

# **Internet Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches in SA Report to Synod 2017**

**Date 02/May/2017, V2.00**

## **Dear Brothers**

Attached you find the report of the Internet Deputies, appointed by Synod 2014.

We as Internet Deputies wish that all the wisdom and insight needed may be upon you.  
May the Lord bless your work.

With brotherly greetings, for Internet Deputies:

Brs. AC Bijker (substitute), GD Bijker (deputy), T de Wit (convenor)

## 1. Deputyship

As per date of this report, Internet Deputies consists of the following members:

- Tjeerd de Wit (Convenor)
- Gerhard Bijker
- Harry Bijker (Substitute)

## 2. Instructions of Synod 2014

Synod 2014 decided to appoint Internet Deputies with the following instructions. A short response on how each instruction was followed up is included:

Synod decided:

1. To approve a budget of R 5000 for further website developments.  
*The budget requested in the previous report at Synod 2014 was an annual amount for running costs of the various internet services. This was misunderstood as a request for new once-off development costs. During the period 2014-2017 the deputies again found a sponsor that carried the running costs.*
2. Not to budget for a paid administrator.
3. To approve the policy as proposed in Appendix A of the Report from Deputies Internet Communication (Refer to Report of Deputies Internet Communication Appendix A).
4. To approve continuation of new website development according to the approved policy.  
*Development was extremely slow in the beginning. Two volunteers started but gave up after a considerable time. A third volunteer (Sr Renette Ros, thumbs up to her!) has only recently had enough time to pay sufficient attention to the development, with considerable results. To avoid confusion in the remainder of the report, when we refer to the old website, it means the vgk.org.za website that was active from 2006(?) to somewhere in 2017. The old website was Afrikaans-only. The new website is both Afrikaans and English and should go live very soon after the synod.*
5. To give the Deputies Internet Communication the right to allow, refuse or remove an entry or article in case of misbehaviour or placing of inappropriate information.  
*The right to remove unwanted content was not needed over the past three years – at the time of writing this report. The development of the new website will make granting access much easier compared to the old website.*
6. To reappoint deputies with the following mandate:
  - a. To continue with a website development as per the approved policy.  
*See response to 4 above.*

- b. To find a capable person from each church in the federation to act as contact person.  
*This was not yet needed because development of the new website has not reached public stage. We do have a list of contacts of people from a number of congregations that requested changes to the website, and we will use these contacts as the contact persons for the new website.*
- c. To exercise the right to allow, refuse or remove an entry or article in case of misbehaviour or placing of inappropriate information.  
*See point (5) above..*
- d. To submit an interim report for discussion during an Indaba to be held end 2015 or beginning 2016.  
*Done.*
- e. To report to the next synod and formulate recommendations according to Article 11 of the Rules of Synod  
*As per this report, although slightly late.*

## 1. Meetings

Contact was mainly via email.

## 2. What was done?

Most of the functionality described in the WEB policy as accepted by Synod 2014 has been implemented. Should the new website not be published on the Internet yet by the time of the synod, a preview of what has been done can be observed here:

<http://job.vgk.org.za> and/or <http://job.frc.org.za>

In order to see the self-service feature, you can log into the website by going to <http://job.vgk.org.za/user> or <http://job.frc.org.za/user> and login with username/password Sinode2017/sinode after which you can fill in information when clicking on "sinode2017" under "other" or "ander". Click Edit once you are there. Also uploading sermons can be verified under "sermons" or "preke". "job" is the name is only temporally and will be removed once it is the official site.

The WEB policy as accepted in 2014, has been updated in Appendix A with changes highlighted (**bold or strikethrough**) in areas where changes were made. A short note in red is given under various points.

Once accepted by Synod, Web Deputies will invite parties (churches, organisations, anything FRCSA related) to be represented on the new web site. An empty page will then be created for such a party with the ability to create content themselves, which in the end, was the main purpose of the new site: self-supporting.

## 3. Budget

R5000/year for hosting the Website at Internet Solutions (which acquired Mweb Business).

#### **4. Functioning of Deputies**

Deputies deem it sufficient to retain brs G D Byker and T de Wit as members and release br AC Byker. Once the new site is running it is a matter of adding parties and provide some support here and there and for that we propose to Synod to appoint sr Renette Ros as deputy, she has agreed to be a member, once appointed.

#### **5. Suggestions**

Deputies make following suggestions to Synod:

- i. To approve an annual budget of R 5000/year for Web, email and streaming hosting.*
- ii. Approve the minor changes to the policy, and the way the policy was implemented.*
- iii. To report to the next synod and formulate recommendations according to Article 11 of the Rules of Synod*

Yours in Christ,

Internet Deputies FRCSA.

## Appendix A

### FRC Internet Policy and comments (italics and in red)

#### 1. Hardware, hosting.

The current [www.vgk.org.za](http://www.vgk.org.za) website is located on a virtual server at Internet Solutions. Total costs for this website at this server is approx. R400/month and has been paid so far by a donor. This location can stay as it is; costs are dealt with later on in this policy.

The DNS records are hosted at Cloud.co.za which also handles the annual renewal feeds for the vgk.org.za and frc.org.za domains.

Mail is via the free version of Google apps and considering the low volumes of email, there is no need to change this.

#### 2. Owner of vgk.org.za.

Technically the vgk.org.za and frc.org.za domains are registered in the name of the Reformation Study Centre - Rev Jopie vd Linden's setup, which is an Art 21 company. This will stay as it is. Ownership of the vgk.org.za and frc.org.za domains can be transferred to Internet Deputies, should the Reformation Study Centre project cease to exist.

#### 3. Design, programming, maintenance

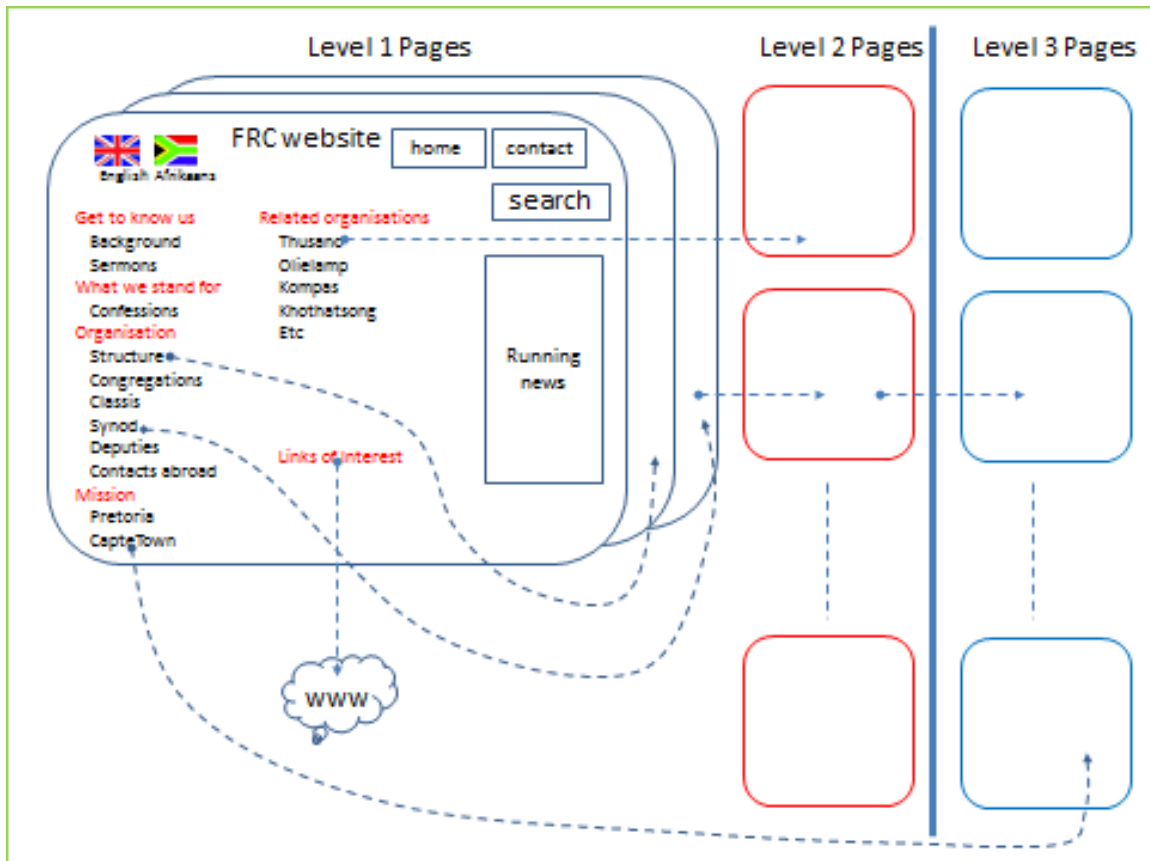
**Both the old and new websites run on the Drupal Content Management System (CMS).**

Changing the new Website will be password protected and there will be levels of passwords for various access levels. Internet Deputies are not currently responsible for the development of the Website but are prepared to oversee the development, however within the limits as set out in this policy. Specifically, Internet Deputies will not be involved in keeping information current for everybody wanting to share information via the website. In the past it has become clear that various attempts have been made by organizations within the FRC to run a website while information was not updated. Internet Deputies wants to establish a clear borderline between the responsibilities of Deputies and the responsibilities of participating **Entities** (se Section 4.1 for Entities) as far as keeping information current.

## 4. Content of the vgk.org.za/frc.org.za website.

### 4.1 Page levels

The proposed structure of the new FRC website is as per next sketch.



Web information is normally presented in pages with content.

For the FRC website we will distinguish between **2** types of pages:

*The main page looks somewhat different to fit in with a more modern mobile-friendly template.*

#### a. Level 1 pages (federation level).

These are pages which can only be filled with content by one (or a few) persons controlling the FRC website or by persons nominated by Internet Deputies to do so. (The only exception being uploading sermons, See 4.2.c). Level 1 pages reside on the site where [www.vgk.org.za](http://www.vgk.org.za) is hosted. These pages contain general information about the FRC bond of churches and should contain data **which fits in the rest of the site structure**. In the sketch above we have, as an example, the main FRC landing page. When clicking on Structure there will be a new Level 1 page with some general information about the structure of the Bond of churches. (Church Government, Classis, Synod...)

*Information was lifted from the old web site and may need refinement. We used the BBK English translation of Who are we (FRCSA)?*

**b. Level 2 Pages (entity content).**

Level 2 pages will **also** reside at the location where [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) is hosted. The content of these pages will be provided, uploaded and kept current by **Entities** (See 4.2 for Entities). Internet Deputies will make information available to Entities on how to upload and change information on these pages. ~~At the moment it is proposed to use Google Sites (<https://sites.google.com/>) for a location of these pages, because it is easy for third parties (Entities) to create and edit content at Google Sites. Content can include documents and photos. A "How to" guide will be made available for Entities on how to go about creating such pages.~~

*In the end, Google Sites was not used, but these pages are stored on the same host as the main page. The information on how a party or entity must go about asking for a new page and how to fill it will be made available after Synod.*

**c. Level 3 pages.**

Level 3 pages fall completely out of the responsibility of the Internet Deputies. In the sketch above, as an example, there is a link from Mission/CapeTown to a level three page. This link points to a website not hosted by [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) and this website is completely developed and maintained by the Entity responsible for this website. (purely mentioned as an example).

*This is typically used when the entity requires more features and content than what is allowed in the level 2 page structures.*

## **4.2 Entities and pages content**

In this policy, an **entity** is defined to be a local church or church related institution or activity like commissions, classis, Synod Deputies, Schools, Magazines, Old Age homes etc. even a basaar for that matter. It is proposed that [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) will not necessarily be a central website for all entities. In other words, entities can still have their own web sites. The following will be upheld:

- a. The Level 1 pages of [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) site will be bilingual (Afrikaans/English) and the language can be chosen via a small flag (SA or UK flag).

*No flag is used, just the words Afrikaans/English. Also the English or Afrikaans text will only be shown when available. The Website will not do automatic translation, like Google Translate, but will allow (for main pages the "allow changes" is required) everyone that contributes to the VGK/FRC site, to provide both an Afrikaans and English translation.*

- b. The name of the site will become [frc.org.za](http://frc.org.za) when switching to English.
- c. The Level 1 pages of the [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) website will only publish information not covered by other entities, except for sermons. Sermons will be accessible directly from the home or landing page, but individual churches will be able to upload sermons. (See Section **Services and Sermons, Text and Stored/Life Audio**)).
- d. All entities, who want to be represented under the [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) website have to approach Internet Deputies. Internet Deputies will send out a general invitation in this regard. Internet Deputies can do three things as far as accommodating entities are concerned:
  - i. Create an menu-option on a Level 1 page with a link to a **Level 2** landing page on the [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) web site on which such an entity can place their own information. Instructions will be made available on how to add/remove information. (Information includes documents). ~~The landing page URL will be [<entity>.vgk.org.za](http://<entity>.vgk.org.za). Each entity must have the ability to create password protected information. For example, Synod Deputies may not want to publish reports before Synod so that everybody can read it and may want to lift that restriction after a synod.~~ This option only allows for very basic usage of Web facilities (static info and document repository), entities must go for option ii if they want more facilities.  
*There was no need to add <entity> to the name because Google Sites is not used. Also it was decided not to allow document repositories here, see Section 5 of this Appendix.*
  - ii. Or create a link to a website specified by such an entity, in other words **Level 3** pages. The URL can be anything. Entities can now do anything they want on their own website.
  - iii. A mixture of i and ii above, where any entity can upload static information as per i. above to their **Level 2** page but still have a link to their own website with additional information (**Level 3** pages).

## 5. Personal Drop Bin

Internet Deputies considered the facility where people can share documents via something like a shared folder residing on the [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) website, but in the end decided against this. There are already various such services available on the Internet which are for



free. <https://workspaces.acrobat.com> or <http://www.skydrive.live.com/> are for example two of those. *As mentioned in 4.2.d.i, it is suggested not to use the FRCSA website as a document sharing/repository platform. Creating a password protected repository turned out to be too cumbersome. There are many good document sharing options on the Internet on which we cannot improve. Google Drive, Dropbox, Onedrive are well known examples. Entities can place links to documents stored there in their FRCSA pages.*

## **6. Email service.**

Email service stays as it is. No separate email server will be created. Email addresses will reside on Google Apps. The only service Internet Deputies can provide is to create email addresses and mailboxes and information on how to access mail. Email addresses will have the format: [address@vgk.org.za](mailto:address@vgk.org.za) where 'address' can be anything to indicate the person/entity. Each 'address' is responsible for mail backup, deleting mails etc.

*Stand-alone and re-route email addresses can be created. A re-route e-mail address forwards any mail to a defined alternative address. This allows stability to the outside world in a changing environment. For example, the scribe of an entity may change over time, but the email address stays the same.*

## **7. Services and Sermons, Text and Stored/Life Audio**

### **7.1 Stored Services and Sermons.**

Any church can store the text of Sermons *and/or* audio MP3 dumps of church services on the [www.vgk.org.za](http://www.vgk.org.za) website. It is each church's choice to use this route or to cater for this service on their own website. The process is as follows when using the central [www.vgk.org.za](http://www.vgk.org.za) sermon/service storage facility.

- (i) Click on the appropriate Icon (Services upload).
- (ii) Login for the appropriate Church, using Church name/password.
- (iii) Upload the audio MP3 file for the service if applicable.
- (iv) Upload the Sermon Text file if applicable (MS-Word)
- (v) Fill in the Liturgy sheet
- (vi) Logoff.

The sermon/service is now stored. Anybody can now retrieve such a sermon/service and liturgy via clicking Services Download Icon and choosing the required church.

Stored video will not be catered for since this takes up too much space. Churches can of course do their own stored video services if so required.

*Most of the development work went into this service because thousands of sermons are downloaded each year, so this function is considered important. An attempt will be made to import sermons from the old website into the new one.*

## 7.2 Life Services.

Some churches may want to stream services life. **Internet Deputies can be contacted for advice in setting up such a service. The current hosting environment allows for a fairly basic streaming service. It remains the responsibility of each church, and currently various churches use different approaches.** On a **Level 1** [vgk.org.za](http://vgk.org.za) main page there will be a menu option labelled "Streaming Services". Clicking this option will show a list of churches providing this service. Behind the Church name will be a URL taking the user to the streaming facility of that church. It is up to this church to announce anything appropriate, like time of next stream, etc.

## 8. Source of basic info about each church. Content of local info (addresses, contacts etc).

All these responsibilities will be vested in the local church. The look and feel of this information should ideally be the same for each church and can be uploaded as per 4.2.d above using Level 2 pages.

## 9. Costs of hosting

R5000/year for hosting the website. Website programming and maintenance is volunteer work.

## 10. Design, maintenance, updating.

Done via central admin provided by Internet Deputies (email [frweb@vgk.org.za](mailto:frweb@vgk.org.za)) and includes taking backups a regular times.

## 11. Handling of questions by people who visit the website and role administrator.

Questions can be asked via Contact Us icon. Mails via this service will go to an *administrator* (provided by Internet Deputies) who passes on the request to the correct person. An initial response will be:

*Thank you for your request for information.*

*Your request has been forwarded to ..... for an expert answer.*  
The person receiving this mail must also receive the email address of the 'expert' so that he/she can follow up.  
*The administrator will also be the point of contact for issues with the website, modifications needed on the website and general maintenance.*

## **12. Links to related websites.**

There may be websites of interest outside the world of the FRC. Links to these websites can be placed on the main landing page or on pages reserved for local churches or entities as described in 4.d. (Level 2 pages). Links on the main FRC landing page (vgk.org.za) can only be placed there by Internet Deputies after receiving a request to do so. Local churches and other entities are free to put any link they deem important on their own page(s) (as per 4.2.d.i or 4.2.d.ii).

## **13. Provision for church news, like calls for ministers and other general news.**

On the main landing pages there will be a small window with running news. Specific persons (like scribes, ministers and other who can contribute) will be able (via login) to place short news items here. The web administrator will automatically receive an email when a new item has been placed. Any entity or church can also provide news via the mechanism of 4.i or 4.ii. Only the last news item will be visible, older items can be seen by clicking on 'more items'. News items will automatically be deleted after a specific time.

*This functionality will be added as soon as there is enough news-worthy content on the federation website. In the meanwhile, this will be replaced with "news" about the latest sermons loaded into the sermon database.*

## **14. Search facility.**

There will be a search option on the main [www.vgk.org.za](http://www.vgk.org.za) landing pages allowing searches in level 1 and Level 2 pages. Also sermons can be searched, as is the case currently.

## **15. Right of admission**

Internet Deputies have the right to allow, refuse or remove an entity in case of mal behaviour or placing inappropriate information. Internet Deputies report to Synod, but between synods there is no synod and it

would be unhealthy to wait for up to three years before actions can be taken.