

20.9 PETITION OF PROTEST GK PINETOWN AGAINST THE DECISION BY SYNOD 2012 REGARDING THE PROCEDURE FOR CO, ART 8 – APPLICATIONS (Artt 40, 249)

- A. Br AJ Burger tables the Petition of Protest.
- B. **Decision:** The Petition of Protest are referred to Commission of Protest 1 – Doctrinal.
- C. Rev PW Kurpershoek reports on behalf of the Commission of Protest 1 – Doctrinal.

D. PETITION OF PROTEST Request for acceptability

1. Chronological Development

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

- 1.1 Classis KwaZulu-Natal South meeting on 9 September 2014 accepted a recommendation of their Deputy which was appointed in 2011 regarding the procedure when evaluating applications under CO, art 8. The Classis approved a Point of Description requesting a revision of the decision by the General Synod 2012 and included it in the Agenda of the Regional Synod Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. The matter was presented as a Point of Description as it intended to augment, extend and improve the procedure in a non-confrontational and collaborative manner.
- 1.2 The Regional Synod Free State and KwaZulu-Natal meeting on 25 November 2014 appointed a Law Commission to consider the receptivity of the Point of Description. They recommended that the Point of Description not be tabled since “3.1.1 Decisions of the General Synod are not altered by a Point of Description but by a Gravamen or Petition of Protest. The Point of Description is to be presented in such a way that it is in essence a Gravamen and not a Point of Description.” The Regional Synod approved this recommendation and the Point of Description was “not handled in the meeting.”
- 1.3 Classis KwaZulu-Natal South has been considering this matter since 2011 and to prevent a further delay of three years, the Church Council of Pinetown therefore decided to submit an objection with the aim to revise the decision of the General Synod 2012.
- 1.4 The Regional Synod meeting took place on 25 November 2014 and this submission is done on 1 December 2014 which is within the deadline of 7 calendar days after the meeting of the Regional Synod where the matter was on the Agenda.

2. Justification of the acceptability request

2.1 Procedural

The 1994 Synod (Acta 1994:52, 53) accepted that “an 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.”

2.2 Inability to conform to the Regional Synod Decision

The objector can not conform by the decision by the Regional Synod not to handle the matter. The matter is of importance in the churches in the resort of Classis KwaZulu-Natal since 2011. It would not serve the churches to delay its consideration to 2018 if the 2015 Synod would be missed.

There are different opinions on the correctness of the decision by the Regional Synod not to handle the matter. Even though CO, art 31 implies that decisions can only be changed by an objection which proofs that the decisions is not in accordance with the Scripture of the Church Order, CO, art 46 is not prescriptive in the approach when it is deemed necessary to review/change a decision.

Visser¹ refers to three options being an 'Objection', a 'Request for Revision' or a "Point of Description'. And according to Spoelstra² a matter that came on a major meeting agenda in an orderly manner should be handled by the major meeting on the grounds of its content and the name or form should not prejudice the content.

This is however not an objection to the decision by the Regional Synod. In conforming to the decision, it is a plea to the General Synod 2015 to handle the matter in their meeting without prejudice by the decision of the Regional Synod

3. Request

The objector is of opinion that all requirements have been met as applied in the National Synod 1994 (Acta 1994:52, 53).

The General Synod 2015 is requested to find this objection acceptable for inclusion in their Agenda for the meeting in January 2015.

In doing so the General Synod would be supporting cooperatively in following the Churchly way without a minor meeting blocking the right to reconsider a decision by a major meeting.

PETITION OF PROTEST GK PINETOWN AGAINST THE DECISION BY SYNOD 2012 REGARDING THE PROCEDURE FOR CO, ART 8 APPLICATIONS

This objection has originally been written in English. If there are any discrepancies or difference in interpretation between the English and Afrikaans versions, then the English version should be used.

1. Decision objected against

Procedure to evaluate applications in terms of Church Order, art 8 to be admitted to the Office of Minister of the Word by persons that have not studied theology (Acta 2012:501,502):

1.3 CO, art 8

1.3.1 CO-Stipulation

Anyone who has not studied shall not be admitted to the office of the Word, unless that person displays unmistakable evidence of extraordinary gifts, piety, humility and modesty, sound intellect and discretion, and eloquence. If someone presents himself for this office, the Classis, with the approval of the Regional Synod, shall examine him, and if the outcome of such examination is favourable, he has to present a number of private probatory sermons after which the Classis shall deal with the matter according to its judgement and in an edificatory manner.

1.3.2 Procedure

1.3.2.1 *The original application to be allowed into the ministry in terms of CO, art 8, is directed at the Church Council of the applicant.*

1.3.2.2 *If the Church Council judges that the application has merit, the CO, art 8 application (by the applicant with full motivation as art 8 describes with a recommendation of the Church Council) must be handed in at the TSP. (It will be sensible if the Church Council also seeks the advice of the Classis with regards to the CO, art 8 application).*

1.3.2.3 *The applicant reports at the TSP (Senate and Curators) for a colloquium doctum. The colloquium doctum serve as an assessment of the theological academic suitability of the applicant. Three sermons (OT, NT and HC) are examined.*

1.3.2.4 *The TSP makes the result of the assessment known to the Church Council.*

¹ Dr Jan Visser, *Die Kerkorde in Praktyk*, 1999. Paragraph 3 on page 204.

² Dr Bouke Spoelstra, *Gereformeerde Kerkreg en Regering. Handboek in die Kerkorde*. 1989. Paragraph 3 on page 270.

1.3.2.5 *The Church Council gives the necessary documentation and motivation to the applicant to Report to the Regional Synod.*

1.3.2.6 *If the Regional Synod finds that the applicant passes, the student is sent to a Classis to deliver proof sermons for a while, and to then handle him as the Classis judges.*

Decision: Noted

2. *Matters to be decided by the Synod
That the Synod approve the guidelines in (1).*

Decision: Approved.

2. Objection

2.1 General

It was not the intention of the Classis KwaZulu-Natal South, nor is it the intention of the Church Council of Pinetown to be critical and dismissive towards the procedure accepted by the General Synod 2012. Putting order to the evaluation of CO, art 8 application has become necessary and the 2012 decision has started well in this process.

The intention of this objection is to supplement, augment or enhance this procedure. It is therefore with some reluctance that the shortcomings of the 2012 decision is highlighted first, in order to justify the Synod to consider the content of this proposal. Although the grounds of objection would seek to indicate deviation from the intent and content of the Church Order, some practical shortcomings are also indicated as justification for the Synod to consider the content of the proposal to improve the procedure and guidelines to evaluate CO, art 8 applications.

2.2 Introduction

Evaluation of the procedural guidelines approved by the Synod in 2012 shows that the guideline does not reflect the content and the spirit of CO, art 8. These are listed below in summary and then discussed below as grounds for the objection.

- 2.2.1 The burden of evaluation in CO, art 8 is in effect shifted away from the churches to the Theological School Potchefstroom (Senate and Curators);
- 2.2.2 Compared to the content and spirit of CO, art 8, the 2012 procedure has a different balance between testing the manifestation of the listed extraordinary gifts on one side and academic assessment on the other;
- 2.2.3 CO, art 8 includes a period of growth and development towards preaching skills after the manifestation of extraordinary gifts has been confirmed, but this is not included in the 2012 procedure where preaching evaluation is combined with the evaluation of the extraordinary gifts;
- 2.2.4 The contribution of all role players in the process is not clearly defined in the 2012 procedure.

2.3 1st Ground of objection – the balance of the burden of evaluation

The substance and spirit of CO, art 8 is that the evaluation, examination and decision be taken by the churches, namely the Classis with the Regional Synod having given consent that such an evaluation be conducted by the Classis.

The 2012 procedure acknowledges the role of the Church Counsel in considering the merit of the application, but the role of the Classis in the evaluation is almost negated. Even though the procedure indicates that “it would be sensible” to seek the advice of the Classis, it is not stated as a requirement. With no clarity on what evaluation and testimony should be considered by the Church Council to judge an application to have merit, it is foreseeable that many applications could reach the TSP as the first real test of the gifts.

Without the role which the Classis could play in confirmation of the soundness of the Church Council judgement and to compliment it with their own consideration of the manifestation of the gifts in their midst, the TSP could be taxed with several applications that should have been declined.

Furthermore, without guidelines to Churches in their role, the TSP effectively becomes the primary evaluating party in the 2012 procedure. The procedure does state that the final evaluation be done by the Regional Synod, but in effect it is a verification of the assessment result by the TSP (and the Church Council) as well as a final confirmation of the 'right mindedness' (regsinnigheid) of the applicant. The delegates to the Regional Synod is not living in close contact with the applicant and can therefore not do the primary evaluation of the manifestation of gifts in the applicant's life and community. Contrary to the intention of CO, art 8 the TSP is burdened to ensure the integrity of the process of evaluating the manifestation of extraordinary gifts while they do not know the applicant and can hardly be expected to testify to the manifestation of the extraordinary gifts listed in the article.

The 2012 procedure furthermore places the TSP in a very difficult position which at least borders on a potential conflict of interest. The institution specifically established to provide and promote academic theological studies is requested to evaluate and potentially recommend that such studies is not deemed necessary. The *bona fides* of the TSP is not being questioned at all, but the impact of their context and dedication to promote and provide academic tuition and to safeguard the integrity thereof should be acknowledged.

In CO, art 8 the churches in the GKSA has resolved that the burden of evaluation would be done by the Churches being the Classis, with approval by the Regional Synod. It is logical that they would request input from other parties like the Church Council and the TSP. However, the 2012 procedure negates the responsibility of the Classis in the process and over amplifies the focus on the TSP as the guardian of the process.

2.4 2nd Ground of objection – manifestation of gifts and academic knowledge

The requirement to be admitted to the Office of the Word for an applicant that has not studied theology, is that he should “*display unmistakable evidence of extraordinary gifts, piety, humility and modesty, sound intellect and discretion, and eloquence.*” The primary evaluation when such an application is considered should clearly focus on the manifestation of these gifts in the life of the applicant.

The 2012 procedure and guidelines does not include support to churches for this evaluation. It is probably implicitly presumed to be included in the consideration of the Church Council to judge if the application has merit. It is not included in the TSP assessment which is stated to focus specifically on the “*theological academic suitability*” and on three sermons. Neither is there any indication that the examination by the Regional Synod would be anything different (confirming these extraordinary gifts) from the normal examination of the “right mindedness” (regsinnigheid) of applicant in terms of CO, art 4.

The confirmation of the manifestation of the gifts listed in CO, art 8 should be the central most crucial element in the consideration of the application. The omission of guidelines on how to verify the manifestation of these gifts will have significant consequences. Applications without merit would not be rejected early in the process but would proceed and overburden the workload of the TSP and church meetings. Alternatively, the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit could be disregarded by not confirming such gifts and the church of Christ be deprived of the service by the gifts He has given.

While the consideration of extraordinary gifts is downplayed in the 2012 procedure, the prominence of academic evaluation as practically the central element in the consideration is not aligned with the intention of evaluation of applicants that have not studied theology.

Doing such an assessment could of course not be wrong, but by not specifying the intention and utilisation of the result is. *Prima facie* evidence³ suggests that academic knowledge *per se* could very well be the overriding input in the balance of information towards the result of the assessment. It is partially to be expected since the TSP does not know the applicant and the manifestation of the listed extraordinary gifts in his life. Also, by the nature of their calling their focus would be academic. Furthermore, although the nature of the assessment result is not specified in the 2012 procedure, it has been experienced in the past³ (which gave rise to the Classis consideration) that the result has merely been that the applicant was not suited without any indication whether the grounds of the decision related to inadequate academic suitability or inadequate manifestation of the gifts listed in CO, art 8.

The 2012 procedure has a notable imbalance since guidance in the evaluation of the crucial gifts listed in CO, art 8 has been omitted while the intent and utilisation of the “assessment of theological academic suitability” have not been clarified. The result is that the consideration of the CO, art 8 application would be almost identical to the consideration of a CO, art 4 application, which is clearly not the intent of the Church Order.

2.5 **3rd Ground of objection – sequence of evaluation**

The wording of CO, art 8 has a dynamic of growth and improvement towards adequate application of extraordinary gifts before an applicant, that has not studied theology, could be admitted to the Office of the Word. Consideration of the article reveals that – Firstly the manifestation of “*extraordinary gifts, piety, humility and modesty, sound intellect and discretion, and eloquence*” is examined. This is confirmed (with certainty) by the Classis and with approval from the Regional Synod, the applicant is then examined by the Classis where the applicant is known and the manifestation of extraordinary could therefore be confirmed. When this has been favourable then an arrangement is made for the applicant to “*present a number of private probatory sermons*”. After a period the Classis decides how to deal with the matter in an edifying manner.

The period of ‘*private probatory sermons*’ and ‘*dealing in an edifying manner*’ is quite different from an application to the Office of the Word under CO, art 4 in which case the applicant is made available for a call in the churches immediately after the examination by the Regional Synod has been favourable.

The sequence in CO, art 8 allows for a period of growth in the effective application of extraordinary gifts in the preparation and delivery of sermons. Depending on the progress the Church Council and/or Classis could either assist in the development in various ways, or they could declare the applicant available for a call by the churches if progress has been satisfactory, or if progress is inadequate over time they could terminate the process and assist the applicant in other ways to utilise his gifts in the Kingdom.

The 2012 procedure does not follow the dynamic of growth and development evident in the sequence of CO, art 8 since the evaluation of sermons (and theological academic suitability) forms part of the initial consideration of the application.

2.6 **4th Ground of objection – all role players**

The role of the Church Council is crucial in the consideration of an application regarding CO, art 8 and even though the 2012 procedure indicates their role to judge if the application has merit, it does not give any clear definition of what that entails.

CO, art 8 indicate the Classis as the key role player in examining the application – not only in establishing the ‘right mindedness’ (regsinnigheid) but also in verification of the manifestation of the extraordinary gifts (van der Linde, Spoelstra, Visser).

³ A representative of the objector could share this evidence in camera.

The 2012 procedure however does not make the involvement of the Classis a requirement until after assessment by the TSP and favourable examination by the Regional Synod. Although the procedure states that “it will be sensible if the Church Council also seeks the advice from the Classis”, it is not stated as a requirement.

The Church Order does not require any participation by the TSP directly. It is understandable and advisable that the churches would ask their advice. Not to make a decision however, but for the TSP advice to be included by the churches (Church Council, Classis, Regional Synod) together with information and recommendations from other parties in the deliberation and conclusion of the application. The content of the TSP assessment and its utilisation by the churches in the process is however not defined in the 2012 procedure.

The consideration of an application regarding CO, art 8 is of great importance and always charged with a lot of serious opinions and emotions and potentially subjectivity. It is important that the process and the roles of all role players be defined clearly in order to facilitate all involved to focus on the content of application without confusion and frustration from the process being followed. The 2012 procedure does not define the roles of all role players clearly.

3. References

In the proposed procedure which follows hereafter, the following literature references have been cited as direct or indirect support for respective portions:

- A. Handleiding by die Kerkorde van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika; 1966; p77-83. Ds LS Kruger, Ds HLM du Plessis, Dr B Spoelstra, Ds TT Spoelstra.
- B. Die Kerkorde – ‘n Verklaring van die Gereformeerde Kerkorde; 1983; p37-40. Dr GPL van der Linde.
- C. Gereformeerde Kerkreg en Kerkregering – Handboek by die Kerkorde; 1989; p72-77. Dr Bouke Spoelstra.
- D. Die Kerkorde in Praktyk; 1999; Dr Jan Visser; p43-44.
- E. Kerkordeboekie van die GKSA; 1998; p16.
- F. Decisions from the RCSA National Synods Potchefstroom in 1967 (p49, 50) and 1970 (p.22-128);

4. Proposed

“Procedural Guidelines for the evaluation of applications in terms of CO, art 8”

The preferred route to the Office of the Word in the GKSA is the completion of the full theological training of our churches as presented by the Theological School Potchefstroom (TSP) in collaboration with the North West University (NWU). There is an understandable caution in admission of persons that have not completed this studies. Yet, with the Kingdom of Christ as basis, it is confessed that the Lord could equip individuals in a different manner through the Holy Spirit – with confirmation in church history where men like John Calvin and Dirk Postma were admitted to the Office of the Word without completion of such theological studies. This is acknowledged and regulated in the GKSA Church Order through CO, art 8.

The following procedure with guidelines should be followed in the consideration of applications in terms of CO, art 8. It is intended to guide the respective role players towards a responsible evaluation of the gifts which the Holy Spirit bestowed on the applicant.

- 4.1 **Any individual** could present himself to his local Church Council to be evaluated regarding CO, art 8 and to receive support throughout the process of judgement^{A, C, D} if:
 - 4.1.1 He is of opinion that he has been gifted by the Holy Spirit with the required extraordinary gifts prescribed in CO, art 8 further expanded in this procedure, and if
 - 4.1.2 He experiences the ‘inner call’ of the Spirit to the Office of the Word.
- 4.2 Upon receipt of a request for evaluation in accordance with CO, art 8, **the Church Council:**

- 4.2.1 Consider and conclude if there is unmistakable evidence that the person does possess extraordinary gifts.^{A, B, C, D} Although each Church Council should use its own discretion on how this evaluation is done,^{C, D} it should be based on intensive observation, intimate knowledge and proof of the applicant's behaviour and character in evangelism and within the congregation.^C
- It is important to note that this is in essence firstly, a consideration of the gifts the Holy Spirit bestowed upon an individual and if confirmed then secondly, to consider if the person should be recognised as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. It is not an evaluation of the person, but a confirmation whether the gifts of the Holy Spirit are recognised or not.
- The Church Council should furthermore consider the circumstance of the applicant in order to conclude if he should not rather be advised to enrol for Theological Academic studies since that remains the preferred development path towards admission to the Office of the Word.
- 4.2.2 Without being prescriptive the following is provided as a guideline for Church Councils and congregations of the evidence to be considered. In all cases it is advised to capture specific examples and their conclusion as such examples would be valuable in substantiating their conclusion and recommendation to the Classis. (The same is valid for the conclusion and recommendation of the Classis to the Regional Synod.) [Note: The intention is to formulate questions which would test practical manifestations of the gifts listed in CO, art 8.]
- 4.2.2.1 How does the brother's life manifest a personal faith and relationship with the Triune God?
- 4.2.2.2 How does his life portray integrity and modesty and devotion to the will of God?
- 4.2.2.3 How does his life demonstrate God's love and grace?
- 4.2.2.4 How is humbleness visible in his life? (How well does he listen to others without always pressing his point of view?)
- 4.2.2.5 How does his knowledge and understanding manifest in his life? (Can he explain things in a simple and practical manner?)
- 4.2.2.6 How well does he live a devoted life which demonstrates the Lord's love and grace?
- 4.2.2.7 How does his ability to distinguish right from wrong manifest? (Does he recognise false teachings even if it is concealed?)
- 4.2.2.8 How clear and understandable are his words? (Is it easy to understand him and does his words clarify the Word of God?)
- 4.2.2.9 How does his knowledge and gifts manifest to educate, develop and comfort members of the congregation from the Word of God?
- 4.2.2.10 Does he know the Reformed Doctrine and how does it shape his life?
- 4.2.2.11 Does he know the principles of Reformed church governance and how does he apply it?
- 4.2.2.12 What additional comments do you have to assist the church in their consideration of this brother's gifts to become a Minister of the Word?
- 4.2.3 If the Church Council is convinced that the applicant possesses the required extraordinary gifts, and that formal academical theological studies would not be most appropriate in his case, then it should request the Classis to assist the church in further consideration. This request to the Classis should be motivated with the Church council's and/or the Congregation's testimonies on the prevalence of the required extraordinary gifts. The original application by the applicant should also be included with the Church Council's request to the Classis.
- 4.2.4 However, if the Church Council is not convinced that the gifts of person meet the requirements, then his application should not be pursued further and he should receive pastoral support in his continued growth in grace; and also regarding his continued consideration of his personal call within the church and the Kingdom.

- 4.3 *Upon receipt of a CO, art 8 application, **the Classis***
- 4.3.1 Considers all associated documentation and confirm if the Church Council has evaluated the matter thoroughly. ^C
- 4.3.2 If the Classis concludes that the Church Council thoroughly reviewed the matter, the Classis should conduct its own verification. ^{A, B, C, D} For its own account it should use discretion in determining if the Classis is of similar judgement that the person has been gifted with the required extraordinary gifts, taking all presented evidence into account and obtaining their own as applicable (e.g. evidence from other churches in the resort of the Classis, personal interview etc.). The Classis could consider using a similar approach to the guideline for the Church Council (see 4.2.2 above). The Classis could consider requesting trial sermons although it is somewhat premature in the logic sequence agreed to in CO, art 8.
- 4.3.3 If the Classis concludes that the brother does not possess the extraordinary gifts as required, or if the Classis is of conclusion that the Church Council has not considered the matter thoroughly, then it is referred back to the Church Council to either support the person pastorally or to review the matter diligently as it is respectively applicable.
- 4.3.4 If the Classis concludes that the individual does possess the extraordinary gifts as required, then
- 4.3.4.1 It requests the Theological School Potchefstroom (**TSP**) to evaluate the theological knowledge of the applicant in order to identify deficiencies and make practical recommendation on how it could be bridged. (e.g. material which could be studied and tutored by a local Minister of the Word).
- 4.3.4.2 It considers the evaluation from the TSP and depending on the significance of the deficiency of knowledge either refers the matter back to the Church Council or if the deficiency is not severe, the Classis then requests the Regional Synod to consider the application. The Classis request should include a recommendation on how the identified deficiency of knowledge could be corrected.
- 4.4 *Upon receipt of a request from the Classis, with a motivated recommendation, to consider and approve examination regarding CO, art 8, **the Regional Synod***
- 4.4.1 Considers the presented evidence from the Church Council and the Classis. The Classis should include the TSP evaluation report, and if necessary a recommendation on how identified deficiency would be addressed.
- 4.4.2 If the Regional Synod concludes that the Classis has conducted an adequate consideration and that the recommendation is sound, it conducts an examination of the applicant's right-mindedness ("*regsinnigheid*").
- 4.4.3 If the Regional Synod concludes that the right-mindedness ("*regsinnigheid*") of the applicant is sound in addition to the conclusion the he does possess the extraordinary gifts as required, then the Synod approve that the Classis would define and execute a "period of probatory sermons" in a manner that the Classis determines. This period could include additional edification to fill potential shortcomings in theological knowledge and sermon preparation.
- 4.5 *Upon approval to conduct a period of probatory sermons, **the Classis***
- 4.5.1 In collaboration with the Church Council and potentially a neighbouring church, sets the period for probatory sermons under supervision of the Church Council (or Councils). Additional arrangements could be made for coaching and mentoring and opportunities to further develop and refine the practical application of gifts required in the Service of the Word. (It would be a good practice if this plan be included in the recommendation to the Regional Synod.)
- 4.5.2 Considers, as applicable, the progress reports from the Church Council who supervises the progress of the candidate.

4.6 **The Church Council**

4.6.1 Supervises and guides the applicant in the execution of the Classis approved plan to augment his theological knowledge if necessary, and in his program of probatory sermons in the Church and neighbouring churches as applicable.

4.6.2 Provides regular progress reports to the Classis as appropriate and as agreed in the Classis decision (see 4.5.1 above). The progress reporting should include recommendations for the consideration by the Classis.

4.7 *At such time that the Church Council recommends to the Classis to proceed with examination of the applicant, then **the Classis***

4.7.1 examines the applicant ^{E, A, B, C, D}with advice of the Deputies of the Regional Synod ^D, this examination is similar to the examination by the Classis, or Regional Synod of a candidate applying for the Office of the Word under CO, art 4 having completed theological study. It should cover the full field of the preparatory (praeparatoir) exam. ^BGuidance towards some uniformity of this examination was confirmed by the National Synod of 1970 (Acta1970:128) as originally decided by the Synod in 1967 (Acta1967:49-51).

Without becoming part of this decision these guidelines for examination is shortly the following:

4.7.1.1 *The applicant should provide three sermons (OT, NT and Catechism) for evaluation.*

4.7.1.2 *The applicant should deliver a sermon for the meeting to judge his ability to preach and the soundness of his elucidation/exposition from the Holy Scripture. The meeting should in time have provided a selection of Scripture from which the applicant should preach.*

4.7.1.3 *The meeting should determine if the applicant can explain main elements of the doctrine; can teach the catechism and can apply Church Governance.*

4.7.1.4 *The meeting has the right to evaluate any relevant point to determine if the applicant is equipped to serve in a congregation to the growth/establishment of the congregation (“tot stigting van”).*

4.7.1.5 *The meeting has the right to investigate any point thoroughly regarding doctrine or anything else, and question the applicant to thoroughly confirm his point of view.*

4.7.1.6 *The meeting should, from the documents presented as well as the own examination conclude whether the applicant is equipped with the required gifts to serve with fruition as pastor and tutor instructor in the congregation. (The full spectrum of ministerial function is covered similar to the subjects of theology, namely Church Governance, Doctrine, Homiletics, Hermeneutics, Liturgy, Pastoral Care and Catechism.) This should include verification of gifts to study and preach; wisdom of life and worthiness both personally and in public; being a worthy leader with temperament in accordance with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

4.7.1.7 *The meeting should be convinced that the applicant meets the specific requirements set for servants in the Church both in behaviour and conduct (refer to 1; Tim 3; Tit 1) as well as character (refer passages like Matt 11:29; Gal 5:22; Phillip 2:1-8).*

4.7.1.8 *The meeting should confirm a sound understanding of the reasons for the application towards the Office of the Word, especially confirmation of personal conviction to the call of the Lord and the history of this conviction.*

4.7.2 If the Classis, with advice of the Deputy of the Regional Synod, concludes that the candidate is not suitable for the Office of the Word, then the Classis takes an appropriate decision based on the merits of the specific application.

4.7.3 If the Classis, with advice of the Deputy of the Regional Synod, concludes that the candidate is suitable for the Office of the Word, it approves him as proponent. The applicant signs the declaration to uphold the true doctrine and his name is entered into the register of proponents, available to be called by the Churches as minister to the Office of the Word.

May the Lord use also those he equipped without formal theological study in the ministry of his Word, and may He provide the Church with the wisdom and insight to recognise and utilise His gifts.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the General Synod

- 5.1 Take note of paragraph 1.
- 5.2 Consider paragraph 2 and approve to consider the proposed revision of the procedure for CO, art 8.
- 5.3 Take note of paragraph 3.
- 5.4 Consider and approve paragraph 4: "Procedural Guidelines for the Evaluation of Applications in terms CO, art 8."

E. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Mandate

Petition of Protest, 20.9.

Decision: Noted.

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

- 2.1 Rev PA Coetzee was requested to speak to the Commission to elucidate re the background of the decision of Synod 2012.
- 2.2 Elder AJ Burger was heard as elucidator from GK Pinetown and the basic argumentation of the Petition of Protest was clarified with him.
- 2.3 Discussions was also held with prof J Smit regarding the decision of Synod 2012.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.3 noted.

3. Necessary background

- 3.1 CO, art 8 deals with the applications of persons to be admitted to the service of minister of the Word on the basis of extra-ordinary gifts.
- 3.2 During Synod 2012 – as part of the Report of the Curators – a document was tabled outlining the working procedure of the Curators re *the nature and scope of the investigation of persons who apply in terms of respectively CO, artt 4, 8 and 9 of the Church Order* (sic – Acta 2012:500, 1.1.2).
- 3.3 This working procedure was put in place by the Curators to guide them as Curators to not deal with every matter *de novo* when dealing with matters concerning CO, artt 4, 8, 9. The working procedure was tabled before Synod to be adjudicated upon and was then approved by Synod.
- 3.4 At first glance herewith a procedure was put into place that is prescriptive to all churches in dealing with applications in terms CO, art 4, 8, 9 – that was not the original intention of the Curators with this presentation.

Decision: Points 3.1 to 3.4 noted.

4. Adjudication of ground of protest 1

4.1 *Averment in petition of protest*

The Petition of Protest avers that with this procedure the burden of evaluation shifts from the churches to the TSP (Senate and Curators).

4.2 *Argumentation in the Petition of Protest*

- 4.2.1 The Petition of Protest states that CO, art 8 presupposes that the evaluation, examination, and decision re CO, art 8 applications are in essence dealt with by the churches.
- 4.2.2 The Petition of Protest further states that the role attributed by the Church Order to the Classis is almost completely abrogated by the procedure.
- 4.2.3 The Petition of Protest also states that – because of the minimal reference in the procedure to the process at the Church Council – the role of the Church Council is limited.

- 4.2.4 The Petition of Protest eventually states that the procedure makes the TSP the primary party of evaluation re CO, art 8 application.
- 4.3 *Adjudication of ground of petition*
- 4.3.1 The point of departure of the Petition of Protest namely that applications in terms of CO, art 8 are primarily the responsibility of the churches, is correct. It is indeed the elders who have responsibility to supervise the ministry of the Word (Acta 11:30, 15:28-30; CO, artt 15, 19).
- 4.3.2 The Petition of Protest is not correct to aver that the Church Council's role is being limited. The words *If the Church Council adjudicates that the application has merit* (1.3.2.2 of procedure) provide sufficient room to the Church Council to execute the full responsibility as expressed in CO, art 8.
- 4.3.3 The Petition of Protest is, however, correct to state that with the procedure – as it currently appears in the decision of Synod 2012 – the role of the Classis is almost abrogated. In stead of the Classis performing the examination (as stated in article 8 CO), it is only stated in the procedure that *it would be wise for the Church Council to ask the Classis' advice*.
- 4.3.4 It is further noticeable that CO, art 8 itself does not assign any role to the TSP. Why the TSP is given such a prominent role in a general procedure applicable to all churches, is strange. It also does not fit the point of departure of CO, art 8, namely that this deals with persons with extra-ordinary gifts and not persons who were academically trained – for which the TSP is responsible according to CO, art 19.
- 4.3.5 It could also be stated – against the background of the decision taken in 2012 – that the procedure was only put in place for the Curators and thus does not prohibit the churches from following the path of CO, art 8. It could also be averred that only the involvement of the TSP is highlighted in the procedure and that therefore it only appears as if the burden of evaluation shifts to the TSP. Yet the General Synod can only work with the decision as it appears in the Acta. As the decision is currently worded, the TSP thus takes a position that is in contradiction to the intention of CO, art 8.
- 4.4 *Finding on ground of protest*
The Petition of Protest sufficiently proved that the current procedure shifted the burden of evaluation from the churches to the TSP.

Decision: Points 4.1 to 4.4 noted.

4.5 *Recommendation*

- 4.5.1 The ground of protest succeeds.

Decision: Approved.

5. Adjudication of ground of protest 2

5.1 *Averment in Petition of Protest*

The Petition of Protest avers that with the procedure a shift came about re the balance between the evaluation of the extra-ordinary gifts and the academic evaluation.

5.2 *Argumentation in the Petition of Protest*

- 5.2.1 The Petition of Protest states that CO, art 8 presupposes that the primary evaluation should focus on the manifestation of the extra-ordinary gifts.
- 5.2.2 The Petition of Protest further states that the procedure under-emphasises the evaluation of the extra-ordinary gifts because it is only implied in the first words of 1.3.2.2 (*If the Church Council adjudicates that the application has merit*).
- 5.2.3 The Petition of Protest states also that the omission of any guidelines on how to evaluate the manifestation of the extra-ordinary gifts can lead thereto that the church of Christ is denied the ministry of the gifts that He gave.

5.3 *Adjudication of ground of petition*

5.3.1 The point of departure of the Petition of Protest namely that the evaluation of persons according to CO, art 8 should focus on the manifestation of extra-ordinary gifts, is correct.

5.3.2 The Petition of Protest is, however, not correct to state that the evaluation of extra-ordinary gifts is under-emphasised. Guidelines for procedure for the evaluation of the extra-ordinary gifts according to CO, art 8 is a matter to be determined by the minor meeting itself according to CO, art 30 and not by the General Synod. Accordingly, it cannot be stated that the General Synod under-emphasised the evaluation of the extra-ordinary gifts by the determined procedure.

5.4 *Finding on ground of protest*

The Petition of Protest did not prove that the current procedure under-emphasises the evaluation of the extra-ordinary gifts.

Decision: Points 5.1 to 5.4 noted.

5.5 *Recommendation*

5.5.1 The ground of protest does not succeed.

Decision: Point 5.5.1 approved.

6. **Adjudication of ground of protest 3**

6.1 *Averment in Petition of Protest*

The Petition of Protest avers that the determined procedure does not reflect the period of growth and development to preaching skill.

6.2 *Argumentation in the Petition of Protest*

6.2.1 The Petition of Protest states that CO, art 8 presumes a period of growth and development up to the application of the extra-ordinary gifts.

6.2.2 The Petition of Protest further states that this period of growth and development is not reflected in this procedure, since the evaluation of sermons forms part of the initial investigated.

6.3 *Adjudication of ground of petition*

6.3.1 The point of departure of the Petition of Protest namely that CO, art 8 presumes a period of growth and development up to the application of the extra-ordinary gifts, is correct.

6.3.2 The Petition of Protest does not, however, take into account 1.3.2.6 of the procedure. Herein the student (sic) is sent to a Classis for preaching trials – completely aligned with the content of CO, art 8.

6.3.3 Thus, although an evaluation of sermons already appear at the TSP evaluation, the opportunity for growth and development is not taken away.

6.4 *Finding on ground of protest*

The Petition of Protest did not prove that the determined procedure does not reflect the period of growth and development up to preaching skill.

Decision: Points 6.1 to 6.4 noted.

6.5 *Recommendation*

6.5.1 The ground of protest does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

7. **Adjudication of ground of protest 4**

7.1 *Averment in Petition of Protest*

The Petition of Protest avers that the determined procedure does not define the contributions of all the roleplayers in a CO, art 8 application.

7.2 *Argumentation in the Petition of Protest*

7.2.1 The Petition of Protest discusses the different roleplayers' contributions in the process surrounding the application according to CO, art 8 – and indicates alleged shortcomings in the procedure.

7.2.2 The Petition of Protest further argues that a clear definition of the roles is necessary, since the CO, art 8 process is a strongly subjective process.

7.3 *Adjudication of ground of petition*

7.3.1 The Petition of Protest does not account for the principle underlying CO, art 30 namely that greater meetings must not deal with matters that could have been finalised by minor meetings.

7.3.2 The definition of all the roleplayers' contributions in the process is a matter that resides with the relevant minor meeting.

7.4 *Finding on ground of protest*

The Petition of Protest did not prove that the determined procedure does not define the contributions of all the roleplayers in a CO, art 8 application.

Decision: Points 7.1 to 7.4 noted.

7.5 *Recommendation*

The ground of protest does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

8. Final recommendations

8.1 Since ground of protest 1 touches on the essence of CO, art 8, the Petition of Protest succeeds in its entirety.

8.2 The request from GK Pinetown that their proposed procedure is accepted, is not given effect to in the light of CO, art 30

8.3 That the proposed procedure is referred to the Curators to provide to the churches as guideline in accordance with the Church Order and Synod decisions.

Decision: Points 8.1 to 8.3 approved (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).