

## 16.3 REPORT 2: DEPUTIES ECUMENICITY INLAND – RELATIONS WITH NGK AND NHKA (Art 27)

- A. Rev C Aucamp tables the Report.
- B. The Report will be concluded during the Synod session.
- C. The meeting sits in camera for discussion regarding point 4.2.
- D. Dr JJ Gerber of the NGK is given an opportunity to react to the decision, describing it as a historic moment for the way forward for the GKSA and NGK. This decision is of utmost importance for Reformed theology in SA and for the respective churches.
- E. Rev PW Kurpershoek leads the meeting in prayer of thanks flowing from the session.

### F. REPORT

#### 1. Tussenkerklike Raad (Interchurch Council)

##### 1.1 *Mandate (Acta 2012:184, 1.8.2)*

- 1.1.1 The to be named Deputies continue to participate in the Tussenkerklike Raad (TKR) and to execute all mandates as contained in the founding document of the TKR.

#### **Decision: Noted.**

##### 1.2 *To be noted: Course of the discussion*

- 1.2.1 During this term meetings of the TKR were held during 2012 and 2013.
- 1.2.2 During the meeting in 2012 discussions were held regarding theological training and specifically the relationship church and University. Attention was also given to the implications of the Confession of Belhar, specifically viewed from the decision of the General Synod of the NGK to start the process to accept the Confession of Belhar as part of their confessional foundation.
- 1.2.3 The meeting in 2012 and especially the one in 2013 was, however, characterised by intensive reflection on the functioning and future of the TKR.
- 1.2.4 Initially in 2012 a request was tabled by the NGK that the TKR only meets once a year. The reasons were among others the viewpoint that discussions regarding unity must rather take place bilaterally, as well as considerations of cost and time.
- 1.2.5 It was agreed within the TKR to only meet once per year and to channel the critical-edifying discourse which occurred within the TKR to the bilateral discussions.
- 1.2.6 The TKR would thus continue to exist as a vehicle for the three church communities to celebrate their close ties, facilitate co-operation, and deliver public witness.
- 1.2.7 During 2013, however, a letter was received from the Moderamen of the NGK in which they stated that the NGK is withdrawing from the TKR for several reasons.
- 1.2.8 At the request of the Deputies of the GKSA, supported by the NHKA, the TKR met to discuss the decision of the Moderamen of the NGK. During this meeting it was acknowledged that the three church communities – given the history of the road travelled together – cannot simply drop the conversation. It was also stated that the TKR cannot simply absolve, nor simply and unqualified continue to exist.
- 1.2.9 Consequently it was agreed that the TKR for the time being focusses on moving the relationship towards a closer church polity justifiable unity, as expressed in the historical perspective of the current founding document of the TKR.
- 1.2.10 Accordingly the following recommendation regarding the continuation of the activities of the TKR was prepared for tabling before the synods of the respective church communities, as per agreement:

1. *The special relationship between the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Nederduitsch. Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, and the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika, as expressed since 1958 in the Tussenkerklike Komitee and since 2004 in the Tussenkerklike Raad, grew from a common reformatory origin, a joint socio-historical context, and a common language. Despite the variety in church formation and churchly ethos, as well as differences in degrees of experience of the common confession, the church communities maintained a relationship of unity in faith in Christ based on a common growth base.*
2. *Convinced that we are one in Christ, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, and the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika are committed to church polity justifiable co-operation between the three churches on bilateral and/or trilateral level.*
3. *The respective Synods accept that this conviction will lead to structured co-operation which in turn can lead to forms of unity, which may have certain organisational consequences.*
4. *The respective Synods request that the Tussenkerklike Raad function within the abovementioned point of departure and that it will amend its founding document accordingly with approval of the competent church meetings.*

1.2.11 This recommendation has already been approved by the General Church Meeting of the NHKA in September 2013 and the General Synod of the NGK in October 2013.

**Decision: Points 1.2 to 1.2.11 noted.**

1.3 *To be decided: Recommendations*

1.3.1 The Synod approves of the actions of the Deputies as mentioned above.

1.3.2 The Synod approves the recommendation regarding the continuation of the activities of the TKR as mentioned above.

1.3.3 The to be named Deputies continue to participate in the TKR and to execute all mandates as contained in the founding document of the TKR.

1.3.4 The to be named Deputies give attention within the TKR to the necessary amendments to the founding document of the TKR and tables it before the next Synod for approval.

**Decision: Points 1.3.1 to 1.3.4 approved.**

## **2. Parliamentary Desk**

2.1 *Mandate (Acta 2012:186, 2.3.1 and 2.3.2)*

2.1.1 The to be named Deputies continue to facilitate the GKSA's participation in the Parliamentary Desk – in consultation with the Deputies Ecumenicity Government.

2.1.2 The to be named Deputies investigate the manner in which the participation in the Parliamentary Desk can be formalised, including the arrangements concerning a financial contribution from the GKSA (previously approved in 2006).

**Decision: Points 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 noted.**

2.2 *To be noted*

2.2.1 The Deputies liaised with the Deputies Ecumenicity Government. The Deputies Ecumenicity Government indicated that there is no need for a formal agreement.

2.2.2 Liaison with the Parliamentary Desk by the Deputies Ecumenicity Government occurs mainly *ad hoc*, personally, and informally.

2.2.3 During meetings of the Convent for Reformatory Churches and the TKR the Parliamentary Desk is a standing item on the agenda, the necessary liaising is done, and information is gained.

- 2.2.4 The Deputies can report with gratitude that there is an open and frank relationship with the head of the Parliamentary Desk, dr Ben du Toit (NGK).
- 2.2.5 Especially the information regarding marriage officers and dr Du Toit's liaison with the authorities in this regard were valuable.
- 2.2.6 In the light of the informal and sporadic nature of the contact with the Parliamentary Desk, there is no need or motivation for a special contribution from the GKSA.

**Decision: Points 2.2.1 to 2.2.6 noted.**

2.3 *To be decided: Recommendation*

- 2.3.1 That the to be named Deputies continue the contact and liaison with the Parliamentary Desk of the NGK on an informal and *ad hoc* basis.

**Decision: Approved.**

### **3. Bilateral discussion: *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika***

3.1 *Mandate (Acta 2012:185, 3.3)*

- 3.1.1 The to be named Deputies continue with bilateral discussions with the NHKA.

**Decision: Noted.**

3.2 *To be noted*

- 3.2.1 During the past three years the NHKA experienced much internal tension with the – as described by them – church schism that occurred. The attention that had to be devoted to this within the NHKA, substantially influenced the course of bilateral discussions. Numerous attempts were made to arrange bilateral discussions but these could not materialise.
- 3.2.2 Currently it is envisaged to arrange a bilateral discussion before the end of 2014. A report, if required, will follow in the Supplementary Agenda.
- 3.2.3 A request was received from the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika to convey a message of greeting on behalf of the GKSA during their General Church Meeting in September 2013. The Deputies delegated revs C Aucamp and PJ Venter to attend the meeting and to deliver the message.

**Decision: Points 3.2.1 to 3.2.3 noted.**

3.3 *To be decided: Recommendation*

- 3.3.1 The to be named Deputies continue with bilateral discussions with the NHKA.

**Decision: Approved.**

### **4. Bilateral discussion: *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk***

4.1 *Mandate (Acta 2012:188, 4.3)*

- 4.1.1 The Synod approves the proposed memorandum of agreement as manifestation of the unity between the two church communities.

**Decision:** Rejected and referred to Deputies Ecumenicity Inland in consultation with Deputies Doctrinal Matters.

- 4.1.2 The to be named Deputies continue with bilateral discussions with the NGK.

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

4.2 *To be noted*

- 4.2.1 Since the proposed memorandum of agreement with the NGK was rejected by Synod 2012, contact was promptly made with the NGK so discuss the events during Synod 2012 and further discussions.
- 4.2.2 An open and intensive discussion took place in February 2012 during which it was undertaken to continue the bilateral discussion, specifically give attention to the nature of the relationship between the church communities, and also focus on the areas of co-operation.

- 4.2.3 In the meantime consultations were held with the Deputies Doctrinal Matters regarding the interpretation of the mandate of Synod 2012 and the manner in which it could be executed. Eventually discussions were held on possible problems in the proposed memorandum of agreement tabled before Synod 2012.
- 4.2.4 However, further discussion with the NGK lead to an amended memorandum. In this *Memorandum of ecumenical relation* the ecumenical relationship is described that developed since the beginning of inter-church discussions in 1958 as reported on from Synod to Synod.
- 4.2.5 At the time of drafting of this Report there were still a few formulations in the Memorandum that had to be finalised in consultation with NGK.
- 4.2.6 In the drafting of this Report, the discussion with the Deputies Doctrinal Matters has not been finalised. If necessary, a Report on this will follow in the Supplementary Agenda.
- 4.2.7 The Memorandum reads as follows:

**MEMORANDUM OF  
ECUMENICAL RELATION BETWEEN  
DIE GEREFORMEERDE KERKE IN SUID-AFRIKA  
AND  
DIE NEDERDUITSE GEREFORMEERDE KERK**

Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) recognise one another as reformed churches. We do so on the basis of the fact that doctrine in our churches is according to the Word of God as recorded in Holy Scripture and is expressed in our common confessional foundation:

- 1.1 The three ecumenical confessions of faith namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed in which we express our commitment to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, and
- 1.2 The three formularies of unity namely the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt in which we express our commitment to the Reformed tradition.

There thus exists a deep unity of faith between our two denominations.

- 2 We recognise our reformatory origin, our common history until 1859, the separation of our ways thereafter, as well as the sustained search and discussions over many decades regarding the Biblical imperative directed at us with regard to the being one of our churches. Since the church of Jesus Christ is the body of Christ, we are called to let the unity in Christ realise and to not resign ourselves to the separation. Thus we should, given our common confession and history, continue to strive to also become visibly and concretely one in Christ.

Although this unity is not yet completely, sufficiently visible, and structurally realised, we are called to give further manifestation to what already exists. As church denominations we grow with one another in the fullness of Christ and are we solely able to comprehend with one another the width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ.

In this regard we readily want to declare:

- a We believe that our heavenly Father, for Whom we are sanctified and through Whom we live, leads us on the path of church unity and that his Name is glorified by expression of unity;

- b We realise that church unity is not something that we can accomplish by our own power, but that as a precious gift it flows from the work of reconciliation of the Son. Only by his power can we obey the command to more and more pursue unity and let it realise;
  - c We submit ourselves willingly to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit alone who leads us in the full truth of his Word and thus also in the riches of unity that the Father unlocked for us through his Son;
  - d We commit ourselves to a growing relationship, as well as discussions regarding and a search for a further manifestation of unity.
  - e We undertake to address difference with one another as well as mutually within one church denomination that may compromise the confession within the framework of the reformed confession and church polity.
  - f The acceptance of new confessional documents do not necessarily compromise the ecumenical relationship.
  - g The search for unity within the GKSA and the NGK with regard to our respective families of churches is recognised and supported. We undertake to respect one another's decisions in this regard, to accommodate one another, and to involve one another in further developments and decisions in this regard.
- 3 Although we struggle with differences between our churches, we are working in prayer towards full ecumenical relations and eventually unity. In the meantime we live actively with one another and we focus on stabilising, deepening, and widening the existing areas of co-operation so that the unity that already exists can become more visible. This unity become presently and in the future visible through co-operation on in the following areas:
- 3.1 Mutual delegation of two members to one another's respective general synodic meetings;
  - 3.2 Joint witness – where possible – directed at government and society;
  - 3.3 Co-operation in the Commission for Foreign Ministry and ministry of one another's members without requiring relinquishing membership;
  - 3.4 Joint participation in Bible translation by the Bible Society of South Africa;
  - 3.5 Joint participation in the retranslation of the confessional documents;
  - 3.6 Joint discussion – where necessary – on formation of confessions;
  - 3.7 Joint study on formularies in the two church denominations;
  - 3.8 Joint discussion on the liturgy in the two church denominations as well as continued co-operation on the revision and development of new hymns;
  - 3.9 Joint study on ethical issues;
  - 3.10 Joint involvement in education issues;
  - 3.11 Coordination of the two church denominations' diaconal work that is performed jointly in common areas;
  - 3.12 Co-operation in the Parliamentary Desk in order to meaningfully engage in the legislative process;
  - 3.13 Joint involvement in the activities of the Tussenkerklike Raad (TKR) and the Convent of Reformatory Churches;
  - 3.14 Continued discussion on reformed theological training in the Southern African context, as well as co-operation and support in this regard;
  - 3.15 Joint search for more effective ways to be jointly involved in local and international ecumenical contact;
- The abovementioned areas of co-operation can be supplemented and / or amended from time to time.

- 4 The realisation of unity is not limited to the abovementioned co-operation. If local churches see opportunity to actively live with one another and there is such recognition, the following can happen according to practices and decisions of the respective church denominations:
- 4.1 The acceptance of each other's members on the basis of good testimony of church councils (attestations);
  - 4.2 Confessing members can mutually bring their children to be baptised according to the practice and subject to the consent of both church councils;
  - 4.3 Full table fellowship for confessing members on the basis of good testimony regarding doctrine and lifestyle;
  - 4.4 Access to each other's pulpits by ministers with competence to minister under supervision of the church council;
  - 4.5 Joint worship services occur as and when church councils consider it necessary.

With this Memorandum we confess together based on Scripture and our confession the unity and catholicity of the Body of Christ, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do so "... so that the world may believe..." (Joh 17:21).

- 4.2.8 In the interest of clarity the following Annexure is attached to the Memorandum in which relevant Synod decisions are quoted as background to the matters mentioned in the agreement:

#### **ANNEXURE TO MEMORANDUM**

##### **AT 4.1 – ATTESTATION/MEMBERSHIP (CO, ART 82)**

*Synod 1958:138, 78C*

The Synod declares that the issue of membership as such resides with the local church council. (Synod 1958:138, 78C).

##### **AT 4.2 – BAPTISM (CO, ARTT 56, 61)**

*Synod 1945:126, 172*

The honourable Synod is requested in the interest of uniformity with regard to the practice of baptism in our congregations, to pronounce on the desirability that only parents who are members are allowed before the pulpit.

*Decision:* Each particular case will be dealt with by the local Church Council.

##### **AT 4.3 – HOLY COMMUNION (CO, ART 61)**

*Synod 1961:119, c(vi)*

Holy Communion as sacrament is a matter for the local church where the Church Council supervises admission to it.

*Synod 1997:556, 3.2.2.2.3*

This article (CO, art 61 – DEI) obviously arranges the admission of believers who recognise the Reformed religion and who report with good testimony. Each local church arranges how it applies this principle in practice (cf. again Acta 1961:199 and 1967:589, 202).

#### **AT 4.4 – EXCHANGE OF PULPIT**

*Synod 1882:34, 84*

Regarding exchange of pulpits, the Synod is of the opinion that it must be left to each Church Council to decide which preacher of the gospel is admitted to the pulpit, with the remark that the Church Council remains responsible to its congregation and the higher church management, and that it ensures that it does not allow any preacher to perform before the congregation of whose orthodoxy and good faith they are fully assured.

*Synod 2009:156, 2.6.4, 2.6.6*

In the discussion it became clear that a perception exists in the NH Kerk that reformed pulpits are in all cases prohibited for ministers from the NH Kerk – according to previous decisions of the GKSA. The Deputies pointed out the misunderstanding of this perception by emphasising that the competence and supervision of a congregation's pulpit are the responsibility of the local Church Council.

The Synod approves of the Deputies' actions in 2.6.4.

4.2.9 A request was received from the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk to convey a message of greeting on behalf of the GSKSA during their General Synod in October 2013. The Deputies delegated rev C Aucamp and dr RM van der Merwe to attend the General Synod and to deliver the message.

**Decision: Points 4.2.1 to 4.2.9 noted.**

4.3 *To be decided: Recommendations*

4.3.1 The Synod approves the proposed memorandum as descriptive of the ecumenical relation between the two church communities.

4.3.2 The to be named Deputies continue with bilateral discussions with the NGK.

**Decision: Points 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 approved.**