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The church council of the FRC Pretoria,

Dear brothers

While studying Art. 26 of the die “Acts of the 39th Synod of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa convened by the FRC Soshanguve North 7th August – 11th August 2017” (further indicated as “Synod 2017”) and the report of Deputies Liturgical Music to Synod 2017, I

observed:

1. that the 6th revised edition of the “Psalmboek, Die berymde Psalms en Skrifberymings in gebruik by die GKSA” in which the additional Skrifberymings nos. 51 – 79 were included, was published in 2009;
2. that the church council of the FRC Pretoria appointed a committee during 2010, with the task to evaluate the Skrifberymings (SB’s) 51 – 79 for their suitability for use in worship services;
3. that in the report of that committee, dated 1st January 2010, the same SB nos. as mentioned in Art. 26, synod decision 3, were recommended for use in worship services, except the SB nos. 65, 73 en 75, with the recommendation that deputies should attend to the questions which were raised by the committee regarding these three SB’s;
4. that the church council adopted the committee report and sent it to the deputies for further handling;
5. that the deputies, at that stage, were not able anymore, to incorporate that report in their report to Synod 2011, with the result that this matter was postponed to the next synod 2014;
6. that Synod 2011 did not attend to the new group of Skrifberymings, but Synod 2011 did establish the criteria for additional songs for use in our worship services and formulated an extended mandate for the Deputies as indicated in the “Acts of Synod 2011”, Art. 23 which reads as follows (shortened version, CR):

“Synod decides:

1. *To accept the following criteria and principles as the new way to look at the whole of our Hymnal:*
 - *1 The Hymns of the church must be faithful to Scripture*
 - *2 The hymns are (a) earmarked for the whole congregation and (b) must be of the highest standard poetically and musically.*
 - *According to synod the following principles are important for the whole of our Hymnal:*
 - *1. The Psalms form the basis of the Hymnal. New hymns that are included in the Hymnal, basically have the function to enlarge the Psalm book. It has the function to add to the Psalm book, not to replace the Psalms or to draw attention away from the Psalms.*
 - *2. The above mentioned entails that hymns that are being added to the Psalms, will be hymns that deal with the “more” of the new covenant. Although in principle almost all God’s works are already revealed in the Old Testament (and in the Psalms), it is important that the congregation must live and sing according to the riches of the new covenant. According to this principle it is not merely “acceptable” to add new hymns to*

the Psalms, but necessary (a practice that is also already known to us through the 'Skrifberymings').

- 3. *To come to a balanced Hymnal for our worship services, it is necessary that this "more" of the new covenant is translated into themes and subjects according to which hymns can be looked for. Instead of evaluating all the hymns that we can possibly find, we think it will be better to look for hymns according to these specific themes and subjects, and even to encourage translations and new hymns on these subjects.*
 - 4. *Naturally we will bring into calculation the 'Skrifberymings' we already have, when looking for hymns on the "more" of the New Testament. The 'Skrifberymings' are already part of the Hymnal. We are grateful for this and accept them for use in our churches. Themes and subjects that are already sufficiently covered by these 'Skrifberymings', do not need any extra work and attention.*
 - 5. *The rich diversity of faith experience in the Psalms must be preserved at all cost. The Hymnal as a whole must give a balanced view of the normal Christian life, namely sin, struggle, judgment, grace, righteousness, suffering, charity, atonement, godliness etc.*
 - 6. *As churches we have a strong bond with the church of Jesus Christ through the ages – also with regard to our hymns and singing. Our Hymnal must show that we have this believe and conviction by adding hymns of the church of Christ through all times and places.*
2. *To mandate deputies to evaluate the new Skrifberymings with the approved criteria using the report from Classis North;*
 3. *To appoint deputies with the following mandate:*
 4. *To have a (new) look at the list of themes and subjects for our church hymns (Psalms, Skrifberymings, etc) as included in the supplement of the report 2011, with the purpose of possible expansion and improvement;"*
7. *that Synod 2014 did not make any decisions, regarding Skrifberymings, as the deputies did not recommend anything in that respect;*
 8. *that Synod 2014 did not give a mandate to the deputies, regarding SB's, with the possible exception of the following (due to the recommendations by the church council of the FRC Pretoria in 2011):*
 - d. *To consider requests from the churches with regard to subjects on which we do not have a sufficient number of hymns, and to look for hymns on these subjects if deputies are convinced that there is indeed a shortage.*
 9. *that the deputies submitted a report to Synod 2017 of over 300 pages (including appendices) in Afrikaans, in which the following recommendation, regarding Skrifberymings, were made (text from pages 4-5 of the English version of the deputies report which was submitted by Deputies in a very late stage, CR):*

"Skrifberymings

First of all, the Skrifberymings that have been proposed did not come to the table of the Synod following the proposed themes of Deputies 2011, but have been proposed to the churches via Classis North. In light of Synod decision 2014 in connection with the themes - and we quote. "To consider requests from the churches with regard to subjects on which we do not have a sufficient number of hymns, and to look for hymns on these subjects if deputies are convinced that there is indeed a shortage", it is therefore the right thing to do to see if the Skrifberymings are supplementary to what we already have in terms of the themes.

In the recommendations (see page 11), 14 Skrifberymings were recommended for use by the churches. What is important now is whether those Skrifberymings meet the criteria and specifically whether it is supplementary to what we have already. Is it in line with the themes identified by

deputies in 2011, and if it is not, it is in line with the recommendation of Synod 2014 relating to the themes.

First, we arranged the Skrifberymings that are in line with the themes identified by Deputies 2011:

Theme: Good works SB 73, 75

Theme: God the Holy Spirit SB 53

Theme: Baptism: SB 54

Now we pay attention to the Skrifberymings that are not in line with the themes presented by deputies in 2011.

Theme: The Name Jesus SB 51 It is an enrichment.

Theme: The Church SB52 The comfort aspect makes it an enrichment

SB75 Paul's prayer is an enrichment.

Theme: The Mediator SB63 It is an enrichment

Theme: Prayer: Our Father SB59 It is already used in the churches.

Theme: The Name

/Coming of Christ SB64 This is a powerful prophecy of the coming of Christ.

Theme: The Faith SB65 It is an enrichment and the transfer of Paul's life to the believer is not a problem, because we also sing the psalms even though we did not experience the specific historical events and the accompanying religious experience. See eg. Skrifberyming 26: 1.

Theme: Christmas

/Birth of Christ SB68 This hymn is usually sung directly after the Christmas worship service

Theme: Confession of Faith SB71 This scripture is already used by the churches

Theme: Amen SB 77 & 78 The Amen is used by 3 of the 4 Afrikaans-speaking congregations

5 Recommendations

5.2 To approve the following 14 Skrifberymings for use by the churches: 51, 52, 53, 54, 59, 63, 64, 65, 68, 71, 73, 75, 77 & 78.

5.3 We do not recommend the following Skrifberymings: 55, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 66, 67, 69, 70, 74, 72, 76 & 79.

10. that deputies did refer to the approved guide lines, but unfortunately did not propose grounds in terms of those guide lines to justify their recommendations;
11. that Synod 2017 accepted the report by deputies, despite the fact that it was written in Afrikaans;
12. that Synod 2017 rejected the deputies recommendation 5.2 (refer to Art. 26, Synod decides 3) on the following grounds:

“Grounds:

3.1 Newly proposed songs for the hymnal of the churches should all be evaluated according to the same set of criteria as specified by Synod 2011.

3.2 Although the newly proposed ‘Skrifberymings’ were evaluated in some way, the evaluation was not conducted in terms of the criteria as set out by Synod 2011.

3.3 The new ‘Skrifberymings’ are not always real versifications of Scripture and deputies should spend more time on that aspect.”

while recommendation 5.3 was adopted by Synod 2017 on the following ground:

“Ground:

The indicated songs did not comply with the criteria as specified by Synod 2011.”

On the basis on what is written above I

considered:

1. that the fact, that the deputies report was only available in Afrikaans at the beginning of the synod meeting, probably resulted in a lack of comprehension of the content of that report among the non-Afrikaans speaking delegates;
2. that there is not a single indication in the deputies report that the SB-groups, as indicated in the deputies recommendations 5.2 and 5.3, were tested on the basis of different sets of criteria, while the decisions of Synod 2017, regarding the deputies recommendations, were based on the assumption that different criteria were used;
3. that the deputies report by implication reveals that the group SB's, as indicated in recommendation 5.3, were tested according to the correct set of criteria and were found not to comply with the required criteria, while the group SB's as mentioned in recommendation 5.2, according to the same testing process, were found to be in compliance with the required criteria, but that some of those SB's did not fit into the framework of the themes as defined by Synod 2011 as themes for which more songs were needed;
4. that Synod 2017 apparently not realised that, although Synod 2011 did establish certain criteria, one aspect of those criteria was not yet finalised, being the list of themes for which more songs were desired. For that reason the new deputies were mandated by Synod 2011 to have a further look and to consider expansion of the list of themes (see mandate 4 above);
5. that deputies failed to provide grounds in terms of their mandate 4, as given by Synod 2011, for their recommendation 5.2, despite the fact that most of those SB's were about themes outside the list of themes as defined by synod 2011;
6. that Synod 2017 apparently not realised that four of the fourteen SB's as recommended by deputies in 5.2, were about themes, already included in the list of themes as approved by Synod 2011 (SB's 53, 54, 73 en 75) and another five of those fourteen SB's were already used in the worship services (SB's 59, 68, 71, 77 en 78);
7. that “Ground 3.1” above only refers to the fact that additional songs should comply with certain criteria and that this rule only can be used as a ground to reject such songs, when indeed is proven that those songs do not comply with the requirements;
8. that the statement by Synod 2017 in “Ground 3.2”, that the SB's, as mentioned in the deputies recommendation 5.2, were not tested according to the required criteria, is not correct (see point 2 and 3 above);
9. that the statement by Synod 2017 (Gound 3.3), that Skrifberymings should always be versifications of Scripture, cannot be used as a ground for rejection of deputies recommendations, as the FRCSA never adopted such a rule as a requirement for the use of Skrifberymings in the worship services (see SB's 27, 49 en 50). Synod 2011 did not specify such a rule as a requirement and deputies were never mandated to use such a rule as a guide line for testing Skrifberymings.

Based on above considerations I make the following

conclusions:

1. That “Ground 3.2” is not correct and therefore not valid.

Ground:

The statement that the testing of the group of SB's as indicated in the deputies “recommendation 5.2” was not correctly done, is incorrect.

2. That “Ground 3.1” as a ground for rejection of the deputies recommendation 5.2 is not relevant.

Ground:

As “Ground 3.2” was proven to be incorrect, “Ground 3.1” cannot be used as a ground for rejection of the deputies proposal.

3. That “Ground 3.3” cannot be used as a ground for rejection of the deputies recommendation 5.2.

Grounds:

- 3.1 That Skrifberymings should indeed be versifications of real Scripture, was never required by the FRCSA as a precondition for use in the worship services.
- 3.2 Some of the Skrifberymings 1 – 50, which are already used for decades in the worship services of the FRCSA, are also no real versifications of Scripture.
4. That “Synod decides 3” (Art. 26) was based on invalid grounds, rendering the decision itself invalid.

Ground:

In “conclusions 1 to 3” above is shown that the grounds on which the decision was based, are invalid.

As a result of what is mentioned above I

Decided:

1. to request the church council of the FRC Pretoria, to not ratify synod decision 3 in Art. 26 of the Acts of Synod 2017.

Reommendation to the church council:

1. to inform Classis North about the not-ratifying of synod decision 3 in Art. 26 of the Acts of Synod 2017;
2. to request Classis North to support a revision request by the church council of the FRC Pretoria regarding above mentioned synod decision at the next synod, in which is proposed to revise the synod decision regarding the deputies recommendation 5.2 as discussed above, without referring the matter back to new deputies.

Grounds:

- 2.1 Deputies, as appointed by Synod 2014, submitted a very thorough report to Synod 2017, initially in Afrikaans, but also available in English, which should be good enough to enable Synod 2021 to make a final decision about above discussed recommendation 5.2.
- 2.2 Synod 2017 did injustice to above mentioned deputies by accusing them by implication of using different testing criteria for different groups of Skrifberymings and in some cases acting contrary to the accepted rules, while there is not a single indication in their report, supporting such an assumed behaviour.
- 2.3 The church council of the FRC Pretoria submitted their report and recommendations already in 2011 to Classis North and it did not seem to be unreasonable to expect that this matter should have been finalised by 2017.

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