

Draft recommendations to the National Assembly of the NGKV and the General Synod of the GKv from this and Supplementary Reports

5. Contact NGK-GKv

Decision 1: (GKv only)

To note with thankfulness that it is clear from the responses to the report *Perspectieven* that the decisions of the 2017 General Synod of Meppel have sufficiently broad support within the churches.

Decision 2: (GKv only)

To concur with the decision of the Deputies for Church Unity (DKE) that in relation to the questions surrounding the calling of women to the offices there is common ground within the GKv and NGK to continue, as required, with joint discussions towards (the growth of) one federation of churches.

Decision 3:(GKv only)

- a. To step back from the two-part decision of the 1967 General Synod of Amersfoort-West, as set out in Articles 16 and 18 of its Acts.
- b. To express heartfelt regret concerning these two decisions, and the effects these decisions have had for the churches, its office-bearers and its members.
- c. To communicate this expression of regret to the next *Landelijke Vergadering* (General Assembly) of the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken.

Grounds:

1. The church polity in effect at that time did not provide a proper basis for the actions of the General Synod in relation to this two-part decision.
2. The judgement that the General Synod made in its first decision, and the consequence that it drew from this judgement in its second decision, were insufficiently supported by the documentary evidence and grounds brought forward.
3. The aforementioned two-part decision has had far-reaching consequences for the bond of churches as a whole, for particular resorts and classes, for churches and persons, both office bearers and members.

Decision 4:

To instruct DKE-CCS to, in consultation with and in a manner accountable to the *Regiegroep* (Coordination Group):

- a. To stimulate and support the process of healing and reconciliation at local, regional and national level;
- b. In specific situations, to refer parties involved to the Reconciliation and Justice Commission

- c. To stimulate, advise and if required give guidance to local churches, and regional bodies/classes in the process of growing towards one united fellowship of churches.

Decision 5:

1. Following on from the formation of the Reconciliation and Justice Commission, to set up a joint Reconciliation and Justice Commission of the GKv and NGK; individual members as well as church bodies will have the opportunity to turn to this commission when they seek reconciliation and/or restoration of justice in concrete situations that developed within our bond of churches as a consequence of the unhappy events of the 1960's, which occasioned pain and harm on both sides of the division.
2. To instruct this Commission as follows:
 - a. To serve as a point of contact for individual members and church bodies to report experiences of injustice;
 - b. To provide assistance and advice, in accordance with commonly accepted standards, such as impartiality, the right of reply and generosity
 - c. To make every effort to bring about conversations between involved parties, in order to promote the way of justice, reconciliation and peace.
 - d. To serve as a listening ear when, for practical reasons it proves to be impossible to achieve justice and reconciliation
 - e. To provide advice with a view to possibly reaching resolutions in the future.
 - f. To consult regularly with the *Regiegroep* about progress that is being made.
 - g. To report to the coming General Synod of the GKv and National Assembly of the NGK, indicating whether its task has been completed, or needs to be continued.
3. To allocate to this Commission a budget of ... (amount to be determined).

Decision 6: (NGK only)

- a. To endorse the decision of GS 2017 to "appoint a Study Committee to investigate whether there is a need to make adjustments to the classical position of the churches in relation to homosexuality, and whether there is a possibility to create a renewed unity of position within the churches. In doing so, this study committee is explicitly instructed to make use of earlier studies carried out by related churches within the Netherlands and abroad".
- b. To pass on this instruction to the Deputies already appointed by GS2017, together with a proposal to the next General Synod of the GKv to jointly deal with this report of its Deputies.

Ground:

CCS was instructed by the National Assembly of the NGK to keep seeking ways to deal with homosexual brothers and sisters in the church in a manner which is responsible before God and persons. In the meantime, the Study Committee that was set up includes experts from the NGK and CGK. Its report will not be ready in time for it to be dealt with at the General Synod of 2020. It seems reasonable for the GKv and NGK to work together when this report is dealt with – we expect in 2023.

6. Contact with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken

Decision 1:

To instruct DKE-CCS:

- a. In dependence on the blessing of the Lord, and in an atmosphere of mutual trust, to work towards ecclesiastical unity with these churches.
- b. To continue discussions with the CGK, in order to confirm the reciprocal recognition that has already been reached.
- c. To engage in reflection concerning opportunities to continue the discussion on man, woman and the office, and the hermeneutics that lie behind it.
- d. To fully stimulate and facilitate the unity of our churches with local churches in the CGK, and of developments leading to such unity.

Decision 2:

To instruct DK-CCS to continue discussions with the Deputies for Church Unity of the CGK in relation to all matters that may promote reflection on and endeavours towards the unity of churches in the Netherlands.

Decision 3:

- a. To insert this addition to the regulations for local contact and cooperation with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk:
In principle it is possible for every Church Council to extend a call to a minister from the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, in a manner that set out in the General Regulations for the Ministry, Art.5.2.b: "The receiving Classis shall, prior to giving its approval to the call, engage in an acquaintance discussion with the minister, in a manner similar to its usual colloquium". A minister who receives and accepts a call to a Christelijke Gereformeerde congregation shall be given the same discharge from his Church Council and Classis as for a call within his own bond of churches.
- b. To amend the *General Regulations for the Ministry* as follows (addition in italics):
C.5.2. For each of these special situations, regulations for admission to the ministry is to be as follows:
 - a. The General Deputies for the Ministry, may, in a specific instance, grant exemption from any requirement listed below, whenever they are convinced that it cannot be reasonably expected from the one concerned that he can satisfy the requirement. When such a request for exemption is refused by the General Deputies for the Ministry, there is no avenue of appeal.
 - b. *The General Synod may decide that ministers from a federation of churches with which national agreement has been reached, may be extended a call in the same manner as ministers of our own church federation. In such cases, Art.C.5.13 of these Regulations does not apply. However, the receiving Classis shall, prior to giving approval to the call, engage in an acquaintance discussion with the minister, in the same manner as set out in Art.C.4 of these Regulations.*

7. Deputies for Consultation on Church Unity (DOE)

These Deputies (DKE-CCS) bring the following points to the notice to all other Deputies with the request to submit them for consideration to the respective General Synod/National Assembly:

1. To continue the work of these Deputies – providing regulation, advice and reflection.

Grounds:

- a. Amalgamated and cooperating churches (*see Note, below*) are served with common advice and regulations in relation to points of difference and issues in church polity that may arise within the framework of unification among three separate church federations;
 - b. Such churches are served by regular consultation with Deputies that have been mandated for this purpose by their respective church federations;
 - c. Such churches, and the church federations, are served with the development of a common vision on church unity in the years to come.
2. To adopt the new MODEL OF CHURCH COOPERATION, and to recommend it to churches that choose to follow the path towards a local amalgamated church.

Grounds:

- a. The document provides a sound model of cooperation for churches that are engaged in or working towards unity or closer cooperation.
 - b. It offers the possibility for such churches to retain the unique local character of such cooperation, and to function as pioneers in the development of broader church unity.
3. To endorse the choices in relation to church polity that are foundational to this Model of Church Cooperation, especially in relation to how such churches are to act if respective Church Orders or decisions of major assemblies of the church federations involved do not agree.

Grounds:

- a. Next to the basic rule that for churches engaged in such cooperation the stipulations of their own Church Order are legally binding, it is good to specify which assembly has the authority to make determinations in the event of situations where such decisions or stipulations are mutually incompatible.
 - b. DOE rightly points to the Classis as the layer in the church federation that must determine the (continuing) acceptance within the church federation, where a local church that deviates from broader decisions or stipulations of the Church Order.
 - c. The Model of Church Cooperation articulates guiding principles for a church that engages in such cooperation, also when these principles have not already been articulated in the local Agreement of Cooperation.
4. To adopt the *Adapted Guideline for the Election of Office-bearers in a cooperating church*.

Ground:

The earlier version of these Guidelines appeared to be in conflict with the general principle in relation to deviations from broader decisions, namely that the Classis has the authority to decide in such cases. The Guidelines wrongly failed to address such a possibility.

NOTE REGARDING AMALGAMATED AND COOPERATING CHURCHES

'Cooperating churches' ("*samenwerkende gemeenten*") and 'amalgamated churches' ("*samenwerkingsgemeenten*"): local congregations from the GKv, NGK and CGK that have made agreements to amalgamate or work closely together, in any combination.

Cooperating churches:

where two or more churches from different federations work closely together, but have not amalgamated. Typically, this would include joint worship services, pulpit exchange, shared use of buildings and facilities, but members still belong to 'their own' congregation, and have 'their own' office-bearers. In this translation of the report, these are referred to as 'cooperating' congregations

Amalgamated churches:

a congregation that is fully amalgamated, with its own office-bearers, unified pastoral and diaconal work, and all other aspects of church life. Agreements for the governance of such a congregation is made between the church federations involved. In this translation these are referred to as 'amalgamated' congregations.

8. Contact with the vGKN

Decision 1: (GKv only)

To respond positively to the request of the vGKN to conclude the *Oecumenisch Akkoord* (Ecumenical Agreement, see note below) with the GKv, and therefore:

- a. To recognize the vGKN as churches of Jesus Christ, building on the same foundation of the Bible as the Word of God, and on the Ecumenical and Reformed Confessions;
- b. To extend the present General Arrangements for local contact and cooperation with the NGK, so as to create a General Arrangement for local contact and cooperation with the NGK *and* the CGK or a Continuing Reformed Church.
- c. To invite the vGKN to attend the major assemblies as an observer.

Grounds:

1. The vGKN know themselves to be bound to Holy Scripture, accept the Confessions of the early Christian Church and the Reformed Confessions, and maintain a Reformed church polity. This bond was recognized in the first instance by the NGK, and has since been confirmed in discussions with the GKv.
2. The interwoven character of contacts with the vGKN and the NGK demands a clarity and consistency in local contacts.
3. The extension of the present General Arrangements does justice to the growing practice, especially in the northern Netherlands, in relation to local and regional pulpit exchange, within various Classes, and with the agreement of various Classical assemblies.

Decision 2: (GKv and NGK)

To convey a heartfelt invitation to the vGKN to participate, in their own manner and at their own rate, in the unification process of the GKv and the NGK, and to instruct the Coordination Group to develop a suitable framework, if required, for such a process.

Grounds:

1. The churches long for unity on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions, also with churches other than the NGK and the GKv.
2. The historical position and distinctiveness of local churches within the vGKN and of the vGKN as a federation ask for a suitably adapted framework in relation to church polity.

Decision 3: (GKv and NGK)

To instruct the Coordination Group, if the vGKN are not yet ready to join the newly formed federation of churches, to prepare general regulations so that the *Oecumenisch Accord* retains its validity after the reunification of the GKv and the NGK.

Note about the *Oecumenisch Akkoord* (Ecumenical Agreement)
Between NGK and vGKN, an Ecumenical Agreement already exists. The proposal is: to apply this agreement also for the purpose of the relation between GKv and vGKN.

9. Contact with the PKN

Decision 1:

- a. To declare that participation in the “*Five-churches Consultation*” fits within the framework of the overall task of DKE-CCS to respond to the continually changing situations in the ecclesiastical Netherlands, and to have regard for the manner in which special situations arising from the maintenance of such contacts relate to the overall striving for church unity; with the understanding that the exercise of such consultation is to give account afterwards to the General Synod/National Assembly.
- b. To instruct DKE-CCS to consider, in the exercise of contacts of the other three Reformed church federations, how this mutual relationship is to find expression.

Ground:

DKE-CCS have made it sufficiently clear that the “*Five-churches Consultation*” is going to be a long-term process. Now that the “agreement for special relations” with all the participating churches – which the PKN was aiming for – has not eventuated, there is a need for continuing consultation and discussion in relation to developing recognition and increasing trust. This provides an avenue for us to develop a suitable format for us to give expression to our mutual relationships.

Decision 2:

To instruct DKE-CCS to invite one or more representatives from the churches to (continue to) attend as advisers in the RAGB (= Raad van Advies voor het Gereformeerd Belijden). They will not be required to

give account to DKE-CCB concerning their advice; however, they will be asked to provide information concerning their activities.

Grounds:

1. The information passed on by the current participants indicates that their participation is valued by the RAGB. Hence, continued participation ought to be recommended.
2. Any advice participants provide is done at a personal level; however, they must feel supported by their church federation.

Decision 3:

To instruct the Deputies/Committee as follows:

1. To continue discussions with the PKN, while maintaining transparency towards the other participants in the *"Five-churches Consultation"*.
2. In these discussions, to deepen conversations about similarities and differences in our respective views on the Church, and about how we as Protestant churches can learn from each other and lend support to each other.
3. In these discussions, to address matters such as pulpit exchange and forms of (guest) membership, and the decisions that have been made by our General Synod/National Assembly.

Grounds:

1. The Report of Deputies recognizes that there is a sense of kinship between the PKN and our church federations, that the PKN desires to be accountable as to its Reformed roots, that questions can and may be asked as to how this rootedness is or is not visible, and how it could be safeguarded and nourished.
2. The discussion conducted with the PKN touches a chord of recognition and mutual longing.
3. The signatures which were placed under the Declaration of Fellowship at the National Synod of 29 May 2019 creates mutual obligations and responsibilities, which we neither may nor wish to walk away from.

(not yet translated)

Besluit 4:

2. Een kerkenraad kan een predikant uit de PKN uitnodigen voor te gaan in de eredienst. Deze voorganger is gebonden aan de leer van de Bijbel zoals beleden in de gereformeerde belijdenissen.
De kerkenraad zal
 - b. vooraf de gemeente informeren met het oog op haar instemming
 - c. en ook de kerken in de classis/regio hiervan op de hoogte stellen.In de GKv wordt dit besluit uitgevoerd naar analogie van Generale Regeling E69.2 voor plaatselijk contact en samenwerking zonder landelijke overeenstemming, art. 2, 3 en 4. In de NGK wordt besluit b. uitgevoerd in het kader van art. 37.2 AKS met betrekking tot het op elkaar acht geven in regionaal verband.
3. Predikanten zijn gerechtigd op verzoek voor te gaan in een PKN-gemeente na daarvan mededeling te hebben gedaan aan hun kerkenraad.

Gronden:

1. Het Vijfkerkenoverleg, gevolgd door de ontmoeting tussen GKv (met NGK) en PKN-delegaties op 18 juni 2019, deed het besef groeien dat nauwere banden met de PKN mogelijk en wenselijk zijn en in plaatselijke situaties kunnen worden uitgewerkt. Hoewel er geen multilaterale 'overeenkomst bijzondere betrekkingen' tussen de vijf kerken werd gesloten, bleken elementen daaruit vruchtbaar te kunnen worden vormgegeven.
2. In het besef dat de PKN een 'plurale kerk' is, is een globale overeenkomst zonder enige drempel met betrekking tot openstelling van kansels niet passend. Wel kan op vele plaatsen uitdrukking worden gegeven aan de gevonden eenheid in Christus met gemeentes en voorgangers die, evenals de GKv en NGK, zich gebonden hebben aan bijbelse en confessionele grondslagen.
3. Kerkenraden hebben de taak te waarborgen dat woordverkondiging en sacramentsbediening tot eer van God en heil van de gemeente dienen en de gemeente te beschermen tegen dwaalleer.
4. Hoewel het een GKv-/NGK-predikant vrij staat op verzoek voor te gaan in een PKN-gemeente is het verstandig als de predikant zijn/haar kerkenraad daarvan vooraf op de hoogte stelt, zodat deze daar zo nodig met de predikant over kan spreken.

10. Contact with the HHK in conjunction with Tripartite Consultation

Decision 1:

To continue, jointly as DKE and CCS, discussions with the Committee for Interchurch Contacts of the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk, with the aim of coming to a closer form of ecclesiastical contact.

Decision 2:

Wherever possible, to conduct these discussions together with the Deputies for Church Unity of the CGK.

11. National Synod

Decision 1:

To grant its approval of the signatures placed under the *Declaration of Fellowship* by Rev. M. Oosterhuis, Chairman of the previous General Synod of 2017 of the GKv, and by Rev. W. Smouter, Chairman of the previous National Assembly of the NGK.

Decision 2:

To support the restart and continuation of the *National Synod* project in the years after 2020, by allowing DKE and CCS the room to participate in the 'new style' Steering Committee, having regard for the distinctive identity and responsibilities of the GKv and NGK, in obedience to the Word of God, and in this connection to draw attention to the lasting value of the Reformed Confession.

Decision 3:

In this manner to continue in the line of the *Declaration of Fellowship* and its practical implementation, as much as possible in collaboration with the CGK and vGKN.

Decision 4:

To instruct the DKE/CCS to report to the next General Synod/National Assembly concerning its findings and developments in this matter.

Grounds:

1. Placing our signature under the *Declaration of Fellowship* on behalf of our churches by the chairmen of the most recent General Synod/National Assembly is consistent with the line that our churches have followed in the last decade in relation to the National Synod.
2. DKE-CCS have clearly demonstrated that after the closing event of the 2019 National Synod, a restart of the *National Synod Project* serves a valuable purpose, in that it will serve to continue the line set out in the *Declaration of Fellowship*.
3. Together with many other churches and faith fellowships, our churches share responsibility that, in the broad variety but also divided church landscape of our nation, we should not neglect the other, but continue to reach out to, address and encourage one another. All this is intended, in the Netherlands of today, to bear witness to the love of God, and to take a stand for His honour.

12. COGG

1. Decision:

To continue to participate in the *Contact Orgaan voor Gereformeerde Gezindte* on the basis of the aims adopted by the 2002-2003 General Synod of Zuidhorn (Acts, Art. 130-132), and on the basis of continuing decisions by and positive reports to the National Assembly of the NGK.

Ground:

By maintaining contact with this body, we strive for understanding of each other, and confidence in each other's confessional faithfulness. Next to this, regular contacts will contribute to the extension and deepening of our commonly-held faith and confession.

13. Council of Churches

Decision1:

To join the *Council of Churches* as Associate Members.

Decision 2:

To continue to participate in discussion groups of the Council of Churches.