoemd. De vooraf vastgestelde agendapunten kwamen voor het besef van de GKN zo onder de druk van een eigen kerkelijke meetlat te staan. In maart 2016 stuurde de synode van de GKN een brief aan de DGK met daarin de vraag om de besluiten t.a.v. de agenda weg te nemen om zo de weg vrij te maken voor een echt broederlijk gesprek. Maar kennelijk waren die punten niet bedoeld als uitspraken, maar als bespreekpunten die in vragende vorm moeten worden opgevat. Eind 2016 besloot de GKN-synode om nog een gesprek aan te gaan met ACOBB met als doel de brief van maart 2016 toe te lichten. Dat gesprek bood een opening om verder door te spreken over het fundament van de kerk. Er ligt op deputatenniveau nu een overeenstemming dat alleen Schrift en belijdenis bij het fundament van de kerk horen en dat de Kerkorde daar niet bij hoort.

Wat het probleem is met de KO?

LH: Het verschil zit in het feit dat we de KO handhaven, maar het zit hem in de interpretatie ervan. Het komt naar voren in zaken als het onderscheid tussen eenheid en eenvormigheid en het toepassen van de tucht rond het verzuim van erediensten. Er zijn allerlei vragen, zoals bijvoorbeeld of DGK vindt dat er niet meer ware kerken in één plaats kunnen zijn. Wat de GKN betreft, gaat het gesprek dat uitwijzen. Het zal in ieder geval duidelijk moeten worden wat het verschil is tussen alles wat er op persoonlijke titel wordt gezegd en wat de formele standpunten zijn. De vraag of wij op hetzelfde fundament staan, moet nog beantwoord worden.

Wij gaan verder in gesprek met de deputaten van de DGK.

Wij (GKN) zijn geen ex-verontrusten of bijna-DGK-ers, maar GKN-ers. Wij zien onszelf als kerk. Als DGK en GKN met elkaar in gesprek zijn, zijn er geen groepjes ex-vrijgemaakten met elkaar in gesprek, maar twee volwaardige kerkverbanden.

Tot slot, de GKN staan open voor zusterkerk relaties, maar wel behoedzaam in deze tijd waarin de VGKSA (nog) een actieve relatie met de GKv heeft. Het is nu nog te prematuur voor deze relaties, alhoewel deze open gesprekken door de GKN wel op prijs gesteld worden

Aan het einde van deze bespreking wordt ieder bedankt voor zijn

bijdrage. Br Moes gaat voor in gebed en ds. Heres sluit de vergadering.

### Appendix E.3 - Verslag gesprek met Prof J Douma, Donderdag 25 Junie 2015

Hierdie gesprek was 'n semi-amptelike ontmoeting, aangesien ek nie 'n opdrag en agenda van die deputaatskap saamgekry het nie, en Prof Douma geen deputaat BBK van die Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) is nie. Ek het gekies vir 'n gesprek met Prof en Mev Douma omdat hulle hulle nog onlangs aan die Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) (GKv) onttrek en by die GKN gevoeg het.

Ons het oor die redes vir hulle onttrekking gepraat. Prof Douma het dit in sy boek *Afscheid van de Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* bewoord. Hulle het besluit om te onttrek omdat die proses van verval ten spyte van talle waarskuwings maar net voortgaan. Daar kom maar net meer dosente aan die Teologiese Universiteit in Kampen wat nie meer voluit Gereformerd dink en skryf nie. Ook Prof Dr Rob van Houwelingen het nou 'n nuwe hermeneutiek omarm, blykens sy bydrae aan die deputaterapport aan die GS Ede 2014 oor vroulike ampsdraers. Prof en Mev Douma verwag, noudat die GS Ede hierdie deputaterapport weliswaar afgewys het maar terselfdertyd die kontakte met die Nederlands Gereformeerde kerken (NGK) met hul hermeneutiek wat daar reeds tot die aanvaarding van vroulike ampsdraers gelei het, uit te brei, dat die volgende sinode wel vroulike ampsdraers sal aanvaar. En dat in die verlengde daarvan ook die saamleef van homofiele kerklidmate aanvaar sal word. Veral ook omdat daar al klaar kerke is wat independentisties op hierdie ontwikkelinge vooruitloop.

Prof en Mev Douma het by die GKN aangesluit omdat hierdie kerke minder radikaal afskeid van en afstand tot die GKv geneem het as Die Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (hersteld) (DGK). In hierdie kerke word nog wel preke van predikante uit die GKv geles en is daar ook meer fleksibiliteit m.b.t. die liturgie as in DGK.

Hulle het die hoop uitgespreek dat die buitelandse susterkerke ertere toenadering tot die GKN sal soek en hulle sal onderskraag noudat hulle maar klein in aantal is en (te) min predikante het.

Ons het aan die einde van ons ontmoeting die kerke in Nederland en Suid-Afrika aan die Heer van die kerk opgedra.

Ferdinand Bijzet

## **Appendix F.1 - REPORT ON ATTENDANCE OF SYNOD BALDIVIS OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA HELD FROM 22 JUNE TO 1 JULY 2015 - ATTENDED BY Br J MOES**

### **Introduction**

A synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia was held at Baldivis, WA, from Monday 22 June to Wednesday 1 July 2015. Br J Moes, convenor of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA), was appointed by the DRCA as the official delegate to this synod, to represent the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (none of the other members of the DRCA were available). Br Moes attended this synod for its full (two weeks) duration.

As Br Moes had arrived already in Baldivis on Friday 19 June, he attended worship services of the FRCA in Baldivis on Sunday 21 June, with the local minister Rev. Stephen 't Hart officiating. On Sunday 28 June, Mr Moes attended the worship services at Mount Nasura, where the newly ordained (on 21 June) minister Rev R. Bredenhof (coming from Canada) officiated. The Lord's Supper was celebrated with the congregation.

On Sundays 5 and 12 July, worship services were attended at the house-congregation of the FRCA in Cairns, on the north-east coast of Australia. This house-congregation has about 40 members, under pastoral supervision of the church at Armadale. On the first Sunday Rev. Dean Anderson of Rockingham officiated, while the Lord's Supper was celebrated. On the second Sunday here, elder Matt Byl read a sermon. At every Sunday afternoon worship service in the FRCA, a sermon is delivered on a Sunday of the Heidelberg Catechism.

### **Opening**

On the evening of 22 June 2015 Synod was convened by the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis. On behalf of the convening church, Rev Stephen 't Hart led in devotions. A considerable crowd had gathered in Baldivis' beautiful church hall, which is a good indication of the interest of members of the churches in West Australia (WA) in synod matters. This can be partially attributed to the publication and discussions well in advance of subjects on the synod's agenda, as well as to the relative nearness of the churches to Baldivis. Quite a few churches apparently also had a congregational meeting on the items on the synod's agenda.

Rev 't Hart invited all present to sing from Ps. 122 about the beauty of God's church and from Hymn 49, which is a prayer for the Holy Spirit of God to grant wisdom and insight. Following prayer, Rev 't Hart offered a meditation on Eph. 4:3 where God's Word speaks about: "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". In his meditation Rev 't Hart emphasised the importance of the unity in the church of Christ. Then, in prayer, he asked the Lord God for exactly that: wisdom and a large

measure of the Holy Spirit for the delegates, so that the meetings could be conducted in peace, with a view of building up the church of Christ, to the glory of the name of God.

After that, Rev 't Hart spoke a few words of welcome, outlining some of the matters that this Synod would have to discuss and decide upon. Then all the FRCA delegates were invited to sit around the Synod table set out in front of the church.

### **Constitution of Synod**

The consistory of Baldivis had examined the credentials received from the three Classes and found them to be in order. The following delegates were welcomed:

From Classis North:

Revs. J. Kroeze, D. Poppe and. E. Rupke and Elders D. Veltkamp, H. Hamelink and G.J. Kleyn

From Classis Central:

Revs. C. Vermeulen, R.D. Anderson and A. VanDelden and Elders H. Gunnink, D. Bonker and G. Groenewold

From Classis South-West:

Revs. H. Alkema and S. 't Hart and Elders H. Olde, G. van der Wal, P. Witten and R. Fokkema

An election was held to appoint the officers for Synod:

Chairman: Rev. S. 't Hart

Vice Chairman: Rev. E. Rupke

First Clerk: Elder D. Bonker

Second Clerk: Rev. C. Vermeulen.

There was no objection against the appointment of sr. Kina VanDuyn to be the administrative assistant for this Synod. On the contrary, her secretarial support was most welcome as she has ably served previous synods in that position before.

With all the delegates and officers in place, the chairman declared Synod constituted. He asked the delegates to rise to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, which they did. Then this opening session of Synod was closed in a Christian manner by the vice chairman, and adjourned by the chairman, after which there was time for fellowship with all delegates and visitors.

### **Foreign Delegates**

According to art. 30 CO a large part of the work of Synod is to deal with matters which belong to its churches in common. For that reason the relationships with foreign churches feature prominently on the agenda. Over the course of the first few days of Synod, the following delegates from foreign churches were welcomed:



Canadian Reformed Churches:	Br. O. Bouwman
	Br. J. VanLaar
Reformed Churches of the Netherlands:	Rev. J. Plug
	Br. J. de Jong
Reformed Churches of New Zealand:	Rev. P. Archbald
	Rev. L. DeVos
First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore:	Pastor Chong Nam Tuck
	Br. Leong Yew Hoong
Free Reformed Churches of South Africa:	Br. J. Moes
Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia:	Rev. F. Tipa kaya
Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis:	Br. S. Dethan
Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (restored) (DGK)	Br. A. VanDerNet
Kosin Presbyterian Churches in Korea:	Dr. Kwon Kyong Ho
Jayoo Reformed Churches in Korea:	Rev. DongSup Song.

Rev. DongSup Song visited the Synod on his churches' own initiative. Synod agreed that he be allowed to address Synod to extend greetings and to introduce his church (the Reformed Churches in Korea). The chairman asked the delegates to rise to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, which they did.

In the first week of Synod, the following items were discussed and decided upon, mostly over a number of days in separate sessions:

### **Bible Translation**

Two churches had submitted a request to Synod to allow the English Standard Version (ESV) to be used in the church worship services. The deputyship for the evaluation of the ESV and NIV (New International Version) had presented a favourable evaluation of the ESV, although only one of the deputies was able to complete the report. However, reports from the deputyship of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) with a similar mandate were included in the submissions from the churches. Synod determined that these were sufficient to acknowledge that the ESV is suitable for use in the church worship services. The churches will now have the freedom to use either the NKJV (the New King James Version, which is used by all the churches in WA at the moment) or the ESV. The NIV 1984 (which is used in the churches in Tasmania) must be phased out by July 2018, because of possible confusion with the NIV 2011 translation, which has "gender inclusiveness" and is therefore not acceptable by the FRCA.

### **Investigation of 19 additional hymns**

The Canadian Authorised Provisional Book of Praise, which is used in some of our churches in WA, includes 19 hymns which have been adopted by the CanRC, but not by the FRCA. Classis South-West have asked Synod to further investigate if these hymns should also be adopted by the Australian churches. These hymns were briefly considered by Synod Armadale 2012 but no decision could be made at the time

because none of the churches had specifically requested Synod to do so. That is why Classis South-West decided to submit this request. Synod agreed that this investigation can now take place.

### **The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC)**

Synod Armadale 2012 had mandated a deputyship to “take up contact with the FERC on behalf of the FRCA, and to make a careful investigation of this church according to BC Art 29, exploring the feasibility of a sister church relationship, and to present a detailed report and accompanying recommendations to Synod 2015.” That report was submitted and discussed. The FERC is one congregation in the city-state of Singapore and has about 320 members. Their origin is from contacts with members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the USA. They hold to the Three Forms of Unity and govern their church by the principles of the Church Order of Dort. They are involved in supporting another reformed church on the inland of Penang in Malaysia.

Some discussion was held specifically on the question whether it is wise to entertain a sister church relationship with a church which consists of only one congregation. Would that one church not be too heavily burdened with the responsibilities that come with a sister church relationship? However, after discussion and feed-back from the FERC delegates, Synod was convinced that this would not be the case. Therefore, with much joy and thanksgiving, Synod decided to extend an offer of sister church relationship to the FERC. A deputyship will be appointed to await the answer of the FERC to our offer and to conduct the relationship according to the rules adopted by Synod.

### **Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)**

The contact with the RCNZ has been on the agenda of FRCSA synods for many years. Synods in the past have acknowledged that the RCNZ are a true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it never came to a sister church relationship because the RCNZ also maintained a sister church relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCA). This sister church relationship formed an impediment that stood in the way of a sister church relationship between FRCA and RCNZ. However, the last Synod of the RCNZ broke off the sister church relationship with the CRCA and replaced it with a relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship. Synod was satisfied that the nature of this new relationship takes away our concerns of negative influence coming from the CRCA to the RCNZ, and therefore considered that the impediment was removed. As a result Synod was very happy and thankful to be able to accept the offer of a sister church relationship with the RCNZ at this time.

### **United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)**

Late last year the consistories of the FRCA received a letter from the URCNA seeking contact with the FRCA. Two Classes submitted this letter to Synod. It was proposed that “Synod mandates deputies for relations with churches abroad to provide the URCNA with information about our churches in response to their letter to us, to take up contact with them, and to report to the next Synod.” The grounds that support this

request mention that the CanRC are in a close relationship with these churches and are pursuing unity with them. For this reason, among others, Synod decided to adopt the proposal and to mandate deputies to get in touch with the URCNA. Our next Synod will then consider how to proceed with that contact.

### **Kosin Presbyterian Churches in Korea (KPCK)**

The deputies for sister church relations also submitted a report about the sister church relationship with the KPCK. In their report they acknowledge that the relationship remains somewhat limited by way of the language and cultural barrier. However, they also consider that the last three years have seen positive developments in practical expression of the relationship. Therefore they recommend to continue sister church relations with the KPCK according to the established rules, on the grounds that as far as can be known they show faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed confessions. The deputies consider it of special interest that the KPCK work with a model and mode of missionary work different from our own. They find that this needs to be investigated further by the churches that are involved in mission work. Synod decided to continue the sister church relationship.

### **Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise**

Judging from the many submissions from the churches in relation to a possible Australian Version of the CanRC Book of Praise, this matter is very much alive in the churches. A survey conducted by the deputies on the Book of Praise demonstrated that there is a clear desire in the churches to move towards a FRCSA Book of Praise. Around the table all the delegates are thankful for the work that the CanRC have done in this respect, and that the FRCA have been able to benefit from that work for many years. But now the churches have expressed the desire to stand on their own two liturgical legs. After a lot of work and discussion, the decision was made to develop an Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise and present it to the next Synod.

This Book of Praise will contain the Psalms and Hymns of the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise that are approved for use in the FRCA (it will not include any unapproved hymns that are used in the CanRC), and it will incorporate changes to the creeds, confessions and liturgical forms as made by the FRCA, as well as the Australian Church Order. There was quite some discussion about which Bible translation to use. Some favoured the NKJV which capitalises personal pronouns referring to God, others the ESV which was earlier adopted for use in the church which does not capitalise personal pronouns referring to God. In the end it was decided that deputies should prepare two versions, one with the NKJV and the other with the ESV. The next Synod can then decide which one to adopt. For the time being, in the interim, the churches are encouraged to use the new 2014 Canadian Book of Praise.

### **Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)**

If the number of church submissions is anything to go by, then a decision regarding the relationship of the FRCA with the RCN was also highly anticipated. Many submissions

expressed great concern about the direction that our sister churches in the Netherlands are going. In fact, Synod Armadale 2012 had sent a letter of admonition to the RCN outlining these concerns. Underlying many of these concerns is a manner of Bible explanation which does not do justice to the sufficiency, authority and clarity of God's Word, but instead allows circumstances of time and culture to determine the understanding of the Biblical text. This letter of admonition did not have the desired effect. The Dutch Synod of Ede 2014 did not accept that any of the warnings are accurate and responded in a fairly strong-worded letter.

In their report this leads the deputies to the conclusion: "We reluctantly must conclude that our Dutch sisters have, as a federation corporately, departed in important ways from the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy." The Synod delegates did unanimously agree that the concerns raised in the deputies report are real and that our sister church relationship cannot continue as per normal. As a result Synod has now decided to suspend the relationship with the RCN. That means that attestations from brothers and sisters coming from the RCN will not be accepted without question. It also means that ministers from the RCN are no longer allowed to preach in the FRCA. To keep the lines of communication open, the FRCA will still welcome two delegates to our next Synod.

This suspension of our relationship is a big step because Synod also declared "that the FRCA's sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the Synod of Armadale 2012 to the synod of Ede 2014." This suspension does not preclude yet another attempt to change the direction of the RCN, because Synod also decided "to interact with the request of Synod Ede for advice with respect to the role of men and women in the church (new deputies appointed by Synod Ede 2014), and present the clear biblical teaching on this matter."

It is safe to say that this decision to suspend the relationship may very well be the last attempt to convince the RCN to turn around from the direction they are going, back to faithfulness to God's Word and the Reformed confessions which we share. It is the prayer of Synod that (the many) sister churches might repent and our relationship restored. Synod urged the churches to remember the RCN in their prayers and ask the Lord of the church to guard and preserve His church in the world.

### **Training for the ministry**

On Monday 29 June Synod reconvened for the second week of meetings. One of the first things on the agenda was the report of the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry. The deputies in their report, as well as the delegates around the table expressed their appreciation for the work done at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton. CRTS provides young men with a faithful theological training of a high academic level. For that reason Synod decided first of all to raise the financial contribution from Australia to AU\$82 per communicant member (which is now equal to the rate per communicant member in Canada). Further, for the last nine years the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry had been investigating the possibilities of distance education with

Hamilton, through the use of internet facilities. The conclusion of that investigation is that the Seminary in Hamilton does not see the way open for that possibility now or in the near future.

Deputies also investigated the feasibility of offering the first year of theological studies in Australia, in close cooperation with Hamilton. Deputies have come to the conclusion that both investigations do not need to continue in the light of Hamilton's response that they see no possibility to work with the FRCA in that regard. Synod agreed to that conclusion. In anticipation of that decision, one of the churches had submitted a comprehensive proposal to Synod with regards to the establishment of our own Seminary in Australia. This proposal was considered inadmissible. However, on the basis of other submissions from the churches, and notwithstanding the great appreciation for Hamilton Seminary, Synod decided to mandate new deputies to investigate the feasibility of establishing our own FRCA Theological Seminary in due time. A next Synod will have to decide if and how to proceed with any plans in that direction.

### **Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)**

On the Monday evening, to allow church members to attend the session, the report about the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) was tabled. Again, great thankfulness was expressed for the blessings we receive from our relationship with the CanRC. Not only are we able to send our young men to Hamilton to receive theological training, and not only are we able to enjoy the benefits of the Canadians' work on the Book of Praise, and not only do many of our ministers come from the churches in Canada, many of us in Australia also have close personal (family) ties with brothers and sisters in Canada. We thank God that we enjoy a very close and encouraging and supportive relationship with our sister on the other side of the Pacific.

At the Synod table, special attention was given to the contacts of the CanRC with other churches. They are speaking with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) about a possible merger. Synod expressed the desire to stay informed about the sister church developments in North America with (besides the URCNA) the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), and the Eglise Reformée de Quebec (ERQ). Further, Synod decided to liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN. Both the FRCA and the CanRC have grave concerns about the developments in our Dutch sister churches. Perhaps we can be of mutual assistance as we consider how to proceed with our relationship with the RCN.

### **Letter to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)**

During its first week, week Synod decided to suspend the sister church relationship with the RCN. The new Deputies for Sister Church Relations will make contact with the RCN to discuss this decision with them. However, Synod also thought it wise to contact the RCN via an official letter from Synod to Synod. Synod discussed what exactly this letter should

say. It was decided to keep the letter short and to the point, considering that our last Synod had already sent the RCN an extensive letter of admonition. The same letter will also be sent to all the local consistories of the RCN, to make sure that all the churches of the RCN are made aware of the matters contained within the letter of admonition that has been sent to the Synod of the RCN of 2013, as well as the letter this Synod Baldivis 2015 has decided to send to the next RCN Synod.

### **Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (restored) (DGK) and Reformed Churches Netherlands (GKN)**

Synod's decision to suspend the sister church relation with the RCN has consequences for the decisions regarding the DGK and the GKN. The DGK is the new name for the churches formerly known as the RCN (restored). GKN is the name of the churches formerly known as "Voorlopig Kerkverband" (Temporary church bond). Both these churches were established when they withdrew from the RCN. The DGK have visited our Synods since 2006. Two submission were received from the churches to investigate the possibility of sister church relations with the DGK specifically. After a long and intense discussion Synod decided that that would be premature at this time. Instead Synod decided to "maintain contact with the DGK and the GKN and be receptive to contact with others who withdrew from the RCN and to report to next Synod on further developments in this regard." As one of the grounds Synod considered that "there are members, ministers and churches within the RCN that continue to express objections and grave concerns about the developments taking place among them who still need time in considering how to respond." Synod also mandated deputies to exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith.

### **Indonesia**

Currently the FRCA have a sister church relationship with the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia (GGRI). This federation is the result of a union in February 2012 of three regional Synods, the GGRI Papua, the GGRI Kalimantan Barat and the GGRI NTT. Synod Armadale 2012 had already expressed great thankfulness that this union could take place. Synod Baldivis decided that our deputies should provide more information about this union to the churches, confirming their Reformed character. Deputies will prepare that report and send it to the churches in due time. The GGRI have established a Theological Seminary in Waimarangu, Sumba. Our deputies were able to make recommendations to improve several aspects of the running of the Seminary. Furthermore, the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville is involved in mission work in Kupang in Timor, through a missionary, Rev. Edwar Dethan. Smithville also supports the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary in Kupang. There is another federation of Reformed churches in Indonesia, the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC) with whom we do not have a sister church relationship. That's why Synod also decided "to consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the CanRC to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and to work together with all the parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles" in order to make progress towards federal unity between the GGRI and the GGRC.

## **Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)**

The last sister church on Synod's radar was the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. The report of Deputies RCA on their interactions with the FRCSA during the past three years was discussed on Wednesday afternoon 1 July. One of the Deputies, Rev. 't Hart, provided a brief background to their report with respect to the FRCSA. The FRCSA have eight congregations, five of which are needy churches. It is the privilege of our churches to continue to provide financial support to our sister. Deputies request that the amount contributed across the FRCA be around AU\$10 per communicant member. At present most of the SA students of theology go to the Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) for their theological training. The college presents itself as a multi-denominational institution that is reformed in theology. The curators of the FRCSA are satisfied that the MTC offers Biblically faithful theological training. The FRCSA do not live in an easy time or environment. There is a lot of crime and violence in SA. As a result, many people have migrated from SA, among them also members of the FRCSA. Some have also joined our churches in Australia.

Br Moes had addressed the Synod and (the many) guest on Monday evening 29 June. The address is attached as an appendix. In addition, immediately after the address, he also showed some slides on the mission work at the Cape Flats. Br Moes flagged another problem in his churches, namely that some churches are becoming vacant in the near future. The Press Review of the Synod stated: "He underlined this problem with a silent and meaningful and penetrating glance in the direction of the ministers around the Synod table."

In two rounds of discussions, a number of questions were asked. These concerned a proposed addition to the recommendations of Deputies RCA. This particular addition was made to reflect earlier discussions on De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands. The DGK delegate at Synod Baldivis had mentioned that it is not a DGK requirement to sever a sister church relationship with the CanRC before a sister church relationship with the DGK can be established (as stated in the FRCSA Acts of Bethal 2014, p.14, Art. 22 Para. 1.7(ii), which is derived from the DRCA report, Acts Bethal, p.100 and p.101, Ground 2). This was apparently as misrepresentation of a discussion of FRCSA - DRCA members with the DGK on 22 Febr. 2014 (see DGK minutes of this meeting as apparently also approved by the FRCSA delegates, p. 55). Br Moes confirmed that, as far as the official FRCSA – DRCA and DGK minutes indicated, this statement on the DGK requirement by Synod Bethal was indeed not justified. Synod decided as follows on this issue:

Synod appreciates the clarification given by the delegates from the FRCSA and the DGK that the DGK did not require the FRCSA to sever the relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches as a precondition for closer relations.

Br Moes will investigate this matter with the FRCSA-DRCA delegates who attended the meeting with the DGK. Synod expressed thankfulness for the growing relationship with the

FRCSA and decided to continue sister relations with these churches according to the established rules.

### **Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB)**

Synod Armadale 2012 had appointed deputies with the mandate to approach the Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB) in order to ascertain if a meaningful sister church relationship could be established. Deputies submitted a somewhat ambivalent report. Although they recommended that Synod mandate deputies to work towards the establishment of a sister church relationship with the IRB, they also indicated that such a relationship would not be that easy to maintain. Furthermore, an earlier Synod had decided that we should, as a rule, only establish sister church relations with churches who are geographically close to us. It was noted that our church sister in Canada would possibly be in a better position to assist the IRB. For these reasons, among others, Synod decided not to appoint new deputies and not to pursue a sister church relationship with the IRB.

### **Conclusion**

In the end it took Synod seven days to work through their agenda. In this overview only the most significant of the many decisions can be reported. They are sufficient, however, to show convincingly how busy our Lord Jesus Christ is with His churches in Australia and world-wide. During this Synod Baldivis 2015 the delegates often turned to the Head of the church in prayer to give thanks and to ask for His blessing and guidance. Synod did this in the awareness and acknowledgement that “unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.” (Ps. 127:1).

### **Personal Comments**

Many FRCA churches had submitted proposals to synod, related to many diverse matters on the synod’s agenda. This showed a fruitful involvement of the churches in the matters of this broader church assembly. That such involvement of the churches within the FRCSA is lacking to a large extent is a matter of concern, as it may reduce a synod to an administrative council, dealing only with deputies’ reports.

Synod Baldivis was very strict in only accepting documents which had been submitted before the deadline of three months before Synod and was also strict on only dealing with matters that had been brought (in time) by the churches to Synod. This approach seems to be a necessary condition for allowing the churches to be involved in the decision-making process by synods.

The focus of the FRCA on new relations with foreign sister churches is on their own region (such as New Zealand, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Korea). This focus is due to limited resources and to some extent to language barriers. These relationships are supported by regular personal contact. This is in line with the approach of the FRCSA, to focus on Africa (through the ICRC), although our resources are even less.

The decision taken by Synod Badivis on suspending the sister church relationship with the RCN has an impact on our own sister church relationship with the RCN. It would be wise to keep the communication channels open as best as possible so that any misunderstanding is avoided in taking such decisions. After the Hamilton Conference



of university professors on the subject of hermeneutics, it would be good to also have a dialogue between the sister churches (FRCSA, FRCA, CanRC, RCN, KPCK) on this matter and to discuss the consequences of the RCN approach to hermeneutics. This dialogue may take place within the context of the RCN deputies on man-woman in office, where Synod Ede has invited sister churches to provide inputs.

Attending Synod Baldivis has been an interesting and enriching experience. It will be instrumental in improved future contacts between the (deputies of the) FRCSA and the FRCA. Personal contacts with sister churches will also support understanding each other as sister churches and clarify directly any misunderstandings that may arise.

J Moes

25 July 2015

## **Appendix F.2 - Address of J Moes to Synod Baldivis of the FRCA**

### **Mr Chairman, Esteemed Brother-Delegates, Dear Brothers and Sisters**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you, as delegates to this Synod. It is a great honour for me to be present at your Synod and to convey warm greetings from your sister-churches, the F.R.C.S.A. We know that the Lord gathers his children and his church over the whole world, but it is encouraging to see this in practice and experience it. Here, where churches from various parts of the world are in this assembly together, we see the Lord working towards His kingdom, also through the efforts of this Synod. People from all nations of the earth are being gathered under the Lord's royal reign.

If I am not mistaken, the literal meaning of the word "synod" is "being together on the way". In this case, we are together on the Way, which Way is Jesus Christ, Who is also the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). These characteristics of our Saviour, being the way, the truth and the life, are essential to not only guide Thomas and the disciples, but also for us as Christians here and now. But being "on the way" also means that we are heading for a destination, and for us this is the way to the New Jerusalem, where we will be living together in harmony, united with the Triune God.

You have (had) important matters on your agenda. By reading through the 446 pages of your pre-Synod documents, which were available well in time, I became impressed by the thoroughness with which you prepare for your Synods. During the two weeks set aside for this Synod, there is ample opportunity for in-depth discussions, evaluation and careful and responsible decisions. It is edifying for me to experience this.

As churches we cannot exist in isolation, not locally and also not internationally. The latter is illustrated by the fact that 70% of the pre-Synod document deals with your sister-churches and ecclesiastical contacts with other churches. We need each other, in the first place in a national federation, but also worldwide. Christ calls us into unity behind the one Shepherd (John 10:16). By following in His footsteps, we will find our strength as believers and as churches. Our ecumenical unity foreshadows the New Jerusalem, where we will be united with all believers in space and time.

Two main paradigms have characterised the church over centuries, and they still play a role in how we see the church-road to be travelled. On the one hand, the church is called to keep itself pure, in line with the gospel, to not become defiled by un-godly practices of the world (Rom. 12:2), but instead be a pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). This task is familiar to us as reformed people. But on the other hand, the church is sent into the world, our missionary task (Mat. 28:19,20). For this purpose we have to conform as much as possible to the culture in which we live or are sent to (1 Cor. 9:20-23). This is generally more difficult for us to practice in the neighbourhoods where we live. The church has to find a Scriptural balance between these two paradigms: her introvert, inwardly directed preservation of the truth, and her extrovert mission work, her outreach and openness to the world with the lowest possible threshold. A challenge for all of us.

The F.R.C.S.A. share many of the issues that you are discussing, especially on how we ought to read, understand and apply the Word of God, as we have it in the Bible. This is an important issue and impacts on our unity as churches. If our vision on and practice of hermeneutics start to differ, it will be more difficult to maintain unity as sister churches

since we will be applying the Word of God differently. As sister churches, we are each other's keeper and have to find *practical* ways to discuss important issues, in addition to sending letters between and attending each other's synods. May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and guide us in the right direction. Your decisions here will have an impact on corresponding matters to be discussed at our next Synod of Soshanguve, the Lord Willing, in 2017.

We will also be able to benefit from other aspects of your deliberations and decisions, such as your investigation of local (partial) training for the ministry and reliable English Bible translations. Concerning the latter, we can learn from your NIV-ESV-NKJV discussions, as well as from corresponding discussions of the CanRC. It may be of interest to you that we are a tri-lingual church federation. Of the eight churches in our federation, six are Afrikaans-speaking and two are Sotho-speaking, while our federal church language is English. Four of the eight churches in our federation are from origin immigration churches, one is an Afrikaans church and three are instituted mission churches. In total, the FRCSA has about 1 600 members, of which about 2/3 are from European origin and 1/3 from African origin (I'll show you some slides at the end of my presentation). In addition, we have five mission congregations, of which one is Afrikaans-speaking, three are Sotho-speaking and one is English-speaking. You will appreciate that all this makes it complicated to communicate and strive for unity between our churches. But whatever language, liturgy and culture we may use, our fundamental unity lies in Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

We also experience similar practical problems as you do when it comes to training for the ministry. To send young men to Hamilton for four years is quite some effort and isolates the students from their home churches. So we are also investigating whether theological students cannot undertake part of their studies in the home-country, with guidance from Hamilton and local pastors. A number of our present ministerial students are studying for their BTh at the Mukhanyo Theological College in South Africa, where one of our ministers is a dean. A particular concern at present in our church federation is that three of our four "immigration churches" will become vacant either this or next year. It will not be easy to fill these vacancies from within our church federation or from available students. Because of our small number of churches, we like to fill these vacancies again with experienced ministers. Some of the new ministers will probably have to be called from sister-churches  
.....

For those of you who do not know yet, I am sorry to say that South Africa is presently a very tumultuous country, with continuous strikes, violent demonstrations and high levels of crime. This is due to a government that is more interested in its personal material wellbeing than in the welfare of the people (although, as good politicians, they tell us that it's just the other way around). Corruption is present at all levels. The transformed police force is hardly able to control law and order and our economy is hardly growing. South Africa has just under 30% unemployment of which 60% are young people. This high unemployment has a very negative effect, especially on our mission congregations. You will have noticed the effect of all this in the many South-Africans immigrants now living in Perth. But notwithstanding our frustrations with the world in which we live, as churches we are very thankful for the freedom that we have in being able to proclaim the gospel and undertake our mission work. We are also thankful to RCN churches in the north of the Netherlands, who provide more than 90% of the funds for our mission work.

I mentioned the various languages that are used within our churches. South Africa has 11 official languages, not including a number of Khoi-San (Bushman) languages. But there are also large differences in cultural practices. The Dutch immigrant churches still have a Dutch culture, while the other churches and mission congregations in our federation have an African culture.

The African culture is strongly promoted by the present government and includes practicing witch doctors (“sangoma’s”), tribal chiefs (who rule rural towns), polygamy (our President has at present four wives) and ancestral worship. We have five kings (previously called “paramount chiefs”). This culture is probably not strange to Australia, but among the majority of South Africans it is still general practice. If you need to find a job or a good wife, if you need friends who earn an income, if you have problems with family or neighbours or have a serious illness, we have a one-stop-shop: the witch doctor (\$ 5 per consultation + a few \$\$ for the pills and drinks). It is very hard to fully eliminate these superstitious and ancestral practices, even for members of the mission congregations, especially when Christianity is seen as part of the “Western” culture. Black Christians need discernment in order to decide what needs to be rejected and what can be kept.

Because of our small church federation, with limited resources, we only have a sister-church relationship with three churches: the FRCA, the CanRC and the RCN. But through our membership of the ICRC we try to maintain ecclesiastical contacts with other reformed churches, particularly in Africa. We also have a growing good relationship with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA). This was started “bottom-up”, i.e. by contact between local congregations, while our two classes and the synods take note and stimulate the contact. Sixty years ago, when the FRCSA members emigrated from the Netherlands to South Africa, the immigrants had difficulty with the sister-church relations of the RCSA. But these differences have disappeared to a large extent. The RCSA is now also a member of the ICRC.

In a wider sense, we have a number of social activities initiated by church members, such as an AIDS support organisation (“Khothatsong”), a monthly magazine (“Kompas”), three reformed primary schools, as well as local mission support organisations. One of our young emeritus ministers (emeritus due to poor health) has successfully started a gospel support project (the Reformed Study Centre / Library) by electronically distributing reformed literature in Africa (in English and now also in French). This work is supported by some CanRC churches.

In a small way we try to spread the gospel in South Africa and stimulate reformed thinking and actions, to the honour and glory of God, our Father. This is one of our prime callings as churches and we trust in the Lord to continue strengthening and blessing us in these efforts. We are very thankful in particular to the F.R.C.A. in providing financial support to the five needy churches in our federation and for the warm and brotherly contacts that are being maintained. If we all are faithful in our work in whatever place we live in this world, of which Christ is the King, we can expect to receive His blessings. But we are also encouraged in our efforts by meeting each other as sister churches and by reflecting on our calling as churches in this world.

In conclusion, I quote the prayer of the apostle Paul to the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:9-11 - NIV): “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge (*epignosis*, discernment) and depth of insight (*aisthesis*, judgment), so that you may be able to

discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God”. May the Lord grant you wisdom and bless you in your efforts as churches, to remain a pillar and ground of the truth and to fulfil your calling in spreading the gospel in this world. May the FRCSA also continue to be blessed in having the FRCA as sister churches. May your churches, also through the efforts of this Synod, go from strength to strength, to the glory of His Holy Name.

Hans Moes

On behalf of the DRCA of the FRCSA

## Appendix G - Interim Report of DRCA to FRCSA Indaba 2016

by Rev. Dirk M. Boersma

### Note: Abbreviations for our sister churches

GKv or RCN = Geref Kerken (vrijgemaakt) / Reformed Churches (Liberated)

FRCA = Free Reformed Churches Australia

CanRC = Canadian and American Reformed Churches

### 1. Membership

Br. H. Moes (convener), Rev. F.J. Bijzet, sr. G. van den Berg (all 3 are members of Bellville FRC), Rev. D.M. Boersma (Pretoria-Maranata/Living Hope).

Deputies have asked br. Addie de Mooij to take the place of br. R. Raimond (Bellville), who was not available. We decided 5 deputies would be enough if br. Boersma, who was reappointed as contact person for ICRC, participates in all the work of the deputies.

Deputies are based in Bellville. Br. Boersma attends the meetings via skype.

### 2. Summary of instructions given by Synod 2014

- Stay in touch with sister churches (maintaining sister church relationship). This includes happily traveling all over the world to attend synods.
- Send a delegate to CanRC synod 2017 and make presentations about the FRCSA to local churches because they support our federation.
- Send two delegates to the next Synod of RCN and stay informed of developments in the Dutch churches.
- Attend the ICRC 2017 conference in Hamilton (Canada) with two delegates in order to build and maintain contact with other churches (this saves money) and inform the churches of what happens in the ICRC.
- Attend the ICRC regional mission conferences in Africa to build relations with African churches and to find out their needs, to see if we can meet them (e.g. leadership training).

### 3. Report on activities performed

- Br. Moes attended Synod **FRCA** (Australia) June 2015.
- Br. Bijzet visited the **Netherlands** and spoke with Rev. JM van Leeuwen (deputies RCN) and prof. Douma (professor in RCN since 1967, but left RCN recently).
- Deputies RCN for studying **male/female participation in the church** (mainly the issue of women in office) sent a letter requesting sister churches to describe how women participate in their churches. We are sending an answer.

- Correspondence with DGK (The Reformed Churches; they left the RCN) about possibly maintaining contact.
- Br. Boersma reported on the **Africa Regional Conference of the ICRC**. After years of struggling, it was planned for August 2015 but had to be postponed to 2016. Place: Kampala, Uganda. New dates: 1-6 August 2016. Topic: the Christian response to islamic insurgence its violence across the world. BBK will send one delegate. In addition, FRC missionaries are invited and encouraged to this conference (costs to be carried by mission boards).
- FRC Joburg raised the issue that ministers lose their **retirement** benefits when they move take a call to another country. Every federation has their own retirement scheme. We sent out letters to sister churches to ask their views on better international cooperation in this.
- We collected the **rules for maintaining sister church relations** as in use by our sister churches RCN, FRCA and CanRC. The RCN are changing them because they have many international relations.
- All electronic copies of the **magazines** of sister churches are now kept in a dropbox.
- We sent a letter to our sister churches RCN, FRCA and CanRC to raise the possibility of having a **conference on hermeneutics**, since this is the major reason the relations between the Dutch churches and the others are tense. FRCA don't think this is useful, CanRC proposed to raise this in the ICRC.

#### 4. **Items for discussion: to clarify matters or to obtain advice**

Nothing at this time.

#### 5. **Finances**

We have spent money according to our budget, mainly for visiting synods. There are no surprises in the spending of budget and we can keep it as it is.

## **Appendix H - Address to Synod Dunnville 2016 of the CanRC**

by Rev. Dirk M. Boersma  
on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Dear brothers and sisters,

### **1. Meetings and fellowship**

During the five years I was a minister in Denver, CO, I was never delegated to Synod. I felt like standing outside the doors of a frequent flier lounge at an airport. Not enough miles (experience) so you don't get in! I am so happy that I live in South Africa now. I fly finally collected enough miles (and perhaps some experience?). The doors of the lounge swung open for me: this is already your third synod I can attend!

All jest aside, I really see it as a privilege to be here.

It gives me great joy to travel halfway around the world and meet churches and brothers and sisters who also belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and follow him.

It is beautiful to taste the unity and love you have for each other. I can sense it in the way you discuss and listen to each other.

I am not talking about recognition of a common culture (in Dutch they call it 'spruitjesgeur'- like the smell of Brussels sprouts and oliebollen) that goes back to our common Dutch roots.

Visiting churches in different cultures and attending these Synod discussions is refreshing and it is a learning experience to see what is essential and where we can joyfully differ from each other. And as we recognize and embrace the truths we hold so dear, the doctrines of grace, we rejoice in our unity in Christ and we work together in his kingdom.

### **2. Greetings**

First, it is my great pleasure to bring you greetings from your South-African sister churches. We appreciate the bond we have with you. We experience it as a blessing from Christ that we receive support and encouragement from you, and that we are in your prayers.

### **3. The FRCSA and its challenges**

Since every Synod consists of a different group of delegates, it can be helpful if I give you an overview of the FRCSA and its recent developments.

The FRCSA consist of 7 instituted churches and 7 mission points with a total of 3,5 pastors and 7.5 missionaries in active service. I estimate our total membership to be between 2000 and 2500 members, with 1/3 of them being members in the mission points.



So you see we are a small federation. And we grew smaller yet. The church of Bethal, which left the Dutch Reformed Churches in SA to join the FRC in 1995, was disbanded in April. It had been reduced to 30 members after a crisis in the congregation.

We remain with three more needy churches. We are thankful to the FRCA, who are so generous to support our needy churches fund.

#### 4. **Mission work**

When the Dutch immigrants started the FRCSA in the fifties, they were faithful and generous and started building church buildings and two schools. They also started to spread the gospel. But when a missionary was needed, the mission work was handed over to the Dutch churches. 30 Years later, the responsibility was transferred to the South African churches. The churches in the Northern provinces of the RCN continued to support the mission work.

Thus far we had churches in areas that were separated into 'white' and 'black'. The country has changed as people began moving around after the barriers had officially been removed. Many areas are mixed. Therefore since 2009 we also have one mission church that is multi-racial and multi-cultural. I am thankful for the privilege to plant this church myself, and I see a beautiful unity growing between black and white members, SA citizens and foreigners, and people speaking different languages. This is a new experience in our mission work.

We experienced a change in the mission points. The rapid growth of the nineties has slowed and we now focus less on expansion. We have begun to focus on training, discipleship, and maturity of faith. One of the missionaries focuses solely on training now.

#### 5. **Fewer pastors**

We lost so many pastors! Six in seven years.

2009: Rev Pieter Nel from Bethal was deposed.

2013: Rev Jerry Mhlanga was deposed and Rev Tjeerd de Boer (missionary) returned to the Netherlands.

2014: The bond between Rev Eugene Viljoen and the church of Cape Town was dissolved. He was available for a call but did not receive any. Sadly, he is now no longer a pastor in the FRCSA.

2015: Rev Kees Kleijn (Joburg) retired and Rev Jelle Drijfhout (Pretoria) returned to the Netherlands.

Three churches are looking for Afrikaans-speaking pastors. Afrikaans-speaking pastors are as scarce as hen's teeth (as the South African expression goes). On top of that, work permits are harder to come by.

In the meantime, the Lord had already provided black students from South Africa for the ministry. In about the same time frame, four students (including Phineas Kgatle who was in Hamilton for 6 months) have become missionaries and pastors.

For the training of future students, we need a training solution tailored for South Africa. We do not have enough pastors to set up our own theological training. Sending students to another continent is not healthy and unaffordable.

This is also an area where we appreciate the cooperation with your churches. Two of our curators hope to have discussions with CRTS this year.

## 6. Support

The report of your CCCA deputies is correct in mentioning that our churches face significant challenges in both missions and sustainability.

Three mission churches that were instituted, became needy churches. Our bond of churches is definitely not self-sufficient. A disproportionate amount of money for missions and mission-related projects comes from our sister churches in Canada, Australia and the Netherlands.

We are very thankful that the RCN (GKv) churches support our missions project (90%). Otherwise we could barely have had one missionary. Then, a while ago, the Australian sister churches started to support the needy churches in our midst. And then you, the Canadian churches, started supporting the mission work and specific projects *Khothatsong*, our HIV-Aids committee, and the *Reformed Study Center*. The latter is a unique project consisting of a library and an electronic delivery service of Reformed and exegetical materials to hundreds and hundreds of pastors all over the world who don't have access to these resources.

Because foreign aid makes our members dependent and lazy, a special synod was held in 2012 to discuss financial dependence and sustainability. The plan is to reduce the inflow of foreign support and to stand more on our own feet. Whether the result will look like an ostrich or a flamingo, we will see...

In all these things we depend on the Lord, who has made the sister churches generous and is also able to make all members in our churches more generous and more responsible in their stewardship.

We are small and dependent. But we do not think about this every day, we just carry out our calling and trust in the Lord.

We realize that every church of Jesus is dependent, including you, the big sisters. So we agree with what Paul wrote about the collection to Jerusalem. Churches should not feel more or less important depending on the number of members and the amount of resources God has put in their hands.

So it is our prayer that we may continue to encourage and support each other, and that our prayers on both sides of the Atlantic will not cease but rather increase, for the glory of Christ.

May he bless you richly!