

## 15.2 REPORT DEPUTIES ECUMENICITY : NATIONAL (Artt 120, 164, 240, 271, 282)

- A. The vice-chairperson, rev SD Snyman, takes the chair.
- B. Rev PW Kurpershoek delivers the Report with more information by dr CJ Smit.
- C. **Decision:** The Report is referred to the Commission Ecumenicity.
- D. **Decision:** Financial matters are referred to the Commission for Finances.
- E. Prof SJ van der Merwe reports on behalf of the Commission Ecumenicity.
- F. Rev J van Schaik reports on behalf of the Commission for Finances.

### G. REPORT

#### 1. Matters for notification by the Synod

Assignment (Acta, 2006:178-193)

##### 1.1 *In summary*

##### 1.1.1 Primary

1.1.1.1 Have discussions with churches in the country within the Reformed tradition regarding church unity.

##### 1.1.2 Directed

1.1.2.1 Start new discussions with churches in the country within the Reformed tradition and the framework of ecumenical contact, ecumenical bonds and ecumenical unity.

1.1.2.2 The Synod assigns the new Deputies to continue their discussions with church communities in the country on a reformed foundation and to advice the next Synod regarding the church communities in which the ecumenical relationships should be on a fixed base.

##### 1.2 *South African Council of Churches*

1.2.1 The GKSA applies for membership of the South African Council of Churches. The Synod makes it clear that the Reformed Churches in South Africa keep their independence and does not take responsibility via association for the viewpoint and acts of the SACC.

1.2.2 At the same time the Deputies recommend that the Synod Midlands should join the Synod Potchefstroom to become members of the SACC.

1.2.3 The Deputies have the assignment to communicate serious and fundamental points of difference to our church members.

1.2.4 The Deputies have the assignment to advice the next Synod on the continuation of our membership.

1.2.5 The Deputies must make a short informational page available to church councils on joining the SACC.

##### 1.3 *Inter Church Council (ICC)*

##### 1.3.1 Primary

1.1.3.1 Continue the discussion with the discussional partners in the ICC, namely the Dutch Reformed Church and the NHK of Africa, and execute all assignments as provided in the Foundation of the ICC.

##### 1.3.2 Directed

1.3.2.1 The Synod trusts that the ICC will contribute towards the realisation, building and experience of the overarching purpose of church unity.

1.3.2.2 The Synod instructs the Deputies to continue with the critical-constructive discussion on the basis of a current interpretation of the Confession.

1.3.2.3 The Synod endorses it that the GKSA become involved through financial support in the parliamentary desk of the Dutch Reformed Church (R10 000.00 per annum).

1.3.2.4 The Synod instructs the named Deputies to start an agreement (regarding the parliamentary desk) with the Dutch Reformed Church.

1.3.2.5 The Synod instructs the named Deputies to examine the possibility of a representative in the parliamentary desk.

- 1.3.2.6 Give invitations to the Synod of 2009 to the Dutch Reformed Church and the NHK of Africa.
- 1.3.2.7 The Synod instructs the delegates to the ICC to remain involved in the creation of a South African code of conduct.
- 1.4 *Afrikaans Protestant Church*
  - 1.4.1 Primary
    - 1.1.4.1 Continue the discussion with the Afrikaans Protestant Church.
  - 1.4.2 Directed
    - 1.4.2.1 The Synod thrusts that the discussions will continue to build the unity of the church communities in Christ.
    - 1.4.2.2 Invite the Afrikaans Protestant Church to the Synod of 2009.
- 1.5 *Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA)*
  - 1.5.1 The Deputies are instructed to continue with the discussions regarding ecumenical unity with the FRCSA.
  - 1.5.2 The discussion on hermeneutics that the FGCSA wishes to continue with the GKSA can be continued in conference on the initiative of the GKSA with the GKN(v), and possibly also the Reformed Church of the Netherlands and the CGKNN, focusing on The Female in the Church.
- 1.6 *Convent for Reformatory Churches*
  - 1.6.1 Appoint delegates to the Convent for Reformatory Churches.
- 1.7 *Synods Soutpansberg and Midlands*
  - 1.7.1 Have a discussion with the Synods Soutpansberg and Midlands as determined by Synod 2006.

**Decision: Points 1.1 to 1.7.1 noted.**

## **2. Issues for discussion by the Synod**

### *2.1 Constitution of deputies*

- 2.1.1 Synod 2006 appointed dr Johann le Roux as chair of the Deputies, but he stepped back shortly before his retirement.
- 2.1.2 The Deputies then appointed dr CJ Smit as chair and decided not to call for any seconds.

**Decision: Noted.**

### **Recommendation**

- 2.1.3 The Synod endorses this.

**Decision: Approved.**

### *2.2 New discussions: Rhine Church in South Africa (RCSA) and the Calvin Protestant Church of South Africa (CPCofSA)*

- 2.2.1 During June 2007 the first, exploratory discussion has been held with delegates from the Rhine Church in South Africa (RCSA) and the Calvin Protestant Church of South Africa (CPCofSA), which was followed by a second discussion in September 2008.
- 2.2.2 The RCSA originated from the work of the German Rhine missionary society. After the church has been added to the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church mainly because of financial considerations, three original Rhine congregations regained their independence in 1955.
- 2.2.3 The CPCofSA split from the Dutch Reformed Missionary Church in 1950 mainly because of the then Dutch Reformed Missionary Church's support and application of the apartheid policy in the circumstances of that time.
- 2.2.4 Both the CPCofSA and the RCSA have the same confessional foundation as the GKSA.
- 2.2.5 Because of the contact created by the Convent of Reformatory Churches with delegates from both of these church communities, ecumenical discussions started.
- 2.2.6 Attention was concentrated on the own ethos of the various church communities.
- 2.2.7 Because both the CPCofSA and the RCSA are regionally centred church communities (Western, Eastern and Northern Cape, Namibia), more cooperation and discussions on regional level between the CPCofSA, RCSA and the classises of the

Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Griqualand West and Namibia should be initiated. The first initiatives to this regard will DV happen at the end of 2008 and the start of 2009 via the Deputies.

- 2.2.8 On request of the CPCofSA a message of greeting on behalf of the GKSA was given by dr CJ Smit during their Synod in June 2008.

**Decision: Points 2.2.1 to 2.2.8 noted.**

**Recommendations**

- 2.2.9 The Synod appreciates the new discussions with the CPCofSA and the RCSA.  
2.2.10 The Synod instructs the Deputies to continue with the discussion and to expand on it.  
2.2.11 The Synod assigns the Deputies to help the classes of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Griqualand West and Namibia in the process of ecumenical contact with the CPCofSA and the RCSA.

**Decision: Approved.**

- 2.2.12 The Synod budgets for the responsibilities of the GKSA regarding these discussions.

**Decision: Approved.**

2.3 *New discussions with other internal church communities with in the Reformed tradition*

- 2.3.1 During Convent 2006, 2007 and 2008 informal discussions have been held with various internal church communities (compare 2.10).  
2.3.2 Through the contact within the SACC the Presbyterian Church of Africa has also been noted and contact was established with the delegates.

**Decision: Points 2.3.1 to 2.3.2 noted.**

**Recommendations**

- 2.3.3 The Deputies are instructed to maintain discussions with the internal church communities with a Reformed tradition, and to expand on it.  
2.3.4 The Deputies are instructed to examine in what way all the church communities that form part of the Convent of Reformatory Churches can have bilateral or multilateral discussions directed at the ultimate ecumenical ideal of church cooperation and unity.

**Decision: Approved.**

2.4 *South African Council of Churches*

2.4.1 Application for membership

- 2.4.1.1 During the Synod of 2006 the available information indicated that it would not be possible to apply for status of observation, therefore the Synod of 2006 gave the instruction that there should be an application for full membership of the SACC.  
2.4.1.2 At the start of 2006 a documented application has been made. Applications are considered on the grounds of three criteria, namely:  
A Concurrence with confessional foundation of SACC as indicated in the constitution.  
B Rural presence of church community.  
C Situation within the church and relationship with other church communities (especially regarding the question whether the involved church community is not a community that tore away).  
2.4.1.3 On 18 July 2007 the GKSA was accepted as member – but only with status of observation. The motivation for this is the fact that there is still uncertainty regarding the relationship between the GKSA and other church communities in the reformed tradition in South Africa and abroad.  
2.4.1.4 The SACC indicated that it would be possible to apply for full membership, but the deputies judged that it would be wiser to remain observers for now while getting acquainted with the ways of the SACC.  
2.4.2 National Conference (July 2007)  
2.4.2.1 The National Conference was attended by dr CJ Smit, revs C Aucamp and PW Kurpershoek.  
2.4.2.2 The National Conference is the highest decision-making assembly of the SACC and meets every three years.  
2.4.2.3 During the National Conference a process was started according to which the role of the SACC should be determined once more with regard to the expectations of

the various church communities. With this they moved away from a working agenda determined by the donors, to an agenda determined by the church communities. In future the agenda will be directed towards issues that cannot be handled by the church communities themselves (including joint theological reflection and participation in parliamentary processes) to the advantage of the involved church communities.

- 2.4.2.4 Attention was also given to various environmental and ethical issues, including change of climate, the prevention of the exploitation of women and children, the building of the family, the building of ethical commerce principles and the combating of AIDS.
- 2.4.2.5 During the National Conference a new leadership structure has also been founded, with prof. Tinyiko Maluleke of *The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa* as the new president.
- 2.4.3 National Church Leaders Forum (January 2008)
  - 2.4.3.1 The National Church Leaders Forum (hereafter the NCLF) was attended by rev PW Kurpershoek.
  - 2.4.3.2 The NCLF must be clearly distinguished from the *National Religious Leaders' Forum* (hereafter NRLF). Where the NRLF is an authority-initiated meeting of all religious leaders, the NCLF is a church initiated meeting of Christian church leaders.
  - 2.4.3.3 The NCLF attempts to facilitate mutual deliberation and consultation between "leaders" (representatives) of as many as possible church communities in South Africa.
  - 2.4.3.4 There has been probing discussions on the fact that the NCLF should remain on a critical distance from the NRLF, because there is a clear confession of the Christian church versus the authority – apart from other religious groups. A joint commission was appointed to provide the necessary theological foundation for such discussions with the authority.
  - 2.4.3.5 Attention was also given to the events at the Central Methodist Church (on January 30 2008 when police entered the church building), the situation in Zimbabwe (to coordinate mutual help), violence and crime (especially the difficult road of confessing it to the authority), the political situation in South Africa (with emphasis on the responsibility to give spiritual testimony – without political correctness – from the Scripture).
- 2.4.4 Central Committee (May 2008)
  - 2.4.4.1 The assembly of the Central Committee was attended by rev. PW Kurpershoek.
  - 2.4.4.2 Die Central Committee must implement the policy and programs endorsed by the National Conference, and supervise the day-to-day acts of the SACC.
  - 2.4.4.3 During this assembly the first report on the functioning of the SACC was attended to. The focus on the church character was very prominent in the SACC (moving away from critical solidarity to a critical discussion with the authority).
  - 2.4.4.4 A lot of attention has also been given to the situation regarding xenophobia (that was burning at that stage), the situation in Zimbabwe and the situation in South Africa on the way to the election of 2009.
  - 2.4.4.5 A penetrating personal discussion was held with rev. Keith Vermeulen – personnel member of the SACC working with the parliamentary office. Thorough information on the functioning of the parliamentary office of the SACC was obtained. There is a probing need in the SACC for persons that can deliver theological documents that can be used as a point of departure in the compilation of comments en reactions on legislation.
- 2.4.5 Communication with GKSA members
  - 2.4.5.1 Various factors caused that there was no communication regarding any issue or viewpoint of the SACC with members. These factors include amongst others the long period that it took to request the application of membership (after handing in the application at the start of 2006 the application was only dealt with in 2007), the

- process to start to understand the acts of the SACC and to make contacts, and the unclear relationship between the two Deputy groups (Ecumenicity: In the Country and Ecumenicity: Authority) that are both involved with the SACC.
- 2.4.5.2 Regarding the informational piece on the enrolment of the GKSA in the SACC, the Deputies judged that the process of application for membership should be completed first and that there should be more clarity on the acts and processes of the SACC, before the information can be given.
- 2.4.6 Evaluation of involvement
- 2.4.6.1 The decision of the Synod 2006 (2006:190-191, 1.1.11–1.1.13) to instruct the Deputies to apply for membership with the SACC had a twofold focus, namely the living of the unrestricted ecumenical calling of the GKSA and the enhancement of the prophetic calling of the GKSA.
- 2.4.6.2 The involvement with the SACC during the past two years has shown that it is necessary to first get to know the functioning of the SACC properly, before the full potential of the SACC can be used to contribute towards the living of the ecumenical and prophetic calling of the GKSA.
- 2.4.6.3 The involvement with the SACC during the past two years has also shown that it is very important to, when considering the SACC, look at the current situation unbiased and not measure it against the past and history of the SACC. With the new leadership of the SACC there is a clear quest to a church directed agenda built on fundamental theological thought that are coming from the church society.
- 2.4.6.4 Regarding the prophetic calling participation in the SACC processes did not deliver what was expected, specifically with regards to facilitating the discussion of the GKSA with the authority. The reason for this to a great extent lies in the shortage of knowledge on the functioning of the SACC, a shortage of real focus on the processes within the SACC and the impaired cooperation between the two involved Deputy groups. But a lot of opportunities exist that can be utilised, amongst others a contribution to the provision of a theological basis for comments on legislation, and participation in the National Church Leaders Forum.
- 2.4.6.5 Regarding the ecumenical calling it was experienced that the SACC do provide the opportunity to live according to the unrestricted ecumenical calling of the GKSA (1967:366), especially with the current evaluation of the acts of the SACC (compare 2.4.2.3). In living this calling it is actually about making visible the ecumenical unity, as well as joint prophetic confession of the truth against the lie and cooperation to such an extent that there is a joint task that has to be looked after (1997:176).
- 2.4.7 Finding on the possible continuation of involvement with the SACC
- 2.4.7.1 A lot of questions and uncertainty existed amongst members and church councils, and emotions ran high on the decision to apply for membership with the SACC. Therefore it is important to compare and where necessary to correct perceptions with the true situation in any decision-making surrounding membership.
- 2.4.7.2 In deciding on membership the Synod should follow the clear guidelines of 1997 (Acta, 1997:176-177, 3.2) on contact with other ecumenical and church movements. According to this the ecumenical calling encompasses discussions on visible unification, prophetic testimony of the truth against the lie, and cooperation to such an extent that there is a mutual task that should be looked after. It should also be judged in the preventative instance whether involvement in conversation is sensible, while the Reformed testimony also has to be clear by giving a clear Reformed viewpoint.
- 2.4.7.3 From the evaluation and involvement (2.4.6 above) it is clear that contact with the SACC provide the possibility for living out the ecumenical calling – possibilities that have to be expanded.
- 2.4.7.4 The necessity to provide a clear Reformed testimony in the acts of the SACC and in reaction to utterances of the SACC is non-negotiable. Thorough involvement and planning can effectively deliver such a confession – to the expansion of the Kingdom.

- 2.4.7.5 While the SACC do not necessarily require full membership to participate in the acts of the institution, the current situation (with the GKSA as observer) is a good opportunity to further develop and judge the possibilities provided by the SACC.

**Decision: Points 2.4.1 to 2.4.7.5 noted.**

#### 2.4.8 Recommendations

- 2.4.8.1 The actions of the Deputies according to which there were not a continuation to full membership, should be endorsed.
- 2.4.8.2 The actions of the Deputies to according to circumstances not communicate to the GKSA members on membership of the SACC should be endorsed.

**Decision: Approved.**

- 2.4.8.3 Deputies receive the assignment to – in correspondence with the Deputies Ecumenicity: Contact with Government – testify prophetically at the Parliamentary Desk and the National Church Leaders Forum.
- 2.4.8.4 Deputies receive the assignment to deliver clear Reformed testimony towards the SACC and their actions.
- 2.4.8.5 Deputies receive the assignment to provide the next Synod with a thorough evaluation based on the guidelines set out by Synod 1997 (Acta, 1997:176-177, 3.2).
- 2.4.8.6 Synod plans financially for all relevant costs that the Deputies have to incur for their testimony towards the SACC and their evaluation of the organisation.

**Decision: Approved as amended – amendments already included – Deputies Acta.**

#### 2.5 *Inter Church Council (ICC)*

##### 2.5.1 Course of discussion

- 2.5.1.1 Three meetings of the ICC realised during this term.
- 2.5.1.2 The purpose of the ICC is to experience unity and progress between the participating church communities and to intensify the coordination, progress and building of the total cooperation between the involved church communities, on the way to unity that is an instruction of the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ that is strived for.
- 2.5.1.3 During each meeting of the ICC opportunity has been given to each church community to say something about the situation within their own church community. The value of this is found in the fact that it is clear that each church community struggles with the same issues and has similar diversity. In this way a better understanding develops for the internal actions in each church community.

##### 2.5.2 Critical constructive discussion

- 2.5.2.1 The critical constructive discussion did not get a lot of focused attention during this term.
- 2.5.2.2 Although the agreement is still that the discussion should be held in accordance with a current interpretation of the Confession, thus far the pneumatology received attention.
- 2.5.2.3 Although it originally started with pro-active attention to the possible implications of the Confession of Belhar for the relationship between the various church communities, this discussion did not make a lot of progress. In the light of the events within the DR Church it has been decided that the issue should be postponed.
- 2.5.2.4 Because both the DR Church and the NH Church were busy with a study on *homosexuality*, discussions on this has been held at two opportunities. The Deputies gave the decision of the 2006 Synod on this, but also participated in the discussions with the other two church communities. There was an attempt to critical constructive discussion, while the two involved church communities also attempted a joint route in the formulation of their recommendations for their various major assemblies.

### 2.5.3 Cooperation

- 2.5.3.1 The assignment of the ICC – as described in the Foundation of the ICC – is *to experience and make progress in church unity on the principle of the same Doctrinal Creed in Jesus Christ* (amongst others):
- (i) take note of the existing terrains of cooperation and provide a holistic view of this to the cooperating church communities;
  - (ii) identify, coordinate and with responsibility expand to the various mandate givers new terrains of cooperation between cooperating church communities;
- 2.5.3.2 All the subgroups of cooperation (amongst others for mercy, education, ministry abroad, liturgical formularies and retranslation of the confession) have not reached a level of cooperation that can be set as an ideal during the last three years. But there are various activities that are still initiated in one or the other form of development.
- 2.5.3.3 During March 2008 specific attention has been given to the necessity to build cooperation. A specific commission was appointed to enhance the issue by getting the various committees to work and as far as possible also provide a written document on the ways of each committee.
- 2.5.3.4 On the area of the service of mercy the three church communities cooperate in the Inter-commission for Mercy. This commission got the assignment to create cooperation especially locally and from the cooperation at local level develop a generic model that can be used in all the communities.
- 2.5.3.5 Cooperation on the educational terrain always happened via the Inter Church Commission For Education and training (ICET). But in 2007 the existence of ICET was terminated and a commission for education, youth and catechism was founded.
- 2.5.3.6 During 2006 it was reported that consideration will be given to the possibility to organise regional meetings of all the reverends of the three church communities and to have joint consideration of *Our calling as (Afrikaans) Reformed Churches in South Africa*. These meetings did not happen and currently there is consideration of the sensibility and feasibility thereof.
- 2.5.3.7 A request has been received from the NH Church of Africa to bring a message of greeting from the GKSA during their General Church Assembly of September 2007. The Deputies delegated dr. CJ Smit to perform this.
- 2.5.3.8 A request has been received from the DR Church to bring a message of greeting from the GKSA during the General Synod of the DR Church in June 2007. The Deputies delegated rev. PW Kurpershoek to perform this.
- 2.5.3.9 There was a request to the Administrative Bureau on 18 March 2008 to invite the DR Church and the NH Church of Africa to the Synod of 2009 to bring messages of greeting.

### 2.5.4 Parliamentary desk

- 2.5.4.1 The cooperation with the Parliamentary Desk of the DR Church has not really been shaping well. From the ranks of the ICC those involved from the DR Church were requested to compile a report on the current actions of the Parliamentary Desk, the cost thereof, and the possible future scenarios relating to the Parliamentary Desk. A fixed agreement has not been reached.
- 2.5.4.2 The Deputies Ecumenical Issues: Discussion with the Authority will further report on this issue.

**Decision: Note taken of 2.5.1 to 2.5.4.2.**

### Recommendation

- (a) To enter into talks with drs Kobus Gerber and Ben du Toit to sort out the problems around the effective functioning of the Parliamentary Desk.
- (b) The Deputies receive the mandate to withdraw from the Desk if the problems can not be resolved (see 15.1 – Report Deputies Ecumenicity: Government).

**Decision: Approved.**

## 2.5.5 Public testimony

2.5.5.1 The process to develop public testimony on relevant issues from the ICC, started in April 2008 by directing a joint testimony towards the authority. In this the authority has been called to restore law and order, they were also ensured about intercession of the churches and the members. Fellow countrymen of SA were called to put their trust in the Lord.

2.5.5.2 An Idea Deliberation was held in March 2008 in which this aspect also received attention. It was decided to have a penetrating look at a sensible method for joint public testimony.

2.5.5.3 The ICC attempted to compile a provisional code of conduct that can contribute towards the national discussion on moral values. Prof Amie van Wyk was involved in this and a provisional contribution was made available to the *Moral Regeneration Movement*. It was also requested that prof Van Wyk (with dr Kobus Gerber) should represent the ICC at the named movement.

## 2.5.6 Future of discussion

2.5.6.1 On the named Idea Deliberation in March 2008 attention has also been given to the effectiveness of the ICC, the road ahead and the visibility of the unity between the church communities.

2.5.6.2 To provide the calling towards church unity with more followers it was also decided that the church communities would meet bilaterally to solve the differences that may exist and to formulate the possible levels of cooperation.

**Decision: Points 2.5.1 to 2.5.6.2 noted.**

## 2.5.7 **Recommendations**

2.5.7.1 The Synod endorses the abovementioned activities of the Deputies.

2.5.7.2 The Synod takes note with appreciation of the work that has been performed on account of church unity and the penetrating discussion that is happening against this backdrop.

2.5.7.3 The Synod budgets for all relevant costs that the deputies might have for their actions as part of the ICC.

**Decision: Approved.**

## 2.6 *Bilateral discussion with the NH Church*

2.6.1 During April 2008 a bilateral discussions with delegates from the NH Church were held. Both church communities have given probing attention to the understanding of unity and union.

2.6.2 From the discussion it was evident that there has to be looked at Scripture and church view that were identified in previous discussions, to determine the validity, value, and weight of the differences.

2.6.3 In the discussion it was also agreed to look at possible models of unification that do not replace the existing structures, but provide greater being to unity and that is as accommodating as possible in the process of unification.

2.6.4 In the discussion it became clear that there is a perception in the NH Church that reformed pulpits are off-limits under all circumstances for reverends of the NH Church – according to previous discussions of the GKSA. The Deputies indicated the misunderstanding of this perception by emphasising that the competence and supervision over the pulpit of the congregation is the responsibility of the local church council.

**Decision: Points 2.6.1 to 2.6.4 noted.**

### **Recommendation**

2.6.5 The Synod takes note of this discussion.

2.6.6 The Synod endorses the performance of the deputies in 2.6.4

**Decision: Approved.**

## 2.7 *Bilateral discussion with the DR Church*

2.7.1 A bilateral discussion with delegates from the DR Church could not happen yet, but is planned for 2009.

**Decision: Noted.**

### **Recommendation**

2.7.2 The Synod takes note of this.

#### **Decision: Approved.**

#### **2.8 Afrikaans Protestant Church**

2.8.1 A bilateral discussion with the AP Church happened on 17 October 2008.

2.8.2 During this discussion it was examined in what way cooperation can be expanded. From the side of the AP Church specific understanding has been asked for the tentativeness that exists regarding the strife to unity, since the question with members remains to what extent the searching for unity is really grounded in the Bible.

2.8.3 A discussion has been held on the liturgy and it was stated that no grounded differences do exist.

2.8.4 Attention has been given to the handling of the 1936 Versification of the Psalms and various revisions that are provided and are used. In order not to damage the literary quality and the continued quality of the 1936 text and also to ensure that the same revision of the Totius text are used as far as possible in the various Afrikaans church communities. It has been set out that any further revision of the Totius text must be performed in mutual agreement with all the church communities that will still use this text.

2.8.5 On request of the AP Church a message of greeting on behalf of the GKSA was given by rev. PW Kurpershoek during their Synod in September 2007.

2.8.6 It was requested on 18 March 2008 that the Administrative Bureau invite the AP Church to the Synod of 2009 to bring a message of greeting.

#### **Decision: Points 2.8.1 to 2.8.6 noted.**

### **Recommendations**

2.8.7 The Synod encourages a more effective course of the discussion.

#### **Decision: Approved.**

2.8.8 The Synod instructs the Deputies that are responsible for the revision of the Totius text, to notify all Afrikaans church communities using the Totius text, of possible amendments as endorsed by the Synod to attempt to eventually create the same sounding text.

#### **Decision: Approved. The decision of Synod regarding the amendments to the Totius text should be communicated to the APK by the Deputies for Correspondence, as well as to other churches in SA.**

2.8.9 The Synod budgets for the responsibilities of the Deputies regarding the yearly conversation.

#### **Decision: Approved.**

#### **2.9 Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA)**

2.9.1 Three discussions were held during the past term. In the past the Deputies Ecumenicity: Abroad handled the ecumenical relationships with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA): because of the sisters church relation between the FRCSA and the GKN(v) in the Netherlands. But there was a request from the FRCSA that the discussions should be held with the Deputies Ecumenicity: Internally, that started to realise within this term.

2.9.2 The question on the view of the churches of each other was a penetrating discussion. There was also an agreement that the discussion will be handled in such a way that there is a purposeful movement to each other.

2.9.3 The relationship of the GKSA with the DRC and NHK, and the effect that it will have on the FRCSA, were handled very thoroughly. The Scriptural involvement of the visibility making of the ecumenical unity, and its critical approach to other church communities was also thoroughly discussed.

2.9.4 Discussions were held on cooperation on the way to unity. Emphasis were placed on the necessity thereof that local churches get to know each other and trust one another. Therefore it has been decided that the local congregations and the involved

classis are requested and led to seriously become involved with one another in the process.

2.9.5 On request of the FRCSA a message of greeting on behalf of the GKSA was delivered by prof Callie Coetzee during their Synod in May 2008.

**Decision: Points 2.9.1 to 2.9.5 noted.**

**Recommendation**

2.9.6 The Deputies are instructed to continue with the discussion.

2.9.7 The Deputies get the assignment to assign the classis in the area of the FRCSA churches to seriously become involved with another.

**Decision: Approved.**

2.9.8 The Synod budgets for the responsibilities of the GKSA regarding the conversations.

**Decision: Approved.**

2.10 Convent for Reformatory Churches

2.10.1 Like in the previous ten years, the Convent assembled yearly in the last three years. Again the blessings of the Lord were experienced in this ecumenical reformatory movement in Southern Africa in the past three years. An overview of each of the Convent gatherings will now be summarised.

2.10.2 Convent 2006

2.10.2.1 In 2006 the Convent was held by the NHKA in Kemptonpark.

2.10.2.2 Delegates of ten participating church communities were present. The theme was *Focuses in the Education – a reformatory perspective*. Introductory speakers included: proff Lawrence Schlemmer, Izak Oosthuizen, drr Theuns Eloff, Huw Davies, Pierre Edwards and mr Paul Colditz. Except for this there was also a panel discussion compiled from knowledgeable people of the authority sector and of education.

2.10.2.3 The decisions that have been made included discipline in school, frustration of principals and teachers with implementation of policies of education, parent involvement in the education and boards of control, a transformation philosophy for tertiary education and sensitivity with the implementation of the HIV-Aids programs at schools.

2.10.2.4 The decisions had been widely reported on in the press, and where possible, taken up with the involved educational authorities.

2.10.2.5 On Sunday 23 July 2006 the church communities was called to a countrywide Day of Humiliation because of crime and violence.

2.10.2.6 The Convent also called the parents of these churches countrywide to participate in the election of school controlling bodies.

2.10.3 Convent 2007

2.10.3.1 In 2007 the Calvin Protestant Church of SA and the Rhine Church in Athlone held the Convent.

2.10.3.2 Delegates of ten participating church communities were present. Die theme was *Church unity*. Introductory speakers were proff. Dries du Plooy, Piet Strauss and Hannes Adonis. There was a panel discussion also.

2.10.3.3 The Convent endorses the fact that the membership fees were revised and determined (for the first time in 8 years) on 10 cent for every confessing member to a total amount of R1 500 per annum.

2.10.3.4 The decision has also been made that participating church communities will in future be represented by no more than ten instead of five representatives. No restrictions are placed on the number of observers.

2.10.3.5 Note has been taken with appreciation that dr. Nico Vorster (Bultfontein) agreed to act as editor of the internet page of the Convent, inter.con, and that the technical care will still be handled by rev. Etienne Fourie.

2.10.3.6 The core decision that was taken by the Convent during this assembly was to continuously work towards church unity on the principle of the Scripture journey. This means that the Convent encourages expanded church discussions on unity amongst participating churches. Once more the Convent expressed serious

concern about the level of crime and violence in our country, which is still unacceptably high despite various meetings, declarations, and resolutions of the authority.

#### 2.10.4 Convent 2008

2.10.4.1 The tenth Convent was held in 2008 by the GKSA at the Elgro River Lodge (Vaal River).

2.10.4.2 The theme was *Visibility of church unity*. The claim from the Scripture on the Visibility of church unity was coming from prof Dries du Plooy (that was absent due to a knee operation). Thereafter the following models for church unity were presented: Model of the DR Church family: prof Piet Strauss; the PKN Model: dr Kobus Gerber; Model of the CPC and the RCSA: revs Ronald Armstrong and Tommy Solomons; Model of the NH Church family: dr Gafie van Wyk; the GKSA Model: prof Callie Coetzee; The United Congregational-Model: Rev OG Kelokihwe. Hereafter a panel discussion under the guidance of dr CJ Smit has been held on the visibility of church unity.

2.10.4.3 On this Convent a volume with the history of the Convent of the past ten years, decisions and papers that has been delivered, was accepted. Delegates of eight participating church communities were present – three made excuses.

2.10.4.4 The Convent thanks the trinity of God, that church unity started to develop over the last few years, for the fact that member churches move closer to each other and the fact that bilateral discussions on unity started. These bilateral discussions include the discussions between the Calvin Protestant Church and the Rhine Church of South Africa, between the Reformed Churches of South Africa and the Calvin Protestant Church and the Rhine Church in South Africa, and between the Calvin Protestant Church and the DR Church.

2.10.4.5 The Convent encourages the various churches to give attention to church unity in a structured way and will attempt to keep the discussion on church unity lively during the yearly meeting of the Convent.

2.10.4.6 The Convent works towards attracting more churches from the reformatory tradition to the Convent, with specific focus on the churches from the Presbyterian and Lutheran traditions.

2.10.4.7 The Convent accepts that church unity is a process of which the outcomes cannot be predicted in detail. But the Convent is convinced that such a process should come from believing. The Convent accepts that church unity cannot be forced, but that it should involve members and congregations in an inclusive process.

2.10.4.8 The Convent judges that the people of South Africa do not only have rights, but also responsibilities. Therefore the Convent supports the idea of a law emphasising the responsibilities of the people of South Africa, as proposed in the Bill of Responsibilities.

2.10.4.9 The Convent also supports the church process to create a Bill of Religious Rights and to participate in it. Note has been taken with appreciation of the fact that the concept has already been distributed to the church communities in South Africa for comments.

2.10.4.10 The Convent supports the discussions of the Religious Leaders Forum with the authority to overcome the impasse surrounding the restriction of crime.

#### 2.10.5 Convent 2009

2.10.5.1 The Eleventh Convent is presented on 1-4 March 2009 by the DRC in Pretoria. The birth of John Calvin in 1509 will be heralded. At this Convent the focus will be on the thoughts of Calvin regarding church unity. Specific emphasis will also be given to the similarities between the Reformed traditions with that of the Lutheran tradition. The partner in discussion here will be the Lutheran Church.

2.10.5.2 A theological scientific publication is planned for appearance in 2009. It is the only official Calvin publication that is planned by the involved church communities for the 500th celebration of the birthday of Calvin.

2.10.5.3 There is renewed action to expand the amount of participating church communities of the Convent. This assignment is given to dr. Kobus Gerber and Wim Dreyer in deliberation with the General Secretary, dr. Neels Smit. All church communities from the reformatory tradition (from the reformed and the Lutheran tradition) are suggested to join the Convent.

2.10.5.4 Without the intercession of the churches and active support the Convent cannot perform the assignment to visibility of church unity. With this intercession and support the Convent can become a considerable and decisive ecumenical movement in Southern Africa!

**Decision: Points 2.10.1 to 2.10.5.4 noted.**

**Recommendation**

2.10.6 The Synod takes note with appreciation of the ecumenical involvement that were developed and expanded by the die Convent.

**Decision: Approved.**

2.10.7 The Synod budgets for the yearly financial expenses of the GKSA as participating church community.

**Decision: Approved.**

2.11 *Synods of Soutpansberg and Midlands*

2.11.1 The Synod of 2006 appointed the Deputies according to article 48 CO to complete the discussion with the Synods of Soutpansberg and Midlands. Although the Deputies for Ecumenicity: Internal also got the assignment to have a discussion with these two Synods, it was accepted that this is an assignment for the *Deputies article 48 CO* – because of determined obligations that the Deputies received to this regard.

2.11.2 The *Deputies articles 48 CO* were given written notification of this viewpoint from the Deputies for Ecumenicity: Internal prevent confusion.

2.11.3 These Deputies thus do not report on this issue.

**Decision: Points 2.11.1 to 2.11.3 noted.**

**Recommendation**

2.11.4 The Synod endorses the actions of the Deputies.

**Decision: Approved.**

### **3. Compilation of Deputies**

3.1 The scope of the task of the Deputies to make sure that church discussions are constructed within the ecumenical assignment requires that at least 12 deputies should be appointed (including the advisors that will become full members), that could then be divided into desks.

**Decision: Noted.**

### **4. Assignment for the new Deputies**

The Synod appoints Deputies with the following assignments:

4.1 The Deputies have discussions with church communities in the country within the Reformed tradition with the purpose of church unity.

4.2 The Deputies start new discussions with the churches in the country within the Reformed tradition and the framework of *ecumenical contact*, and continue structured discussions within the framework of *ecumenical bands* with a view to *ecumenical unity*.

4.3 The Deputies continue to participate in the Inter Church Council, including discussions with the DR Church and the NH Church of Africa, and execute all assignments as set out in the Foundation of the Inter Church Council.

4.4 The Deputies continue with discussions with the Afrikaans Protestant Church.

4.5 The Deputies continue with discussions with the Rhine Church in South Africa (RCSA) and the Calvin Protestant Church of South Africa (CPCofSA).

4.6 The Deputies continue with discussions with the Free Reformed Church in South Africa.

4.7 The Deputies appoint delegates to the Convent for Reformatory Churches.

**Decision: Points 4.1 to 4.7 noted.**

4.8 The Deputies appoint delegates to the various assemblies of the SACC.

**Decision: Not approved.**

4.9 The Deputies invite the DR Church, the NH Church of Africa, the Afrikaans Protestant Church, the Rhine Church in South Africa, the Calvin Protestant Church of South Africa and the Free Reformed Church in South Africa to the Synod of 2012.

4.10 As further assignments the Deputies receives all the relevant endorsed recommendations in this report.

4.11 Die Deputate maak 'n opname van ekumeniese bande wat onderhou word deur plaaslike kerke, op plaaslike vlak.

**Decision: Points 4.9 to 4.11 approved.**