

REPORT SUBCOMMITTEE RELATIONS CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS CONCERNING THE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN NEDERLAND (GKN)

1. Background

The GKN is a federation of churches that came into being around 2009. It is made up of concerned people that left the GKv and DGK. They present themselves as “a federation of local Reformed churches that, from the Protestant Reformation, through the secession of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834, the Doleantie in 1886, the Union in 1892 and the Liberation in 1944, 2003 and subsequent years, want to live today only according to the Holy Scripture”. The official Dutch name of this federation is “*Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland*” (GKN), without the insert 'in' and without further postal or informal addition. More information is available in the Dutch language on the federation’s website: (<https://www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl/>). Efforts are continuing to reach out to others. Talks with the Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) [DGK] have taken place with a view to unity. Information evenings are being organized for the concerned in the GKv and others.

Because of its small size and resulting limitations in the church order, the federation had initially added the designation *voorlopig verband* (provisional federation) [GKNvv]. In previous reports we used the acronym RCNpf. This term is now obsolete and will refer to these churches by the Dutch acronym GKN.

Regarding the GKN the committee received the following mandate from Synod Dunnville 2016:

4. Recommendation

That Synod decide:

4.1 To maintain contact with the Reformed Churches The Netherlands (GKNvv) and continue to monitor developments within this federation. (Acts Art. 118)

2. Contact

The subcommittee maintained contact with the GKN through correspondence and a face-to-face meeting. The subcommittee received a copy of the letter from the Synod of the GKN held on 12 March 2016 addressed to GS Dunnville 2016. In this letter the GKN conveyed greetings and expressed the hope that contacts between the two churches could be maintained. The letter also confirmed that talks towards possible unity between them and the DGK were being initiated.

In a letter dated August 16, 2016 we informed the GKN of the decisions of GS Dunnville regarding our relationship with the GKN (Art 118). Also, a copy of the *Acts of Synod Dunnville 2016* in pdf format was forwarded to them for their information together with a request for a meeting with the deputies BBK of the GKN in the Netherlands in 2017.

Via email we received a press release of the above-mentioned synod of the GKN held 12 March, 2016. In further emails a meeting in person was arranged and finalized.

The full subcommittee had opportunity to meet with 5 Deputies BBK of the GKN on March 30, 2017 in the GKN church building *Elim*, in Ede, the Netherlands. The meeting was opened with Scripture reading and prayer. This was the 3rd time since our first appointment in 2010, that as CanRC deputies we met with representatives of the GKN. The brothers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet again, and gave us an update on 1) the developments in their churches in particular on the internal structure of the GKN and 2) on the discussions with the DGK.

The developments in their churches

A number of years ago the internal structure of the GKN was not very clear and didn’t work very well. The churches were quite independent. There was a national assembly, but it was not clear what the

jurisdiction/authority of this meeting was. The result was a loose and problematic cooperation between the churches.

This has changed and now their ecclesiastical life is better organized. As a result, the cooperation and harmony is much better. They are now structured in accordance with the C.O. of Dort. Because of the small size of the federation there are no classes or regional synods. The national meeting is a General Synod, which meets twice a year.

Since they could not reach an agreement on how to eliminate some of the differences among the local churches, the Synod concluded that these things were not reason for separation (“niet kerkscheidend”) and should therefore remain the responsibility of the local churches. And thus in some of the churches the sisters vote in the election of office bearers, in others they don’t. And not all churches use the same Marriage Form, nor have they approved the same hymns for singing in the worship services. This does not mean that all local churches are free to choose any hymn they would like to sing. The decision only accepts existing circumstances.

Recently another Synod was held. The brothers noticed with thankfulness the improved harmonious cooperation and the positive atmosphere, reflecting a much better unity. Synod had also appointed church visitors, and they could report encouraging meetings and conversations. “We can say with gratitude that we are now a very small, but flourishing church community”.

Currently the federation consists of 7 instituted churches and 6 preaching points. The churches are served by 3 fulltime-active ministers (Rev. Van der Wolf, Rev. L. Heres, and Rev. Visser). There are 3 ministers-emeritus (Dr. Douma and Rev. Hoogendoorn and Rev. D. de Jong [minister emeritus of Burlington Ebenezer]). One student is currently studying in Apeldoorn, and there may be a new student coming. Two more ministers recently left the GKv and joined the GKN one of which is Rev. A. De Jager who at one time served the church in Neerlandia as its minister.

The decisions about women’s voting and about the hymns in the liturgy has led some people to leave the GKN for DGK. That was difficult, but despite this – membership is overall quite stable. There is some slow growth, where here and there a GKv member is joining, but it is not a stream or a movement. The problem is that people are confused and they don’t know where to go. The brothers experienced that during the last years the gap between the GKN and the GKv has grown considerably.

Discussions with the DGK

The first request for a dialogue towards possible unity came from DGK. This first discussion was held (2015), but then further movement was put on hold. The GKN first wanted to address matters in the Acts of the DGK Synod that sounded like ‘pre-conditions’ which would hamper an open discussion. Misunderstandings could be clarified and in February of this year a continuation of the preliminary discussion was held. This resulted in a joint agreement that the foundation of the church is God’s Word and the Confession. The C.O. is important, but does not belong to that foundation. This ‘joint agreement’ can be found on their website. This is a positive and joyful development which was reported at the Synod of the GKN in March 2017.

General discussion

The subcommittee asked if there is mutual trust between the GKN and DGK, for instance with regard to what Dr. J. Douma [who is a minister-emeritus in the GKN] has written about Genesis 1?

The GKN brothers expressed their fear that deep down there is still general mistrust among the DGK when it comes to the GKN. It is clear that much prayer will be needed that the Holy Spirit may move this process forward, and also much wisdom and love. At the same time, they say, we need determination to hold fast to what we have received. The GKN brothers made it clear that they are driven by Christ’s command that those who believe in him must be one. One of the difficulties is that those who have left

the GKv, may have done so for a variety of reasons. However, the first motivation to keep going, they say, is not to form a joint haven for concerned members of the GKv, but to be obedient to the Lord's calling.

We suggested that, to avoid any misunderstanding in view of dr. Douma's writings, the GKN issue a clear statement on its position on creation and the first chapters in the book of Genesis.

We further encouraged the brothers as they embark on the road of discussions with the DGK and we expressed the hope for good results. They, in return, then emphasized that we should not look at them as just 2 wings, so to speak, of the same church, made up of ex-members of the GKv. We are talking about 2 real, full-fledged independent church federations.

In closing the GKN chairman of the meeting summed it up with positive remarks. "By God's grace we are doing well. Although we are small, we see spiritual growth in a country that slides more and more into darkness. And, yes, we do desire contacts with foreign churches, but our manpower and time is limited. If the sister church relationship between the CanRC and the GKv would indeed come to an end, we would love to have more contact. But right now we stand back. It will take time for you, the CanRC, to say farewell to the GKv in a proper way".

3. Recent Developments

The GKN Synod October 2017 made a decision to terminate the discussions towards possible unity with the DGK. This was as the result of an article that appeared in the official DGK church magazine *De Bazuin* which appears to label the GKN as schismatic. The GKN demands that the DGK publicly distances itself from this article before talks can resume. Synod Lansingerland 2018 of the DGK responded that they have no preconditions that need to be met and urged the GKN to continue the dialogue and to discuss any concerns at these joint meetings of deputies for church unity.

At the meeting of General Synod March 17, 2018 deputies for contact with foreign churches reported on their work. They expressed the opinion that in contacts with other churches priority should be given to Europe and to former sister churches, the FRCA, the CanRC and the FRCSA. A decision was made to enter into a sister church relationship with the Selbständige Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche (SERK) in Germany. It was also decided to request the FRCA to enter into a sister church relationship. The intention was made clear that at the next general synod similar proposals need to be made to the CanRC and FRCSA.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The subcommittee appreciates the difficulties that may exist in a small federation as well as the need for a soundboard. Further encouragement to seek unity with the DGK and with concerned GKV members will be valuable. Therefore, the sub-committee proposes that some form of contact be maintained with the GKN.

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