

20.8 OBJECTIONS BY BR AJ BURGER AGAINST DECISIONS OF THE NATIONAL SYNOD POTCHEFSTROOM

1985: REGARDING FORMULA FOR ORDINATION OF DEACONS
1997: REGARDING THE WORDING OF ARTICLE 25 OF THE CHURCH ORDER (Artt 19, 38, 189, 190, 303, 329)

- A. The Petition of Protest is stated.
- B. **Decision:** The Petition of Protest is referred to the Petition of Protest Commission 7.
- C. Rev AB van der Walt reports on behalf of the Petition of Protest Commission 7.
- D. **Decision:** The Commission report is referred back to the Commission.
- E. Rev H Reinecke reports on behalf of the Petition of Protest Commission 7.

F. REQUEST

1. Request for acceptability for inclusion in the Agenda (Additional) of the Regional Synod of Free State and KwaZulu-Natal

In considering this request the following chronological development of the objections is presented:

- 1.1 The objections were considered in the meetings of the Church Council of the Reformed Church Pinetown which did not agree with it. Since the objector could not conform to the decision, and the route of appeal was not judged to be in the best interest of the local church, the Church Council requested advice from Prof. A le Roux du Plooy.
- 1.2 Based on his advice the objections were addressed to the Regional Synod Free State and KwaZulu-Natal (18&19 November 2009) which considered it and also did not agree with the content.
- 1.3 Still in line with the advice and based on the acts of the National Synod Potchefstroom, the objections are now addressed to the General Synod 2009 for consideration

2 Justification of the request

(a) Church Procedural Advice

In his advice Prof A le R du Plooy referred to the application by the 1994 National Synod Potchefstroom of consequences of the successful objection by Prof B Spoelstra (1991) regarding the procedure for Objections. I.e. that with support of the Church Council the objector could direct the objections directly to the Regional Synod for consideration of the objection content.

At the 1994 Synod the 'legality' commission proposed the following consideration for the Synod (1994:53,53): (My free translation.)

"The question arises if there is presently one route to handle an Objection, being tested via the churchly way, or two routes, being that an objection by an individual to the applicable major meeting after consideration and rejection (by a minor meeting). The interpretation of the Commission is that the successful objection of Prof B Spoelstra means that Objections should follow the churchly way with the understanding that if the way to the next major meeting be blocked, the objector's right to object to the applicable major meeting should be supported. In such a case the objector should indicate clearly why he/she can not conform to the judgement of the minor meeting."

This report was considered by a pre-advising commission and based on their proposal the Synod decided the following: (1994:53) (My free translation):

"The right of direct access to any wider meeting for issues justified on Scripture, is not blocked by the 1991 decision."

(b) Inability to conform to Church Council Decision

Without going into all detail reasons why the objector could not conform to the decision of the Church Council, the nucleus is summarised.

The Church Council concluded that the Objections do not indicate: “*that the practise of house calls, as method to educate/develop all Church members, is in conflict with Scripture.*” (My free translation) With this argument the essence of the objection is however missed as the objection is not against house calls specifically, but the fact that ‘house calls to everybody’ is being uplifted to a Scripture founded God given order. The objector can not conform as it is experienced as false teaching if something that does not come forth from Scripture is taught to the Church as if it is from Scripture as a God given order.

(c) Inability to conform to the decision of the Regional Synod

The intention is to indicate the main reason why the objector can not conform to the decision without going into every point of detail.

In the reasoning that form the basis for the Regional Synod decision, the following Scriptures are indicated Ef 4:1-16; 1 Kor 12:12-31; Rom 12:1-8. These scriptures are addressed to the congregation (believers) and focus on their unity and communion as well as the gifts and services that support and build them. And although no one of these texts in anyway refers to the method in which the support or service should be done, and although the texts are applicable to communion by the whole congregation – the reasoning makes a jump to conclude that house calls by the deacons themselves to everybody in the congregation is an essential, practical implication; that it is a Scripture founded Godly order. This jump is not explained; in fact the practical inability for the Seven in Acts 6 to make personal house calls to all the thousands in the congregation is not accounted for at all. The objector is of opinion that this jump in reasoning is not founded on Scripture and can therefore not conform to the decisions based on it. The practise and importance of house calls by deacons to all in the congregation is not the issue of objections, but the declaration that it is a Godly order is not true to Scripture.

3 Request

The objector is of opinion that all requirements have been met as applied in the 1994 National Synod Potchefstroom (Acta 1994:52, 53) and as advised by Prof A le R du Plooy. The General Synod 2009 is requested to find these objections acceptable for inclusion in their agenda for the meeting in January 2009. In doing so the meeting would be supporting cooperatively in following the Church way without a minor meeting blocking the right to object to a decision by a major meeting.

G. PETITION OF PROTEST 1 – 1985: REGARDING FORMULA FOR ORDINATION OF DEACONS

1. Structure of the Objection(s) document

Since both objections have a common history, this history is stated in the beginning as applicable to both objections to prevent unnecessary repetition. This is followed by a short comment – also equally applicable to both objections. Lastly the objections are documented as two independent objections. The meeting is requested to consider the combined history and comment and then to consider the objections as two separate issues.

2. Historical context

Consideration and decisions related to the focus of the deacon service had a long history at National Synods Potchefstroom, with the following references applicable to these objections:

- (a) 1927 (Acta 1927:106 a.f.) The Synod decided to limit the deacon service to the care for the poor.
- (b) 1964 (Acta 1964:391 a.f.) A proposal from the Particular Synod Cape and SWA differed from the 1927 decision and this resulted in a study deputate with the order to do (my free translation): “*a thorough study of the deacon service referring to the*

Holy Scripture, the Confession, the Church Order, Church history and the Formula for Ordination of Deacons.”

- (c) 1967 (Acta 1967:160 a.f.) The study could not be completed “*due to the material that required in depth and long discussions...*”, (my free translation) and the synod deputised a new depute to complete the study.
- (d) 1970 (Acta 1970:338 a.f.) The Synod took note of the completed study report, discard the depute proposals and “*concludes with the study (alone)*”.
- (e) 1973 (Acta 1973:151 a.f.) An objection is offered against the 1970 decision to a) discard the study depute proposal; b) the reduction of the deacon service in Church Order Article 25; and c) the reduction of the deacon service in the Formula for the Ordination of Deacons. The synod did not take a decision and deputised a depute to consider the objection and advise the following Synod.
- (f) 1976 (Acta 1976:441 a.f.) The depute advised that the objection should not be successful. The synod however, do not approve of the proposal as it hardly addressed the “*difficult exegetic questions and far reaching implications*” (my free translation). The objections is again referred to a depute.
- (g) 1979 (Acta 1979:592 a.f.) The depute advised the synod to approve the objection related to the proposals of the 1970 study depute report that was rejected regarding the limitation of the deacon service in the Formula for Ordination of Deacons, but that the objection related to the limitation of the deacon service in Church Order Article 25 should not be accepted. Although the synod seemed supportive (referring to the decision to revise the formula for Deacon Ordination 1979:493), no decision is taken, probably due to an organisational glitch.
- (h) 1979 (Acta 1979:573 a.f.) As a result of content and discussion of a SDDS (Synodal Depute for Deacon Affairs) report, the synod deputised a study to “*Taking into account the study report regarding the Deacon Service (refer Acta Synod 1970) to investigate the whole service of the Deacon and the focus of ‘care for the poor’ as well as possible coordination with other parties of similar nature that might impact on body of Churches*” (my free translation)
- (i) 1982 (Acta 1982:468,469) The depute report related to the objection as tabled in 1979 are considered again and the Synod decide that the objection regarding the rejection of the 1970 depute report regarding the Formula for Deacon Ordination is successful, but that the objection against the Church Order Article 25 is not successful.
- (j) 1982 (Acta 1982:495 a.f.) The synod took note of the report from the study depute following from the discussion of the 1979 SDDS report (punt h above). One of the study conclusions was that the focus of the deacon service is in accordance with the study report of 1970.
- (k) 1982 (Acta 1982:439) Since the synod of 1979 did not take a decision related to the 1973 objection (organisational glitch), the order of 1979 regarding updating the Formula for Ordination of Deacons was not completed and the synod deputised a depute to do so.
- (l) 1985 (Acta 1985:335 a.f.) The Formula for Ordination of Deacons is approved as currently published in the new Afrikaans Book of Psalms. The objection stated in § 4 is against some formulation in this Formula.
- (m) 1997 (Acta 1997:562 a.f.) The synod was requested to revise the wording of Church Order Article 25 in order to bring it in line with the changed (1985) Formula for Ordination of Deacons since the material imbalance brought tension between the Formula and the Church Order. The synod approved the proposed rewording of Church Order 25 as published in the new Afrikaans Book of Psalms as well as the white “Church Order Booklet”. The objections stated in § 5 is against this rewording.

3. Comment

Both objections stated below are not aimed against the focus of the deacon service and does not aim to re-open any such consideration. The stated objectives furthermore has

no problem with any particular method of work by any council of deacons, there is specifically no objection against house calls to the whole congregation in itself. The objections are not about the meaningfulness, the need or practicability of house calls by deacons to everybody in the congregation. Both objections address the correctness, or not, of a specific method of work being decreed by the National/General Synod for all Councils of Deacons on how they must execute their work.

It is the intention that this English text would be a clear and correct account of the cases made in direction as well as content. If there are however discrepancies the meeting is requested to use the Afrikaans text as correct.

To facilitate clear referencing, all quotes is in *cursive* font and text references are indicated as (year : page number).

4. Objection decision of the National Synod Potchefstroom 1985 regarding Formula for Ordination of Deacons

4.1 Decision objected against

Objection is made against the decision of the National Synod Potchefstroom 1985 (Acta 1985:357) being: *“Decision: 1. Approved following changes.”* (my free translation) regarding proposed Formula for the Ordination of Deacons (Acta 1985:354-357).

The complete Formula is published in the new Book of Psalms and only portions directly related to the objection are quoted (Own underlining and free translation):

“... For this reason (to be ordained as a deacon) you, brother being ordained, as well as all present should first hear a short declaration of the establishment of the deacon service from the Word of God.

Together with other deacons you must –

Visit everybody and inspire them to ...

by visiting everybody ensure that ...

You heard what your order is. We ask you now ...

Do you promise to execute your Godly order truthfully and with eagerness ...”

4.2 Motivation

The need and/or appropriateness of house visits by deacons in the service of all in the congregation is not the issue in this objection. The fact that a practical work method is decreed as if it comes forth from the Word of God is the issue. To declare something that does not come forth from the Scripture as if it is a “Godly order” is not according to Scripture and against the Reformed Confessions and practise.

4.3 Discussion/Argumentation

4.3.1 Objection ground 1: The decree of a specific work method in the Formula does not come forth from the Scripture or the Confessions of Faith, and to put it to the Church as if it does comes forth from Scripture is in conflict with the Reformed Confession. The purpose of the Formula is given in the Formula itself – to give an explanation from Scripture regarding the formation of the deacon service. The foundation in Scripture of almost the whole Formula, the focus of the deacon service on the whole congregation is clearly reflected in the documents that were considered in the relevant Synod meetings of 1964 (Acta 1964:390 a.f. as part of proposal), 1970 (Acta 1970:338 a.f. as report of the study deputate) and 1982 (Acta 1982:495 a.f. as part of the second study deputate report). Further also as applied by the Synod in approving the objection in that was considered by the Synod meetings of 1973 (Acta 1973:151 a.f.), 1979 (Acta 1979:592 a.f.) and 1982 (Acta 1982:439).

However, the ordination of a specific work methodology does not feature in any way in any of these documents. In fact, the decreed work method (to visit everybody in the congregation) seems not to have been possible in the Jerusalem congregation in Acts 6 as can be concluded of the ratio of the number of Deacons and the number of members in the congregation. In fact, the objector could find nowhere in Scripture any references to any specific method in which way Deacons should go about executing their work.

And yet, the Formula is declaring a specific work methodology with Godly authority as if it comes forth from Scripture as a “Godly order.”

This is in conflict with the Reformed way of working with Scripture and also in conflict with the Reformed Confession of Faith as it is formulated in the Netherland Confession of Faith Article 7.

4.3.2 Objection ground 2: The approach in the Formula for Ordination for Deacons is not in harmony with other Formulae for Ordination.

The practical work method of house calls by the specific services in the Church is for elders and ministers just as valid as it is for deacons. And yet, the Formulae for Ordination of Elders and Ministers do not contain the pretence that such work method comes forth from Scripture. These other Formulae keep to the principles and objectives of the services and leave the practical work methodologies to be considered by the local Church council (with some order agreements in the Church Order). The fact that house calls are not included in these Formulae does not reduce the seriousness with which Elders and Ministers (Church councils) consider and decide on their work methodology in the congregation.

The services of minister, elder and deacon is equal, each one distinguished according to specific calling. There is no foundation why a specific work methodology for one (deacon) should be specifically highlighted and not for the other two. Based on the equality of the services there is an expectation that the approach in the formulae for dedications should be similar for all three.

In contrast to this, the Formula for the Ordination of Deacons decree a specific work method (house calls to all) as part of a “Godly order”. This is not in harmony with the Formulae for Ordination of Elders and Ministers, which exclusively keep to the Scripture founded principles and objectives of the elder and minister services.

4.3.3 Objection ground 3: The declaration in the Formula for Ordination of Deacons of a work method that does not come forth from Scripture, is in conflict with the Reformed (Presbyterial) Church Governance structure.

Referring to the description of the Reformed or Presbyterial Church governance by Dr. Bouke Spoelstra in “Gereformeerde Kerkreg en Kerkregering – Handboek by die Kerkorde” (1989:1, 8) Church governance is described as the governance that Christ, as King and Head of his Church prescribes and which comes forth from Scripture via exegesis. Church Government is when this Church governance is applied in practise and the Church Order is a set or order agreements assisting elders in the practical execution of Church Government.

House calls as a specific and apparently only Godly ordained work methodology is not deducted by direct exegesis. It is a deduction/judgement of a practical method to bring the Godly ordained calling into being, as there could be several other methods to do the same. To include a practical work methodology assisting the orderly and beneficial execution of the Deacon service in the congregation in the Formula for Ordinance of Deacons as if it comes forth from Scripture as part of Godly order, is equivalent to uplift something that is at most a orderly agreement to the level of Church Governance prescribed by Christ – Something that is in conflict with the structure of the Reformed / Presbyterial Church Governance.

4.4 *Proposal*

If this objection is successful it is proposed that the applicable portions in the Formula for Ordination of Deacons be changed to the following (my free translation):

“Together with your fellow deacons you must

- 1. Inspire everybody to real action love towards fellow Christians and all people;*
- 2. Ensure that no one miss out on the communion of faith due to being poor, lonely, aged, sickness or whatever other reason;*

Motivation: Dropping the decree of work method from the Formula for Ordination of Deacons would resolve all three listed objection grounds against the current wording – it will bring the Formula under the intended declaration of Scripture founded principles and objective without adding anything to it, it would bring it in harmony with other

Formulae for Ordination and also bring it in line with the Reformed/Presbyterian Church Governance structure.

H. PETITION OF PROTEST 2 – 1997: REGARDING THE WORDING OF ARTICLE 25 OF THE CHURCH ORDER

1. Objection against decision of the National Synod Potchefstroom 1997 regarding the wording of article 25 of the Church Order

1.1 *Decision objecting against*

An objection is made against the decision of the National Synod Potchefstroom 1997 (Acta 1997:562): *“Decision: The Synod approves the Revision.”* Regarding the request to revise the wording of Church Order Article 25.

The approved wording of CO art. 25 is published in the Book of Psalms and in the white “Kerkordeboekie” and only the direct applicable sentence is quoted: (my free translation):

“...Their (deacons) order/job is to visit all in the congregation to ...”

1.2 *Motivation*

The current wording of CO art. 25 puts more reglementation on churches and councils of deacons than which is justified from Scripture. It pressurises the conscience of Churches, Councils of Deacons and individuals deacons with something that is not founded from Scripture and leave no room to take local conditions into account in considering the work methodology of deacons.

It furthermore appears that this hides the responsibility of Councils of Deacons to consider local conditions at least partially. In cases where local conditions might require a different practical method to meet the deacon service principles and objectives, the wording of CO art 25 results in either silent acceptance of the deviation from the Church Order, or the gifts of some potential deacons are prevented from serving as deacons, or deacons come under difficult force of conscience on something that does not come forth from Scripture.

1.3 *Discussion / Argumentation*

1.3.1 Objection ground 1: The wording of CO art 25 to decree a fixed work methodology is not true to the Reformed/Presbyterian principles for Church Governance

In the proposal to revise the article (Acta 1997:564) the following was stated (my free translation):

“With regards to the style of the Church Order, B Spoelstra writes in ‘Handleiding by die Kerkorde’ (1965:13) that the Church Order “defines a principle and it is expected that the principle and spirit of order is understood and different situations be considered on merit. A Reglement in contrast prescribes a precise action, rather indicating how something should be done and not what should be done.

In connection with CO art. 25 it is concluded that the principle regarding the deacon service should be explicit and the execution of the service only in main considerations without reglementing the service in detail.”

And notwithstanding this reference, the approved wording of CO art 25 contains in fact a detail prescription of “how it should be done.” The way in which the work has to be done is prescribed directly.

Dr GPL van der Linde writes the following in ‘Die Grondbeginsels van die Presbiteriale Kerkregeringstelsel’ (1965:31) (my free translation): *“... Church officials should in the first place seek/investigate the principles that Christ has laid down in the Holy Scripture, his Word for the behaviour of the Church. From these principles the governance for the Church should be deducted and formed. The Church Governance ... must always have the principles from God’s Word as foundation. The Church governance may contain nothing else than the application of these principles.”* He also state very explicit (1965:94) that: *“They may not prescribe anything different to the Church that what is included in Scripture or concluded from it.”*

Dr B Spoelstra ask in ‘Gereformeerde Kerkreg en Kerkregering – Handboek by die Kerkorde’ (1989:4): *“... How can we differentiate in principle between the governance*

that should be and the governance prescribed by the governors of the Church? The Church governance must either have the kingdom (Christ as prescriber) or the Church as foundation to determine who should determine the governance that should be.”

When the Church prescribes a specific work methodology in the Church Order as absolute on same certainty as the focus of the service that comes forth from Scripture, then it goes further than what Christ gave in his Word and is it the Church that determines governance. This is not in accordance with the reformed/Presbyterial Church Governance.

- 1.3.2 Objection ground 2: The unqualified prescription of work method in CO 25 is in conflict with the structure of Reformed/Presbyterial Church Governance.

In “Gereformeerde Kerkreg en Kerkregering – Handboek by die Kerkorde” by Dr Bouke Spoelstra (1989:1, 8) the structure of the reformed church governance as described as the governance that Christ prescribed as King and Head of his Church and it is extracted by exegesis from Scripture. Church government is when this Church Governance is executed in practise while the Church Order serves as determination of order supporting the elders in practical execution of the Church governance in Church government.

By putting a practical work methodology for orderly and beneficial execution of the deacon service on the same level as the principles of the service, then something of orderly arrangement is elevated from an orderly agreement to direct church governance – this is in conflict with the Reformed Church governance structure.

- 1.3.3 Objection ground 3: The unqualified prescription of a specific work methodology in CO art 25 is in conflict with Church Order Article 30.

The decision to broaden the focus of the deacon service is indeed a subject for major meeting as it concerns all the Churches. Likewise the decisions that such redefinition (reunderstanding) of the deacon service should be included in the Formula for Ordination of Deacons and the Church Order article 25.

The exact work methodology how the service should be executed on local level is however a subject that is not forthcoming from Scripture itself and is something that should be considered by minor meeting and Councils of deacons with reporting in the Church Council Meeting. The major meeting should at most be guiding towards a preferred methodology with freedom to minor meetings to consider and decide in responsibility as is the case in CO article 23 relating to work method of elders.

Van der Linde states in ‘Die Grondbeginsels van die Presbiteriale Kerkregeringstelsel’ (1965:153) (my free translation): *“It is furthermore true that major meetings may not take the Church Government out of the hands of the Church Council or to rule over it; the power of the major meeting is limited to its own terrain and must be executed in accordance to the Word of God”* Not in any one of the documents considered by the Synods is any reference regarding the Scripture foundation or reasoning of exegesis of any particular work methodology. Likewise, the objector could not find any such reference in the Bible at all.

When a major meeting (National Synod Potchefstroom 1997) prescribe a particular work method that is not forthcoming from Scripture, then it considers a subject that could have been handled by a minor meeting. This is in conflict with Church Order Article 30.

- 1.3.4 Objection ground 4: The specific prescription of work methodology in CO art.25 is not in harmony with the rest of the Church Order.

The specific services in the Church (minister, elder, deacon) are separate and equal and it is true to state that the expectation of house calls to everybody in the congregation as practical method to execute each of the services, is equally an expectation for elders and ministers as it is for deacons. Based on the equality of the services it is logic to expect a clear harmony in the balance between principle and practical work methodology within agreements regarding the order for execution in the Church Order regarding the equal services.

However, in CO art. 16 regarding the service of Ministers there is no mention whatsoever regarding the work methodology to be followed. In CO art. 23 regarding the service of elders the expectation of house visits are stated to benefit the congregation, both before and after the Holy Communion – but it include the qualification (my free translation) “... as circumstances of time and place may allow ...” In both cases the eventual consideration and decision regarding work methodology in the local Church is left to the responsibility of the local Church.

In contrast, CO art. 25 regarding the service of deacon contains an explicit prescription that (my free translation): “*Their order/job is to visit everybody...*” without any freedom to take local circumstances into account and without cognisance of the independence of the local Church. The current wording of CO art 25 that prescribe a work method explicitly without room to consider local circumstances is not in harmony with the rest of the Church Order.

1.3.5 Objection ground 5: The prescription in CO art.25 of a specific work method is in conflict with the Reformed Church Governance as it negates the equality and independence of the deacon service.

This objection ground is about the question to which extent the governing service (elders, minor and major Church meetings), more specifically the National Synod Potchefstroom, may consider and decide which specific work method the deacons of a local Church must follow in execution of their service. Three references are sited and quoted in support of this consideration:

(a) Visser writes in “Die Kerkorde in Praktyk” (1999:4) (my free translation): “*The services in the church of Christ are all equal, although their services differ. Between the services there are no difference in status, they are differentiated in respective assignments/calling*”

(b) Specifically with regards to the requirement in CO art. 25 that (my free translation) “*The deacons report in the Church Council...*” Dr B Spoelstra writes in ‘Gereformeerde Kerkreg en Kerkregering – Handboek by die Kerkorde’ (1989:156) (my free translation): “*They (the Church Council) must first verify that the (deacon) service is executed above suspicion, honest, dedicated, in responsibility to the requirements of Scripture and answering to the norm of love and that the service is responsible, unbiased, and complete to benefit of the Church and promotion of the Kingdom of God. This reporting does not give to the Church council any right to take the service of deacons over, to control, to monitor in detail, to change or to veto the deacon service. The Church council may deem it necessary to sharpen up the deacons in their service on the grounds of their spiritual responsibility in the church governance for the whole congregation.*”

Spoelstra writes further (1989:152) (my free translation): “*Right from the start the service of the Seven was independent and nowhere subordinate to the service of elders. The apostles withdrew the completely from the service of the tables (Hand. 6:3-6; 1 Tim 3:8-13). The deacons service therefore with the authority of Christ in their service and has full ‘governing’ competency in their service ...*”

(c) The third reference quoted is by Dr GPL van der Linde who wrote the following in ‘Die Grondbeginsels van die Presbiteriale Kerkregeringstelsel’ (1965:103,104) (my free translation):

“*... deacons execute their service independently as far as the executive authority bestowed upon them. They decide in the council of deacons who should be supported and how; they request the faithful to provide the means and comfort, encourage and care for the poor and activate them towards thankfulness towards Christ.*

When the elders oversee the execution of the deacon service in general and they therefore report to the Church council about their service, the independence of the deacon service is not negated. In fact, each church official, also elder and minister owes responsibility towards the Church council regarding the execution

of their calling. The intention therefore of the deacons reporting to the Church council in general, is not that as far as their specific service is concerned, they be subject to several prescriptions by the Church Council. The Church council do however determine that the deacons should care for the poor. But which persons are cared for, how they are cared for is something for the deacons to determine.

Therefore, although the deacon service in essence is not church government in general, it is partially involved in church government for one aspect of church life.”

Note that van der Linde still limits the focus of the deacon service to care for the poor as it was pre-1985. He furthermore refers to deacons reporting to the Church council and not the newer wording of the reporting in the Church Council.

Based on the background of the above quoted three references, the following conclusion is drawn:

When a major meeting of Churches, being represented by delegated elders and ministers, prescribe a specific work method to a council of deacons of a local church without it coming forth from Scripture through exegesis, then such major meeting and the delegated elders and ministers put a requirement on the deacons that negates their independence and equality of service or calling. The deacons' independent and direct responsibility to Christ as Head of the Church for their service, to consider and decide on their work method to execute his order, is not maintained.

(Obviously the deacons still report in the Council of Churches and remain as such under governance of the Church council – but then in the capacity described in the three references quoted above.)

1.4 *Recommendation*

If the objection against the current wording Church Order article 25 is successful, it is proposed to change the wording in accordance with the relevant wording of CO art 23: (Free translation of the applicable sentence):

“Their job/call is to visit everybody in the congregation, for the upliftment of the Church as circumstances of time and place allow, and ...”

Motivation: The recommended wording would not only resolve all the stated objection grounds, the importance of house visits by deacons to everybody as recommended work method would be retained.

I. **REPORT OF THE COMMISSION RE PETITION OF PROTEST 1**

1. **Assignment**

- 1.1 Petition of Protest: br AJ Burger against decisions of the National Synod Potchefstroom 1985: Regarding the Formula of ordination of deacons.

Decision: Noted.

2. **Matters that the Synod should take note of**

- 2.1 Request for receptivity for the Supplementary Agenda of the General Synod 2009.
2.2 Motivation of request.
2.3 Request.
2.4 Structure of the Petition(s) of Protest.
2.5 Historical course of events.
2.6 Remark.
2.7 Pts 4.1-4.2 which deals with the decision that is protested regarding the Formula of ordination of deacons as well as the motivation.
2.8 Pt 4.4: the recommendation of the protestor.
2.9 The commission and the protestor were in telephonic discussions with each other.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.9 noted.

3. Matters on which the Synod should decide

- 3.1 Pt 4.3: the grounds for protest 1-3 of the protest regarding the decisions taken in 1985 with regard to the Formula of ordination of deacons.
- 3.2 Pt 4.4: the recommendation of the protestor.

Decision: Noted.

4. Argumentation

4.1 Ground of Protest 1: 1985 regarding the formulary for the installation of deacons

The protestor claims that the method determinations (that deacons should visit everybody) in the Formulary are not founded in the Scripture or confession and to present it like that is contradictory to the Reformed Confession.

4.1.1 Reasoning of ground of protest 1

- 4.1.1.1 The protestor tries to claim that “*the visits*” (as prescribed in the Formulary) from the Formulary is connected to the “assignment from God” and that it is not an assignment from God (according to him). But the protestor makes an unrightfully thought transference that the Formulary does not make. The Formulary has a particular structure, namely Calling (vocative), then indicative from the Word, then imperative (resting in the indicative), and then the questions, arousal and prayers. The assignments in the Formulary are not assignments from nowhere but are assignments that are anchored in the calling and indicative in the Word of God. That is the first presentation of the Formulary. The protestor jumps from “visits to all” to the “assignment from God” and ignores the calling and indicative from the Word. The “assignment from God” in question 3 of the Formulary, is in relation to the calling (question 1) of the deacon; and his confession/ maintaining of the Word of God in doctrinal purity (question 2) and has a relation with the indicative from the Word. The Formulary does not want to regulate, but wants to apply the principle in practice. The principle is flowing from the assignment for care and koinonia. The application comes to live in the way in which these assignments are executed. The local congregation can then by themselves decide in what way practice will fit into circumstances.
- 4.1.1.2 The protestor claims that the method determinations (plural) in the Formulary for the installation of deacons are not founded in Scripture, and that there is no Scriptural references that would indicate a determined method. But the protestor fails to proof that the method determinations (home visits) is contradictory to the Scripture.
- 4.1.1.3 The protestor acknowledges that “the Scriptural foundation of nearly the whole Formulary and the scope of the service of deacon is clear from the points of description and study reports from Synods 1964, 1970, 1973, 1979, 1982 and 1985”, but he claims that the prescription of a determined method (doing visits), is not found in any of the abovementioned Synod pieces. The principle of visits, namely care (with reference to Acts 6) is clearly found in study report 1985. Further: The deaconal aspect in Acts 6 comes down to caring for the whole congregation, to serve the whole congregation as a congregation of unity. The deaconal service in action, are in concrete relations to the daily needs of people. The deaconal service must encourage the whole congregation to show mercy: care of the poor and encourage the rich to show mercy.
- 4.1.1.4 The protestor refers only to Acts 6 in the Scriptural support of his protest and then claims unsubstantiated “that the specific prescription (to visit everybody) would also not have been practically possible in the first congregation ...in Acts 6, as can be derived from the ratio between the amount of deacons against the amount of members in the congregation”. The argument of the protestor is not valid, since the assignment of the first seven deacons was connected to the Greek-speaking widowers. Further these first deacons can also not be directly compared to the current deacons. The commission is convinced that the care and koinonia task of deacons (Acts 6) is mostly created in interpersonal contact between the deacons and the believers, amongst other through VISITS. In order not to miss one (compare

Acts 6:1) there is an explicit order that each one has to be looked after therefore this interpersonal contact is created by personal visits.

- 4.1.1.5 It must be acknowledged that the protester is correct when indicating that there is no direct reference in Scripture regarding “home visits” with regards to the service of deacons. But this is not enough to indicate that the assignment “to do visits” is not from the Scripture. The commission is convinced that the protester deviates from the Reformed Scriptural use: he overlooks the scope of the Scripture and look for determined text references to justify the issue. He also forgets that understanding an issue from Scripture, does not rest on single tasks, but must be understood from the revelation historical relation of the Scripture. From Acts 6:1 it must be derived that nobody may be overlooked, and this directly indicate that all the believers are the object of (deaconal) care and koinonia. The commission is also convinced that the assignment to do “visits” (that is interpersonal contact) has its implicit foundation in the revelation theoretical relation of the whole Bible (OT and NT) for three particular services. The assignment to watch that nobody fall behind, cannot be separated from the assignment that believers must look after each other: “*Carry each other’s burdens*” (Gal.6:2), “*The eye cannot say to the hand: “I don’t need you!”... but that its parts should have equal concern for each other*” (1 Kor.12:21-26), “*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing*” (1 Thess.5:11). “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...*” (James.1:27).
- 4.1.1.6 The commission is convinced that the care and koinonia task of the deacons (and also the care tasks of ministers and elders) is shaped in the VISITS (home visit, hospital visit, illness visit, prisoner visit, etc.) to members, in order for *no one to be missed* (compare Acts 6:1). Practically the daily care cannot be fully practiced without doing personal visits at members.
- 4.1.1.7 The protester claims that the specific method of the deacons (to visit everyone), and the determination thereof as assignment from God, is contradictory to the Reformed Confession as formulate in BC art. 7. But he does not proof this. The commission judges that the Reformed Confession actually leaves space for the authority of the churches amongst each other in a determined order to maintain the body and maintain it to the advantage of the church, but that such order regulations may not deviate from that, which was introduced by Christ (BC art. 32). The churches have the method of the deacons that is found in the Formulary for the Installation of deacons, set out to serve the unity, harmony and advantage of the churches. The Formulary of the installation of deacons is not in contradiction to the confession.
- 4.1.1.8 What is also illustrative is the fact that the Formulary for the Installation of deacons used the words “*visit*”, while the protester in his reason uses “*home visit*”. Home visit is actually only one form of the method, but “*visit*” can be created in many other forms. The Church Order also uses the word “*visit*” and not “*home visit*” (in the edition before 1997; as well as in the 1997 edition).
- 4.1.1.9 The protester fails to view the methods of the services of the minister, elder and deacon (separately) as a whole from the Formulary, Confession and Church order: What the one does not say, the other one says. At all three services the method of visits is clearly embodied: Visits of ministers: Installation Formulary; Visits of elders: Church Order article 23; Visits of deacons: Installation Formulary and Church Order.
- 4.1.2 Finding: Ground of Protest 1
- 4.1.2.1 The Formulary for the Installation of deacons does not bind the consciences of people to an order that is not from Scripture, because care for the body of Christ is an assignment of Christ and also a principle that can be deviated from other parts of the Scripture. The assignment “that deacons must visit everyone” is founded in Scripture.
- 4.1.2.2 The commission thinks that a thorough study regarding the determined method of visits regarding the three particular services, from the Scripture, needs immediate attention regarding church historical development and the church practice (as is

found in the Formularies and Church Order). The restricted time during this Synod does not allow the commission to fulfil this task. Such a study should be orderly and tables at the Synod to be of service to the churches. VISITS of ministers, elders and deacons in their different services, is actually one of the dear pillars in the GKSA that should be kept safe and should be enhanced to the glory of God, to the growth of churches and to the welfare of each member.

Decision: Noted.

4.1.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 1.

Ground of protest 1 fails.

Decision: Approved.

4.2 Ground of protest 2

The protester claims that the editing team of the Formulary for the installation of deacons is not in harmony with the other formularies of installation.

4.2.1 Reasoning: Ground of protest 2

4.2.1.1 The claim of the protester is not correct. The installation formulary for ministers indicates the work of office of the ministers amongst others in the following way: *“As shepherd you should grasp the trustworthy Word according to the doctrine, and cut it in the correct way. In the services and in home visit you should educate and console members, discipline, according to the demand of the different circumstances”*. Therefore home visits are a clear demand for ministers.

4.2.1.2 The installation formulary for elders amongst others states: *“you must carefully take note of the doctrine and life of each member and support all Christians with advice and consoling”*. Visits are not explicitly named in the Formulary for elders, but it is implied by word like: *“care”, “carefully take note”, “support with advice and consoling”*. This assignment to visits comes from the image of the shepherd (1 Pet. 5:2-3) Visits from part of the essence of the work of the shepherd; it is the care for the sheep (Also see pt.4.1.1.9 above).

4.2.2 Finding: Ground of Protest 2

The protester indicates no grounds for the fact that the formularies for the installation of ministers, elders and deacons are contradictory to each other. The commission judges that that there is clear harmony between the formularies with regards to performing visits.

Decision: Points 4.2.1 to 4.2.2 noted.

4.2.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 2.

Ground of protest 2 fails.

Decision: Approved.

4.3 Ground of protest 3

The protester claims that the installation formulary for deacons describes a determined method not found in Scripture, and therefore is contradictory to the structure of the Reformed Church Authority.

4.3.1 Reasoning of Ground of protest 3

Care of people in need was the assignment from Christ to all the religious. By organising the assignment for visits as part of the ministerial work of the deacons, that mostly perform care work, executes the assignment of Christ for the wellbeing of His church. The reasoning in 4.1.1.1; 4.1.1.5; 4.1.1.6 above is also applicable here.

4.3.2 Finding: Ground of protest 3

The protester does not show that the formulary for installation is in contradiction to the Reformed Church polity.

Decision: Points 4.3 to 4.3.2 noted.

4.3.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 3

Ground of protest 3 fails.

Decision: Approved.

5. Recommendations regarding the petition of protest 1 – 1985: Regarding formulary for the installation of deacons

5.1 The petition of protest as a whole fails.

Decision: Approved.

J. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION RE PETITION OF PROTEST 2

1. Assignment

Petition of Protest: br AJ Burger against decisions of the National Synod Potchefstroom 1997: Regarding the editing of Church Order article 25.

Decision: Noted.

2. Matters to be noted by Synod.

2.1 Request for receptivity for the Supplementary Agenda of the General Synod 2009.

2.2 Motivation of request.

2.3 Request.

2.4 Structure of the Petition(s) of Protest.

2.5 Historical development.

2.6 Remarks.

2.7 Pte 5.1 and 5.2 that deal with the decision against which the protestor protests regarding the editing of Church Order article 25, as well as the motivation.

2.8 Pt 5.4: the recommendation of the protestor.

2.9 The commission and protestor were telephonically in discussion with one another.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.9 noted.

3. Matters Synod must decide

3.1 Pt 5.3: the grounds of protest 1-5 of the protest regarding decisions taken in 1997 i.r.o. the editing of Church Order art 25.

3.2 Pt 5.4: the recommendation of the protestor.

Decision: Noted.

4. Argumentation

4.1 Ground of petition 1

The protestor avers that CO article 25's fixed prescription of method cannot be accounted for from church polity principles and thus regulates.

4.1.1 Argumentation: Ground of petition 1

4.1.1.1 The protestor's argumentation of this ground of protest rests on his averment that Scripture does not provide any principles i.r.o. the instruction to deacons "to visit everyone in the congregation" The commission is convinced that visits are a material method determined by Scripture. The protestor's argumentation of the whole ground of protest 1 rests thus on an own viewpoint of CO art 25 as being regulating. That the commission is convinced that visits are a material method determined by Scripture, rests upon the following:

4.1.1.1.1 The protestor avers that he could not find any reference in Scripture that could indicate a specific method. Yet the protestor fails to prove that the provisions regarding home visits are contrary to Scripture.

4.1.1.1.2 The principle base of visits, namely care (with reference to Acts 6) is indicated clearly in the study report National Synod 1985. Further: The diaconal aspect in Acts 6 boils down to care of the whole congregation, to serve the whole congregation in a united congregation. The service of the deacon in action comes to the fore in its most concrete form in contact with people in their daily need. The service of the deacon must motivate the whole congregation to show love: Caring of the poor and encouraging the well-off to show love.

4.1.1.1.3 Scripture does not provide any direct reference in relation to "home visit" in the context of the service of the deacon. Yet it is not sufficient ground to declare the instruction "to do home visit" as unscriptural. The commission is convinced that the

understanding of a matter in Scripture does not rely on a few texts but that it must be understood in the revelation-historical context of Scripture. From Acts 6:1 it must be deduced that no one may be overlooked, and this already indicates that all the believers are the object of (diaconal) care and koinonia. The commission is also convinced that the instruction to conduct "home visits" (i.e. interpersonal contact), does have its foundation implicitly in the revelation-historical context of the whole of Scripture (OT and NT) for all three special services. The instruction to take care that no one falls behind, cannot be severed from the instruction that believers must give attention to one another and look after one another: "*Carry each other's burdens*" (Gal.6:2 NIV), "*The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' ... but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*" (1 Cor.12:21-26), "*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*" (1 Thess 5:11). "*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...*" (James 1:27).

4.1.1.1.4 The commission is convinced that the tasks of care and koinonia of the deacons (as are the tasks of care of ministers and elders) especially finds form in the VISITS (home visit, hospital visits, visits to the sick, visits to the imprisoned, etc.) at members' homes, so that *no one is overlooked* (cf. Acts.6:1). Practically, the daily care cannot become reality without personal visits in members' homes.

4.1.1.2 The Church Order art 25 determines the order in the church by applying the Scriptural principles in church practice. The church order has the kingdom (Christ as Lawmaker through his Word) as point of departure in the determination of the diaconal service in CO art 25. Thus CO art 25 is directed by principle as well as practice, and art 25 gives practical prescriptions founded in Scriptural principles (cf also CO art. 23, 57, 68, 69, etc.).

4.1.2 Finding: Ground of protest 1

Church order article 25's prescription of method is accounted for in Scriptural principles. The commission is of the opinion that the need for diaconal visits flow from Scriptural principles and is thus contained in CO art. 25. The protestor fails to prove that the instruction "to visit everyone in the congregation" in CO art.25 is unscriptural, because his point of departure relies on the notion that Scripture (according to him) provides no principles on this matter.

Decision: Points 4.1.1 to 4.1.2 noted.

4.1.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 1.

Ground of protest 1 fails.

Decision: Approved.

4.2 Ground of protest 2

The protestor avers that art 25 CO provides an unqualified prescriptive method that is in conflict with the structure of Reformed Church Polity.

4.2.1 Argumentation: Ground of protest 2

The protestor is of the opinion that the prescribed method provided in CO art 25, is unqualified. It is unclear what he means by this. He still takes as point of departure that the method is not Scripturally founded. The commission judges that the arrangement of diaconal visits through CO art 25 is not something that can be "at most an order arrangement". The diaconal visits are qualified for it is a Scripturally founded instruction. That the diaconal visits are a Scripturally founded instruction, was already thoroughly argued in point 4.1.1.

4.2.2 Finding: Ground of protest 2

The protestor does not indicate that CO art.25 is an unqualified prescription that is in conflict with Reformed Church Polity.

Decision: Points 4.2.1 to 4.2.2 noted.

4.2.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 2
Ground of protest 2 fails.

Decision: Approved.

4.3 Ground of protest 3

The protestor avers that the unqualified prescription of a certain method is in conflict with art 30 CO.

4.3.1 Argumentation: Ground of protest 3

4.3.1.1 The protestor argues this ground of protest still from an own viewpoint that the method of visits is unscriptural, and the protestor is of the opinion that it therefore should have no place in CO art 25, and that it could be arranged in local churches by church councils and deacons.

4.3.1.2 The prescription i.r.o. diaconal visits is a qualified, Scripturally founded instruction (see point 4.1.1 of the report). The instruction affects all local churches and must therefore be dealt with at a greater meeting. Church order article 30 is indeed meant for greater meetings to give effect to the common mutual accord of all the churches for matters that affect all eg. formularies and church polity. Matters such as the content of the formularies and church polity cannot be finalised at a lesser meeting and thus must be finalised according to CO art 29 and 30.

4.3.1.3 The commission judges that the Reformed Confession does allow that the rulers amongst one another in greater meetings may determine and maintain a certain order for maintenance of the body to the use and benefit of the church, but that such order arrangements may not deviate from what was instituted by Christ (BC art.32).

4.3.2 Finding: Ground of protest 3

The method prescribed in CO art 25 is a qualified, Scripturally founded instruction that involve all deaconates and church councils. Thus it is a matter for the denomination that must be dealt with in greater meetings. This is not in conflict with CO art.30.

Decision: Points 4.3.1 to 4.3.2 noted.

4.3.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 3
Ground of protest 3 fails.

Decision: Approved.

4.4 Ground of protest 4

The protestor avers that the prescription i.r.o. diaconal visits in CO art 25 is not in harmony with the rest of the Church Order. The protestor says that the offices in the church are separate and equal, and that it is logical on the basis of the equality principle to expect that there should be clear measure of harmony in the order arrangements in the balance between principle and practical method. And this harmony the protestor does not find.

4.4.1 Argumentation: Ground of protest 4

4.4.1.1 The fact that “to all” is not mentioned in CO art.16 and 23 i.r.o. ministers and elders, does not mean that these two services need not visit everyone. To the contrary, also these two services’ visits to all are assumed. The omission of the words “to all” in CO art.16 & 23 is not an inequality or disharmony – as the protestor avers. The same also applies i.r.o. the silence of CO art 16 on home visits: It is obviously assumed as a Scriptural instruction as it is pertinently mentioned in the formulary for ordination of ministers.

4.4.1.2 With regard to the prescriptions for Ministers of the Word, CO art 16, it is alleged that “no mention is made of visits”. Yet CO article 16 says: “*The office of a minister of the Word is to persevere in prayers, proclaim the Word and administer the sacraments, attend to and oversee his fellow ministers, the elders, the deacons and church members, and ultimately, in conjunction with the elders, exercise the discipline of the church and ensure that everything in the church takes place in an orderly and proper manner.*”

Prof. GPL van der Linde (Die Kerkorde, 'n Verklaring van die Gereformeerde Kerkorde, p.72) says i.r.o. "proclaim the Word" the following: "The Word must be ministered in public in the worship service and in homes during home visits, including visits to the ill (Hand.20:20). A minister who does not perform home visits is unfaithful to his assignment. It also includes ministry to the children (See Joshua 4:6ff.; Mat.19:13, 15)".

Regarding the "attend to and oversee his fellow ministers" Van der Linde (p.73) says the following: "He must admonish the unruly, encourages those who lack courage, support the weak, be patient towards all (see 1 Thess.5:14,15). This must happen in the preaching as well as in personal interaction directed at everyone by means of the Word". The "personal interaction directed at everyone by means of the Word" then most certainly include visits.

4.4.1.3 With regard to CO art.23, dealing with the office of the elder, the protestor avers that the arrangements or home visits "to the edification of the congregation" prior to and after Holy Communion; and "...as circumstances allow from time to time ..." in both cases the eventual consideration and decision of specific methods in the local church is left to the responsibility of the local church council. The fact is, home visits are arranged here. With "prior to Holy Communion" Van der Linde says (p.100): "Holy Communion may thus not be celebrated without the prior home visits and the resulting report meeting of the elders". Van der Linde says "the determination that home visits must also take place after Holy Communion, links to the abovementioned principle. After Holy Communion enquiries must be made as to whether Holy Communion was celebrated and if not, why not. If there was recklessness, the elders must act timeously". This arrangement is not less than the arrangement of CO art.25; a direct, specific instructions of local circumstances and independence of the local Church. This arrangement of CO art.23 is rather a confirmation that there is harmony between the prescriptions regarding method of the different offices.

4.4.1.4 The protestor fails to evaluate the methods of the services of the minister, elder and deacon (each separately) in totality from the Formularies, Confession and Church Order: What one fails to do, the other does. With all three services the method of visits is clear: Ministers' visits: Formulary for Ordination; Elders' visits: Church Order art 23; Deacons' visits: Formulary for Ordination and Church Order.

4.4.2 Finding: Ground of protest 4

The commission finds that there is indeed harmony with the rest of the Church Order, a.o. CO art 16 and 23.

Decision: Points 4.4.1 to 4.2.2 noted.

4.4.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 4

Ground of protest 4 fails.

Decision: Points Approved.

4.5 Ground of protest 5

The protestor avers that CO art 25's prescription of a specific diaconal method is contrary to Reformed Church Polity in the sense that the equality and independence of the diaconal office is compromised.

4.5.1 Argumentation: Ground of protest 5

4.5.1.1 The protestor avers that the absence of deacons at greater meetings and that fact that only ministers of the Word and elders in greater meetings decide on a.o. the Formularies (etc) amount to illegitimate domination of the other two services over the service of deacon and an illegitimate infringement of the independence of the diaconal service.

4.5.1.2 The protestor loses sight of the fact that the elders minister the service of governance of Christ in his church (also the diaconal service) – therefore (i) that they must also supervise the service of the deacons, (ii) that the deacons must report in (not to) the church council regarding their service, and (iii) that the elders

(as governors) formulate order arrangements from Scripture i.r.o. the diaconal service.

The deacons of the local congregation and all congregations do have the full church route (CO art.30 and 46) to have a say in greater meetings. Further, it is untrue that the elders and ministers of the Word prescribe a method to the office of deacon.

4.5.1.3 The Church Order further states the equality of the different offices in CO art 84. The protestor fails to argue i.r.o. CO art 84 and only wants to aver inequality/domination on the basis of a certain method.

4.5.2 Finding: Ground of protest 5

The determination of CO art.25 i.r.o. diaconal visits does not compromise the equality and independence of the service of the deacon. The service of the elder is directed at governance, while the service of the deacon is directed at care and. It is a difference in task and direction rather than inequality.

Decision: Points 4.5.1 to 4.5.2 noted.

4.5.3 Recommendation: Ground of protest 5

Ground of protest 5 fails.

Decision: Approved.

5. Recommendation i.r.o. petition of protest: 1997, regarding the editing of Church Order art. 25.

The petition of protest fails in its entirety.

Decision: Approved with result that 5.4 of the petition of protest falls away.