

## Appendix 10 Concept decisions

### Material:

1. the decisions of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN (L)) General Synod of Meppel, 2017, (GS Meppel) regarding men and women in church office (Acta, Art.18);
2. letters with requests to revise these decisions, as follows:
  - a. RCN (L) Bussum-Huizen (Nov. 15, 2017);
  - b. RCN (L) Capelle on the IJssel- North (May 18, 2018, and Nov. 20, 2019);
  - c. RCN (L) Zuidwolde Dr. (Aug. 30, 2018);
  - d. RCN (L) Ureterp (Sept. 25, 2018);
  - e. RCN (L) Vlaardingen (Oct. 15, 2018);
  - f. RCN (L) Rijnsburg (Nov. 21, 2018);
  - g. RCN (L) Kantens (Jan. 1, 2019);
  - h. RCN (L) Amersfoort- de Horsten (Jan. 31, 2019);
  - i. RCN (L) St. Jans klooster- Kadoelen (Feb. 2, 2019);
  - j. RCN (L) Baflo (Feb. 21, 2019);
  - k. RCN (L) Urk (March 15, 2019);
  - l. RCN (L) Ommen- North/East (March 15, 2019);
  - m. RCN (L) Vroomshoop (May 6, 2019);
  - n. RCN (L) Katwijk (June 3, 2019);
  - o. RCN (L) Mariënberg (July 1, 2019);
  - p. RCN (L) Bruchterveld (June 20, 2019);
  - q. RCN (L) Zuidbroek (July 9, 2019);
  - r. RCN (L) Blije-Holwerd (Aug. 19, 2019);
  - s. RCN (L) Zaamslag (Aug. 3, 2019);
  - t. RCN (L) Ten Boer (Sept. 12, 2019);
  - u. RCN (L) Den Helder (Oct. 1, 2019);
  - v. RCN (L) Apeldoorn- South (Sept. 30, 2019);
  - w. RCN (L) Hattem- Center (Oct. 28, 2019);
3. letters with requests to improve the grounds for these decisions, as follows:
  - a. RCN (L) Ommen -West (Sept. 12, 2018);
  - b. RCN (L) Dronten- North (Oct. 10, 2018);
  - c. RCN (L) Groningen- Northwest (Nov. 19, 2018);
  - d. RCN (L) Haren (Oct. 10, 2018);
  - e. RCN (L) Amersfoort- Zuid (Jan. 10, 2019);
  - f. RCN (L) Wezep (Jan. 1, 2019);
  - g. RCN (L) Assen- Marsdijk (Jan. 21, 2019);
  - h. RCN (L) Soest- Baarn (June 3, 2019);
  - i. RCN (L) Bunschoten- West (July 4, 2019);
  - j. RCN (L) Axel (July 11, 2019);
  - k. RCN (L) Balkbrug (July 13, 2019);
  - l. RCN (L) Heemse en RCN (L) Baalder (Aug. 15, 2019);
  - m. RCN (L) Schildwolde (Aug. 22, 2019);
  - n. RCN (L) Veenendaal-East (Sept. 16, 2019);
  - o. RCN (L) Valkenburg South Holland (Apr. 23, 2019);
  - p. RCN (L) Waardhuizen (Sept. 19, 2019);
  - q. RCN (L) Emmeloord (Oct. 14, 2019);
  - r. RCN (L) Drachten- East (Oct. 22, 2019);
  - s. RCN (L) Capelle ad IJssel- South-West (Nov. 11, 2019);
  - t. RCN (L) Gouda (Nov. 9, 2019);
  - u. RCN (L) Zuidlaren (Nov. 11, 2019);
  - v. RCN (L) Zeist- de Bilt (Dec. 2, 2019);

4. 17 letters from foreign sister- and contact churches, in which deep concern is expressed regarding these decisions; for a complete overview of these, see appendix X.
5. the report of the committee weighing revision requests, "*Serve each other sincerely from the heart*" ("*Elkaar van harte dienen*" (03-07-2020))
6. the presentation report of the committee weighing revision requests (17-08-2020)

**Decision 1:**

to acknowledge, with approval, the report of the committee weighing revision requests, "*Serve each other sincerely from the heart*" ("*Elkaar van harte dienen*") (hereafter called "the committee report").

Grounds:

The committee report offers a careful study of the subject "men and women, and church offices," which demonstrates a respectful attitude toward and making use of the Scriptures. This study provides us with a good basis for answering the requests to revise, to clarify, or to improve the decisions, which requests have been extended by the churches in connection with the decisions of the GS Meppel, 2017, regarding men and women in church office.

**Decision 2:**

to reject the requests to set aside the decisions by which the GS Meppel, 2017, made possible opening the church offices of deacon, elder, and minister to women.

Grounds:

The committee report has demonstrated that, on the basis of a reverent and careful consideration of the material in Scripture, it is possible to come to the conviction that the church offices are open to women.

**Decision 3:**

- a. to be willing, to a degree, to agree to the objections against decisions 3 to 6 of the GS Meppel, 2017, as follows: the Synod replaces those decisions and their grounds with the declaration that, on the basis of a responsible interpretation of Scripture, there is room in the churches for the conviction and the practice that men and women may be called, in the same way, to all the tasks in the church, including service in the church offices.
- b. to maintain the last part of decision 6 a of GS Meppel, 2017, whereby in the General Regulation regarding permission to preach, Art. 1, the word "male" is to be removed.

Grounds:

1. The committee report, on the basis of a coherent interpretation of Scripture, gives responsible support for this standpoint, which forms the basis for this declaration.
2. In the grounds expressed for decisions 3 to 6 of the GS Meppel, 2017, the support from Scripture showed too little coherence. Churches in The Netherlands and in foreign countries correctly expressed objections to this.
3. As grounds for the rejection of the objections which have been received, the following key points of the interpretation from Scripture, in particular, are relevant in the committee report:
  - a. There are good exegetical arguments for the interpretation of the so-called "remain silent" texts, by which these texts provide no good reasons for excluding women from a church teaching or ruling office.
  - b. There are good exegetical arguments for an interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-14, by which this passage does not need to be used as a timeless framework for the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 (where, supposedly, there is a "creation order," by which women have a subordinate position to men)
  - c. In Genesis 1-2 the emphasis is on the unity and the mutual service of man and woman. Although man and woman were created different (male and female), both of them were

given the mandate to help creation unfold, develop, and shine. There are good reasons for not presuming subordination (of the woman to the man), but full equality.

- d. In Genesis 3 we see how sin shatters this original unity and mutual service. The punishment which Eve receives as a result of the Fall into sin, that is, being subject to the domination of her husband, is not an ethical guide for a subordination of all women to all men, but rather a curse, imposed by God, which through the redemption in Christ ought to be fought against and, as much as possible, overcome. It is not possible to deduct from this a lasting, hierarchy of men above women.
- e. In the New Testament, and particularly in the apostle Paul's writings, where we read about men and women, the emphasis is once again on their unity and equality (1 Cor. 11:11; Gal. 3:28).
- f. In the New Testament the call to serve given to followers of Christ is central. In accordance with the example of our Lord, all are called to do what He said: don't lord it over others, but serve each other. Here there is no emphasis on the difference between men and women. With regard to carrying out special tasks, what counts is: which gifts fit which tasks? (1 Cor. 12:4-11).
- g. When "the restoration of the relation between men and women as overcoming the punishment, which is the result of sin" is seen as a constant refrain in salvation history, different Old Testament passages are to be read as signals of this restoration. Also, where there is accommodation to the surrounding culture, in which women are subordinate, there are passages which can be read as offering critiques of this culture, pointing in another direction.

#### **Decision 4:**

- a. decisions 7 and 8 of the GS Meppel, 2017, are to be replaced by the declaration that the churches in the RCN (L) federation have the freedom to decide whether and when women, too, may be called to service in one of the church offices.
- b. to reject the objections against decision 7 of GS Meppel, 2017, that it made it possible for the decisions regarding men and women, and church office, to be directly implemented.

#### **Grounds:**

1. In our church life, the situation we were used to, either tacitly or explicitly regulated, has changed, so that the way church services are filled in, and the way church offices tasks are carried out, are increasing in diversity. We will need to learn again, from Scripture, and from our church leaders in the past, that this does not mean an undermining of the unity of our church federation.
2. In these developments, every local congregation must be able to determine its own position and tempo, with an eye to maintaining tranquility and peace in the congregation. To this end, we offer the following considerations to assist in this process:
  - a. The church structure which can be discovered in the New Testament, is an accommodation to the social (patriarchal) structure of that age, and therefore is not uniformly normative for our own church structure and filling in the church offices in our time (see the committee report, the chapter "Not ruling over, but serving").
  - b. The unity of the church rests in its Lord, Jesus Christ, and is specified and shaped by the truth which Scripture teaches us: its true and complete teaching, summarized in the Confessions (Church Order, Art. A1); the issue of women in church office is not part of this confessional teaching.
  - c. Scripture teaches us in the New Testament (for example, in the letter of Paul to the Philippians), how we ought to deal with different views within the church (see the committee report, the chapter "Diversity and unity").
3. Whereas filling in the church offices belongs to the freedom of the local congregations, and our church unity is not affected by this, the congregations ought to respect, as well, the way different congregations are working together with congregations from other church federations, and not

put pressure on the spiritual cooperation of the congregations in our federation, in line with what Church Order A2.1 specifies; where necessary, arrangements can be made about this.

**Decision 5:**

deviating from the GS Ede, 2014, to declare:

- a. that there are good reasons not to speak of two lines in the Scriptures (equality, but also difference in responsibility between men and women), but rather of *one* line of equality, damaged by sin and God's curse, but restored in Christ;
- b. that reflection about the structure of church offices is not necessary to answer the question: may sisters, too, be called to service in the church offices?

Grounds:

1. The committee report has provided a sufficient refutation of what the GS Ede, 2014, without further substantiation, declared regarding the two lines.
2. A reflection about the structure of church offices would only be of service when it would be necessary to do justice to a difference in responsibility between men and women.

**Decision 6:**

to reject the objection that GS Meppel, 2017, did not sufficiently pay attention to the objections of sister-churches.

Grounds:

1. Although this is not to be found in the grounds for the decision, in both the deputy report to GS Meppel, as well as in the discussions at the Synod, including during the "foreign churches week," extensive attention was given to the responses of the sister-churches.
2. Objections from sister-churches are reasons for not taking a decision only when they concern matters which are constitutive for the unity of the church (see ground 3 under decision 4).

**Decision 7:**

to reject the objection that the decisions of the GS Meppel demonstrate the use of a "new hermeneutics."

Grounds:

A different interpretation of the texts or application of the Scripture material regarding the questions relating to men and women, and church office, does not mean that we have to approach and use Scripture in a different way.

**Decision 8:**

to reject the objection that the deputies of the "Synod Committee concerning Men and Women in Church Office" (Dutch: "M/V en ambt"), appointed by the GS Ede, 2014, were incorrectly discharged in 2017.

Grounds:

According to Art. 9, sub articles 1 and 2 of the regulations for the General Synod, discharging a committee is not connected to the evaluation of the content of reports or their proposals.

**Decision 9:**

to reject the objection against the call given by the GS Meppel to the churches to carefully formulate regulations with an eye to appointing men and women to tasks not belonging to the church offices.

Grounds:

the objection concerns the supposed "appointments analogous to appointments to church offices;" the call of the Synod is broader, and intends nothing more than protecting both those who fulfill a special task, and the congregation itself.

**Decision 10:**

- a. to send these decisions, with the committee reports supporting them, to:
  1. The churches which have requested revisions;
  2. the churches which have written letters requesting a further substantiation, renewed considerations, or reformulations, without requesting a revision;
  3. the (former) foreign sister-churches, which have written the Synod concerning the decision of the GS Meppel;
  4. the ICRC, which, due to these decisions of the GS Meppel, 2017, has suspended the membership of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated).
- b. to send each church requesting a revision, and the foreign churches mentioned, separate letters, as answers.