

## 16.17 REPORT 12: DEPUTIES ECUMENICITY ABROAD – UNITED KINGDOM DESK (Art 58)

- A. Rev HS Coetzee tables the Report.
- B. The Report will be concluded during the Synod session.

### C. REPORT

**Deputies responsible for this desk:** Rev TF Dreyer (s) and dr DG Breed.

#### 1. Free Church of Scotland (FCS)

Ecumenical unity

##### For notice

##### 1.1 *Mandate*

- 1.1.1 Ecumenical unity with the FCS is to be upheld and promoted by means of visits from Deputies and practical cooperation, where possible.
- 1.1.2 The discussion on the meaning of “correspondence” is to continue, in order to reach consensus.

**Decision: Points 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 noted.**

##### 1.2 *Execution of the mandate*

- 1.2.1 Rev TF Dreyer attended the FCS’ Synod in Edinburgh in May 2013. The GKSA’s greetings were conveyed and an invitation to the General Synod in January 2015 extended. Rev Dreyer and his family were warmly welcomed and the FCS expressed their sincere appreciation for this longstanding ecumenical bond.
- 1.2.2 The excitement over a renewed focus on local evangelisation and church planting was palpable at the 2013 Synod. A great deal of time was spent on exploring and praying about these matters.
- 1.2.3 The FCS reiterated their stance on the intention of the government to legalise homosexual marriage. This legislation has been passed in the meantime. The FCS is one of a very few voices in that society that continues to take a clearly Scriptural stance and is experiencing the inevitable resistance and persecution. They requested our prayers in this regard.
- 1.2.4 Discussions aimed at persuading our Presbyterian brothers to broaden their current understanding of church correspondence continue. It is hoped that these discussions will eventually lead to greater parity in this regard.

**Decision: Points 1.2.1 to 1.2.4 noted.**

##### For decision making

##### 1.3 *Recommendations*

- 1.3.1 The GKSA is to reaffirm its ecumenical unity with the FCS.
- 1.3.2 This unity is to be upheld and promoted by means of visits from Deputies and practical cooperation, where possible.
- 1.3.3 The endeavour to reach greater consensus on the meaning of “church unity” is to continue.

**Decision: Points 1.3.1 to 1.3.3 approved.**

#### 2. Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCS(C))

Ecumenical unity

##### For notice

##### 2.1 *Mandate*

Ecumenical unity with the FCS(C) is to be upheld and promoted, by means of visits from Deputies and practical cooperation, where possible.

**Decision: Noted.**

**2.2 Execution of the mandate**

- 2.2.1 Rev TF Dreyer attended the FCS(C)'s Synod in Edinburgh in May 2014. Greetings from the GKSA were conveyed and an invitation extended the General Synod in January 2015. Rev Dreyer and his family were warmly welcomed and the FCS(C) expressed their sincere appreciation for this longstanding ecumenical bond.
- 2.2.2 The relationship between the two sister churches has not discernibly changed, either by gaining more common ground or repairing the rift. The relationship is civil. Most of the juristic issues between these congregations, especially on matters such as the use and ownership of church property, are coming to an end.
- 2.2.3 The FCS(C) advocates the same principles as the FCS on the matter of legalising homosexual marriage and they have renewed their protest against such legislation. Prayer is requested in the face of the resistance and persecution associated with such a stance.

**Decision: Points 2.2.1 to 2.2.3 noted.**

For decision making

**2.3 Recommendations**

- 2.3.1 The GKSA is to reaffirm its ecumenical unity with the FCS(C).
- 2.3.2 This unity is to be upheld and promoted, by means of visits from Deputies and practical cooperation, where possible.

**Decision: Points 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 approved.**

**3. International Presbyterian Church (IPC)**

Ecumenical ties

For notice

**3.1 Mandate**

- 3.1.1 The Synod is to approve establishing ecumenical ties with the IPC and the Deputies are to further promote this relationship, with the aim of possible ecumenical unity.
- 3.1.2 The Synod is to take note of the Deputies caution around certain church law aspects and the Deputies are to continue discussions in this regard with the IPC.

**Decision: Points 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 noted.**

**3.2 Execution of the mandate**

The Deputies were able to make contact with the IPC in various ways, since the last Synod. The GK Randburg sent rev HC van Rooy and rev J van Schaik in 2012 to visit rev HK de Kock and Canada Water Church (CWC) as well as represent rev TF Dreyer at the IPC's English Presbytery. They had very positive feedback on this church's effort to spread the Gospel and the Reformed doctrine in England and Europe, specifically in London.

Rev Dreyer and rev HK de Kock (Canada Water Church in London) conferred in 2013 with rev Paul Levi, the moderator of the Presbytery at the time, about Canada Water Church's affiliation with the IPC and the GKSA's caution around the two relevant church law issues, viz. church offices (their two in contrast to our three) and a strict Presbyterian church governance system that could enable the Presbytery to rule over the local church council.

It can be reported, with great excitement that some ground has been gained on the issue of the offices. A contributing factor was a number of congregations of the Church of Scotland (*not to be confused with the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) with which we are in ecumenical unity*) joining the IPC, due to the Church of Scotland allowing people who are in homosexual relationships to serve in the offices of the church.

The position of the Reformed Churches of Scottish tradition on the offices is closer to that of the GKSA, which had a positive impact on the IPC it would seem. It should also soon be included in their *Book of Church Order*, recently revised and amended.

The Deputies are of the opinion that the matter of the church governance system still need some time and discussion to eradicate any unclearness (see the Report on the London ministry for more information).

**Decision: Noted.**

For decision making

3.3 *Recommendations*

3.3.1 The Synod is to take note of developments in the relationship with the IPC.

3.3.2 The Synod is to uphold its ecumenical ties with the IPC and instruct the Deputies to further promote the relationship towards possible ecumenical unity.

3.3.3 The Synod is to take note of the Deputies' caution around certain church law aspects and instruct the Deputies to continue conferring with the IPC.

**Decision: Points 3.3.1 to 3.3.3 approved.**

#### 4. London Ministry

Ecumenical unity

For notice

4.1 *Mandate*

4.1.1 The Synod is to set aside one collection per year for the support of the London ministry and the Deputies, in consultation with GK Randburg, are ensure that the funds are appropriately allocated.

4.1.2 The Deputies, in cooperation with the GK Randburg, is to take an advisory role in the development of the London ministry and to patiently, yet actively, endeavour to affiliate the congregation with a local church denomination – be it the FCS or the IPC.

**Decision: Points 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 noted.**

4.2 *Execution of the mandate*

4.2.1 Contribution to the further development of the London ministry

Since the last Synod, the GKSA has kept in regular contact with rev HK de Kock and the elders of Canada Water Church (CWC). Rev de Kock and his family came to South Africa for their annual visit and the GK Randburg were able to send ministers to London on two occasions. Rev TF Dreyer also visited as representative of the Deputies.

It can be reported, with tremendous gratitude, how a living and growing Reformed congregation has been established in central London where Canada Water is located (please see <http://gkrlondenbediening.com/> for more information). This has only be possible through the grace of God and the obedience of the church, headed by the GK Randburg and the Deputies for Ecumenical Affairs.

CWC is currently one of the largest congregations, closely working with the IPC (see 3 above), and 156 individuals of 27 nationalities regularly attend services. This is substantial in comparison to England's average church membership of a merely 60-70 members. Because it is an inner city ministry, it is also a very transitory community and they lose approximately 20% of their membership each year. They do not, however, consider it a loss, but a gain for the world. They grew approximately 30% per year, over the past two years, a nett growth of 10%. This growth is in large part nominal or non-Christians who convert.

Although the number of South Africans in England and specifically in London have decreased, the congregation still minister to a large percentage of South Africans (almost 30% of members).

Two of the three elders are South African. It would seem that the number of professionals sent by large financial institutions to London, for a period of time, are also on the increase. South Africans doing contract work (for six months up to two years) in London often join the CWC. Another development is the growing number of second-generation South Africans that find joining this congregation appealing, during their studies in London. The area in which CWC is located has quite a few tertiary institutions and has also been marked for further development in this regard.

#### 4.2.2 Affiliation with a local church denomination

CWC is at present the only congregation of the Reformed Churches in London (RCL) that are affiliated to the GKSA, as per previous Synod decision (cf. Acta 2009:175). CWC does, however, maintain a close relationship with the IPC and the Free Church of Scotland (FCS).

Rev de Kock is a co-opted member of the English Presbytery of the IPC and heads the denomination's collective church planting initiatives. He was also a special guest at the FCS' last Synod and delivered the congratulatory speech to his colleague in London, Rev David Miller of Cobham Presbyterian Church, on becoming the new moderator of the FCS Synod.

At the local level, the CWC is most closely affiliated with the IPC and the possibility of formal cooperation with them remains on the table. The only challenge and caution the CWC's church council and the GKSA's Deputies for ecumenical affairs face that prevents formal merging at the moment, is the risk that the Presbytery's church orderly stipulations may be so prescriptive that it would rule over the local church council. The elders of the CWC and the Deputies for Ecumenical Affairs have been in discussion with the IPC over the past few years and it is clear that further discussion and time is required.

It was clear from discussions that both the IPC and the FCS attach great value to their relationship and collaboration with the CWV in London and England and that this growing congregation is a great inspiration to them. In a city where only 2% of its inhabitants are members of a church and attend services, of which a minute percentage are of the Reformed confession, such excitement is natural.

#### 4.2.3 The cost of the London ministry and application of collections

Establishing this congregation in London has cost the GK Randburg on average R280 000 over the past ten years. The annual compulsory collection from the GKSA contributed on average of R120 000 per annum, making the nett cost to the GK Randburg approximately R160 000 per annum. The GK Randburg does, however, remain responsible on behalf of the church for the total gross expenditure for the CWC from South Africa and should the GKSA no longer contribute through compulsory collections, the London ministry may falter.

It is with sincere gratitude that we report that the growth and stability of CWC means that these costs are decreasing. The congregation is on the road to financial independence, in line with the average period for independence of church plants in London (on average 10-15 years).

#### **Decision: Points 4.2.1 to 4.2.3 noted.**

##### For decision making

#### 4.3 *Recommendations*

4.3.1 The Synod is to take note with thanks of the abovementioned ministry amongst South Africans and within the community, where these churches are located.

4.3.2 The Synod is to again set aside one collection per annum in support of the London ministry and for the Deputies, in consultation with GK Randburg, to ensure the proper spending of the funds.

4.3.3 The Deputies, in cooperation with the GK Randburg, are to take on an advisory role in the development of the London ministry, especially in regard to possible incorporation into the IPC.

**Decision: Points 4.3.1 to 4.3.3 approved with a special word of thanks to Reformed Church Randburg for the role that they play in this ministry.**

## **5. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (EPCEW)**

### For notice

#### 5.1 *Instruction*

“The Deputies Ecumenicity: Abroad are instructed to keep in contact with Reformed church communities abroad on matters of urgent and common importance, in accordance with CO, art 49.” The eventual unity of Reformed Churches must become our most urgent and important ecumenical calling (cf. Acta 2009:162).

**Decision: Noted.**

#### 5.2 *Execution of the mandate*

In light of the increased immigration to or extended working periods of church members in the United Kingdom the deputies have found it prudent to seek out a broad network of denominations to support members, especially in Ireland or Wales, by providing a spiritual home.

One such denomination is the EPCEW. Rev TF Dreyer met and held discussions with their delegates at Synods of the FCS and FCS(C). Delegates at the ICRC also met up with them. Eventually they extended an invitation to their Synod, where rev HK de Kock conveyed rev Dreyer’s greetings on behalf of the GKSA.

The EPCEW is a very small denomination of 13 congregations in England and Wales, together with two congregations in Sweden that recently joined them. Their limited resources make it difficult to establish any real ecumenical ties with foreign churches, but their Deputies have already expressed their gratitude over members from the GKSA who have joined their congregations and expressed the wish to enter into discussion with the GKSA about closer ties. The Deputies are of the opinion that this relationship should be further investigated, given the lack of more substantial denominations in England and Wales.

**Decision: Noted.**

### For decision making

#### 5.3 *Recommendation*

The Synod is take note of the ecumenical contact made with the EPCEW and instruct the Deputies to further explore establishing ecumenical ties and possible unity with the EPCEW.

**Decision: Approved.**