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GREETINGS BROUGHT TO SYNOD SOSHANGUVE, 2017 OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Beloved chair and brothers in Christ

I thank you for the opportunity to be with you here today. Thank you for your invitation, not only to bring these greetings, but also to attend your discussions regarding the contact between our churches and the development of our relationship. I pray that our being together today will help us all to see that our Lord has united us in Christ! May his Spirit lead us to jealously guard against any actions which will harm our being-together-in-Christ!

I want to ask you to take a few moments now to think about not what keeps us apart, not about all the differences – but about all that we share in Christ. Brothers:

- We all have one Lord and Saviour ... Jesus Christ!
- We all are reconciled to God ... through Jesus Christ!
- We all show the fruit of the Spirit ... love, peace, gentleness.
- We all have the same longing ... for Christ to come again.
- We have the same Bible.
- We have the same confessions.
- We share the same history ... the reformed tradition.

Our Lord reminds us about this unity in Christ, when He says in Ephesians 4:

*There is one body and one Spirit,
just as you were called to one hope when you were called;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

And this is why our Lord calls on us – again in the words of Ephesians 4:

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Brothers, may these words guide us in our interaction with one another, in our thoughts about each other, in our focused love for each other.

In the report of your deputies, much attention is given to the differences between our churches. We know we cannot ignore differences between our churches. We have to be honest with one another. We as RCSA need you to admonish us when necessary. But we also need you to encourage us when necessary. And especially ... we need you to trust our Lord ... that He will guide us by his Spirit, that he will keep us true to Him! When we have differences with you, it is not only because we are stubborn or influenced by the spirit of the time or a new hermeneutics. No, we as churches want to be true to the word of God ... but we acknowledge the truth of 1 Corinthians 13:

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

In the report of your deputies, you also speak about the development of local contacts between churches. We praise the Lord with you when we think about what has happened here in Pretoria especially. As Rev. Jacques Howell stated in his sermon on 21 May 2017 in the FRC Pretoria:

In spite of human decisions, the Spirit didn't prevent us,

but brought us to the point to seek again the unity

Jesus Himself prayed for according to John 17.

To God be the glory!

Brothers, it is an important day in our country today. While we are here deliberating, our parliament is discussing the possible removal of our State President. The volatile nature of our socio-political situation in South Africa demands from us as churches, as Christians, to be present in our country with a unified witness about the one and only King of this world, our Lord Jesus Christ. May we not come to the point where we step back from one another because of our differences and become a fractured voice in a country which more and more needs the true gospel in a unified voice!

Beloved, our Lord tells us in John 13:

A new command I give you: Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

With these words He calls upon us to love each other, to meet each other in Him! We are struggling with differences, but the way forward is not to try in some way to get us to think the same in each and every matter. No, we all need to be with Christ ... and then to see each other with Christ ... and realise we all need Him, we all trust in Him, we all depend on

Him. Yes, when we all are focused on Christ, we will grow together in our love for one another and in the real time living of the unity we have in Christ!

Chair, brothers ... I thank you for listening to me. I pray that our Lord will guide you by His Spirit. May He bless you in Synod and in your daily life as His churches. With you, I pray the words of Ephesians 3:

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people,
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever!*

Amen

Rev. Pieter Kurpershoek
(Deputies Ecumenical Affairs: Inland)