

19.8 REPORT 7: DEPUTIES CHRISTIAN EDUCATION – POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS AND NWU (Artt 184, 186)

- A. Dr DJ de Kock tables the Report.
- B. The Report will be concluded during the Synod session.
- C. The chairperson, dr DG Breed, welcomes prof H van Schalkwyk, Rector of the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU, in the meeting.
- D. Prof H van Schalkwyk answers a few questions addressed to him by the delegates.

E. REPORT

1. Mandate

- 1.1 Letters and e-mails to be sent to Church Councils in which covenantal parents are encouraged to send their children to the NWU (Potchefstroom campus), to ensure that Reformed values are upheld and developed (Acta 2012:233, 3.1).
- 1.2 The yet to be appointed Deputies CE are to be instructed to negotiate with the Rector of the Potchefstroom campus of the NWU, prof HD van Schalkwyk, and representatives of the senate and faculties regarding a professorship in Philosophy for Christian Reformatory Science as well as a research project on Reformatory Education by the Faculty for Education Sciences (Acta 2012:233, 3.2).
- 1.3 The Synod is to become involved with the financial aspect of the execution of the abovementioned (Acta 2012:233, 3.3).
- 1.4 The Synod is to encourage parents to send their children to the NWU, given that the NWU is the only value-driven university in the country according to the statute (Acta 2012:233, 3.4).

Decision: Points 1.1 to 1.4 noted.

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

Execution of the instruction

The Deputies send correspondence in terms of instructions 1.1 and 1.4, from time to time, to the Church Councils and articles are also published in the church magazines.

The Synod decided not to become involved financially (instruction 1.3) (Acta 2012:233,3.4).

Two visits were made to the NWU (Potchefstroom campus) in pursuance of instruction 1.2 and the following can be reported:

2.1 *Meeting of 25 June 2013*

Three of the Deputies: CE, viz. DJ de Kock (s), MAL Linde and PJ Mentz, met with the Rector, prof HD Schalkwyk, on 25 June 2013.

The following matters were discussed at the meeting:

- 2.1.1 The Deputies assured the Rector of the GKSA's great esteem for the NWU, given their historical and longstanding bond.
- 2.1.2 It was also pointed out to him that the churches are continually called on to keep the University in their prayers.
- 2.1.3 It became clear from the meeting that the University's management takes great pains in ensuring the value-driven nature of the University at all times. This was evident from *inter alia* the appointment of prof PH Fick, from the ranks of the GKSA and Theological School Potchefstroom, as student dean and the rector expressed his great appreciation for the work he does.

Furthermore, prof Kobus van der Walt (Environmental Sciences) was appointed to revise and further develop the philosophy of science (previously Interfaculty Philosophy) modules. The Rector suggested the Deputies contact prof Kobus van der Walt, in order that the Deputies and the Faculty of Theology may offer input in this regard.

- 2.1.4 Given that the Synod was unwilling to make a financial contribution toward the establishment of a professorship in Philosophy for Christian Reformatory Science (cf. decision in Report of 2012), the Deputies could not take this matter any further.
- 2.1.5 The possibility of a research project by the Faculty of Education Sciences, pertaining to Christian Reformatory studies, will still be explored. A follow-up discussion in this regard may yet be sought.
- 2.1.6 The Rector made the Deputies aware of the pressure the NWU faces, especially from inside government, questioning the Afrikaans character of the University. There have even been allegations of racism and prejudice by the NWU toward certain groups. Ensuring that the University remains value-driven and continues to function as politically independent as possible has consequently turned into an intricate game of politics that requires a great deal of care and wisdom, within the current political administration and climate. In light of this, the management and staff of the University need the GKSA's continuous prayer and active support.
The pressure on the University has significantly increased over the past year (2014), subsequent to the negative reporting in the media on the so-called hazing or orientation practices as well as the ensuing Wessels report. The ANC government took the opportunity to apply further pressure in an attempt to cast suspicion on and even change the Christian and Afrikaans character of the Potchefstroom campus, of the NWU, to suit the ANC's political agenda.
- 2.1.7 The meeting also raised the shared concern over our youth's reckless behaviour on the social terrain, evidently due to *inter alia* the abuse of alcohol. There is a disturbing discrepancy between what many young people profess about their faith and their actual conduct. The churches have a great responsibility in this regard to lead the youth on the right path and simultaneously remind parents of their responsibility and the example they must set.

2.2 *Meeting of 17 September 2013*

Following up on the first visit to the NWU (Potchefstroom campus on 25 June 2013) the work group of the Deputies CE, tasked with the collaboration between the Church and the University, accepted an invitation from the Rector to meet with prof Kobus van der Walt (previously of Environmental Sciences) on 17 September 2013. The aim of the meeting was *inter alia* to gather further information and to ascertain the progress made in establishing and revising the modules for the Department of Philosophy of Science (the former Interfaculty Philosophy) as well as to obtain the input and opinion of Prof van der Walt on how these subject contents may be developed to reflect the value-driven aspiration of the University. Making contact with prof Kobus van der Walt was imperative for the Deputies to, in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology, also offer input in this regard.

2.2.1 The content of the meeting

The discussion proved to be insightful, enlightening and practically oriented; in fact, it was filled with goodwill and mutual support.

2.2.2 Philosophy of Science

The three representatives of the Deputies gained a profound sense of the attitude and seriousness with which lecturers at the University focus on fulfilling the value-driven intent of the University justice. Taking their lead from the Senate Committee for Philosophical Moulding all the faculties are committed to making students clearly aware of the philosophical principles of the different subjects that also include the subject matter around worldviews, the notion of order, systems theory, etc. This is conveyed by means of the “Understand the world” modules integrated into Philosophy. Each and every student at the University must pass these modules before they can graduate. The religious foundation of every subject is, therefore, thoroughly addressed.

2.2.3 The student profile at the NWU

It became clear from the meeting that an estimated 80% of students at the University come from Christian homes, although some already show a “looseness” as far as the church and church attendance are concerned. It was also mentioned that less than half of the children baptised in the GKSA go on to confirm their faith in the GKSA, which is greatly unsettling. The question arises whether the church and more specifically the ministers of the GKSA still have the confidence to encourage their members who are parents of prospective students to send their children to the NWU. Has the foundation/tradition of the NWU changed? Are Christian values still truly lived out on campus? Why would the ministers of the GKSA still encourage parents to send their children to NWU? What does the University do/offer that is so “different” from any other campus in South Africa?

2.2.4 Important questions

The questions pertinently put to Prof van der Walt, at this meeting, by the Deputies were the following:

2.2.4.1 Atheism is already raised at an organised level in schools, which means children learn about it from an early age. How is the University going about addressing this on campus – and also all sorts of other “evils”, like alcohol and drug abuse, pornography, promiscuity, etc.?

Prof van der Walt’s response:

Naturally there aren’t any clear-cut answers, but we all fervently do our best. It is the duty of every minister, Christian parent, Christian lecturer and Christian teacher to set an example of sincere and true Christianity, without any coercion or disapproval, but taking an “example is better than precept” approach and treating everybody with respect and dignity. It is the lecturer’s task and there are many lecturers who take this matter seriously. It’s not so much about preaching Christian values, but living according to them. Actions speak louder than words and where cases needing intercession do arise, it is up to the churches and interested parents to enquire and comment.

2.2.4.2 What sets the NWU apart from any other university with questions like: “Where am I going to study?”; “Where are the best bursaries?”; “What do I do about my course?”; and “Why is the NWU the best choice?”

Prof van der Walt’s response:

The University has a variety of mechanisms that guarantees value-driven practices: It is included in the University’s statutes; all the relevant interest groups are represented on the University’s council – under the heading “community”, which includes the church community – and, as mentioned above, there is a senate committee that ensures the philosophical foundation of every subject group at every faculty level. Parents who are former students can make use of the alumni forum to offer input.

Parents can also obtain seats on the University's council and various management bodies; participate through the convocation on the council and various management bodies; and also personally voice their views through a range of channels like residence fathers, the office of the dean of students and even the lecturers, should it relate to academics, etc.

- 2.2.4.3 What values, if any, are still upheld at the NWU? What role can the church, members/parents, play in supporting the University to retain the values that are still upheld? Is there still a role to play?

Prof van der Walt's response:

It needs to be borne in mind that these students come to the University from their particular home. They come from homes, congregations and communities that taught them certain values and the question is: Are these the values they live out here on campus? The freedom students suddenly have is indeed appealing and many rebel or succumb to these new influences, but are they prepared or strong enough to resist the temptation? How were they raised – in their home, in the church?

- 2.2.5 What can the churches do?

In asking the question of what the churches can do to support the University in retaining the values important and non-negotiable to Christians, the answer lies in the following:

- 2.2.5.1 Do the churches/ministers/congregations prepare prospective students well enough for life on campus?
- 2.2.5.2 Do the students realise that retaining these Christian values depends on living according thereto amid the masses of students on campus? It would seem that the majority of students on campus still insist on the values important to us all and say: "If we are (perform!) good enough, they leave us be!"
- 2.2.5.3 In summary: Churches, congregations, members, parents and catechists all need to focus and work together in making prospective students aware of what is waiting on them. They need to live according to the values non-negotiable to us and insist on them, because it is their right! When it's not the case, parents/students need to report it that solutions may be sought. It is after all about the students and the University, not to mention the church's future and each must do his/her part and play his/her role.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.2.5.3 noted.

3. Matters that the Synod decide on

Recommendations

- 3.1 The Synod is to, through the to be appointed Deputies, continue to encourage parents in a variety of ways to send their children to the NWU.

Decision: Approved (amendment already added – Deputies Acta).

- 3.2 The Synod is to confirm its support of the NWU, in light of the historical bond between the University and the GKSA.

Decision: Approved.

- 3.3 The to be appointed Deputies are to keep in contact with the management of the NWU to maintain and develop the existing bond.

Decision: Approved.

- 3.4 The Synod is to once again remind parents and Church Councils of their responsibility to rear children in such a way that they may act maturely and responsibly over the course of their studies (cf. 2.1.7 and 2.2.5).

Decision: Approved.

- 3.5 The Synod is to call on churches to support any endeavour by the NWU to bolster their Christian ethos.

Decision: Approved (amendment already added – Deputies Acta).