

21. Doctrinal Matters

21.1 REPORT DEPUTIES UNITY IN DIVERSITY (Artt 9, 15, 18, 81, 82, 84, 86, 87, 108, 110, 112, 114, 245, 253)

- A. Rev HJP de Beer tables the Report with occasional elucidation.
- B. The chairperson, dr DG Breed, rules on the order that there will be opportunity for delegates for point-for-point discussion of the Report.
- C. **Decision:** Point 6.1.3 are referred to the Commission Doctrinal.
- D. Rev P Venter reports on behalf of the Commission Doctrinal. (See also 20.5 – Point of Description Regional Synod : Guidelines for distinguishing between essential and non-essential matters.)
- E. The chairperson, dr DG Breed, hands the chairmanship to the deputy-chairperson, rev SD Snyman (discussion pt 6.1.3).
- F. Dr DG Breed resumes the chairmanship from pt 6.6.3.5.
- G. Rev HS Coetzee proposes the following Order Proposal: That the Report Unity in Diversity is again put to the meeting and that point 7.3.2 is implemented.
- H. **Decision:** Order Proposal approved.
- I. The implementation of pt 7.3.2 iro referred Petitions of Protest 2012 is put to the meeting by the chairperson, dr DG Breed, after which he leads the meeting in prayer with the earnest plea for God's guidance and assistance.
- J. Broad-based discussion follows.
- K. **Decision:** Point 8.1 iro financial implications are referred to the Commission for Finances.
- L. Rev J van Schaik reports on behalf of the Commission for Finances.
- M. Rev ASA de Bruyn reports on behalf of Commission Doctrinal.

N. REPORT

1. Instruction (Acta 2012:353; F3.1-3.3)

- 3.1 To determine in co-operation with local churches what the fundamental reasons are why there are still differences in viewpoints and practices in matters already decided, despite decisions that churches have taken together.
- 3.2 To advise the Synod 2015 on the petitions of protest with regard to women in the particular services.
- 3.3 To advise the Synod:
 - 3.3.1 on how unity and diversity in our churches can serve our missionary calling.
 - 3.3.2 when does freedom in diversity cross the line of disobedience to the Word.
 - 3.3.3 when the decisions and actions of the local church compromise the common accord .
 - 3.3.4 when ecclesiastical decisions place a yoke on persons' conscience (Belgic Confession, art 32).
 - 3.3.5 how the Reformed Churches can be freed from a paralyzing perception of a dying church to a clear image of our missionary calling.

Decision: Noted.

2. Procedure

- 2.1 A questionnaire to address the matters pointed out in 3.1 was sent to all churches in the GKSA. The answer received was dealt with and the result is incorporated continuously throughout the Report.

- 2.2 The Deputies met with certain Reformed Churches' representatives on their request on different occasions for specific inputs from these churches' perspective.
- 2.3 Scheduled work meetings were held during which, amongst others, study assignments by the Deputies (with reference to point 1.3 of the instruction) were presented and discussed in preparation to this Report.
- 2.4 The Chair of the Deputies delivered a presentation on invitation at a gathering arranged by the Regional Synod Pretoria (June 2013) to communicate study results till date, with the request of possible further inputs from the churches.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.4 noted.

3. Compilation of the Report

- 3.1 The end result of the study is communicated and not the various study assignments in detail (the detailed assignments are attached as Addendums).
- 3.2 It was attempted to communicate the end result of the study in practical applicable guidelines for churches, based on the Biblical truths, the confession and church polity principles.

Decision: Points 3.1 and 3.2 noted.

4. Fundamental reasons determined in co-operation with churches (see 3.1 of instruction)

From the end result of the investigation done (amongst others according to the questionnaire and formal meetings with individuals/churches/church meetings and other delegates) it is evident that the following fundamental reasons according to the churches occur

“why there are still differences in viewpoints and practices already decided, despite decisions that churches have taken together.”

4.1 *Difference in view of Scripture/authority of Scripture*

4.1.1 Exposition

According to a few churches there is a difference in the GKSA regarding view of Scripture and the acknowledgement of authority of Scripture. There are references to two opposing ideas namely fundamentalism and Scripture Criticism.

The GKSA had already dealt with this on numerous occasions regarding mentioned aspects (see Acta 1988:508-510; 2009:504–506).

4.1.2 Finding

If it is evident that there are indeed differences with regard to view of Scripture and authority of Scripture, churches should study the results already produced in this regard. It is not necessary that further studies should be done on mentioned aspects.

Decision: Points 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 noted.

4.1.3 Recommendation

That churches and majority assemblies should take thorough notice of existing decisions regarding view of Scripture and authority of Scripture and apply this in their decisions and conduct.

Decision: Approved.

4.2 *Difference in exposition of Scripture and use of Scripture*

4.2.1 Exposition

According to a few churches there is a difference in the GKSA concerning exposition of Scripture and use of Scripture. Churches refer to “different interpretations of Scripture parts”, “each interprets the Scripture according to what he/she thinks is correct” and so called “selective use of the Scripture”. The GKSA had already devoted intense attention in synod decisions in the past concerning exposition of Scripture and the use of Scripture (see for example Acta 2009:506-512).

4.2.2 Finding

If it appears that there are indeed differences concerning exposition and use of Scripture, intense attention should be paid by churches and majority assemblies to studies already done by the GKSA in this regard. It is not necessary that further studies should be done on mentioned aspects.

Decision: Points 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 noted.

4.2.3 Recommendation

That churches and majority assemblies should have thorough knowledge of existing decisions concerning Scripture Interpretation and Management and should take this into consideration in their decisions and conduct.

Decision: Approved.

4.3 *Lack of distinction between average and substantial matters*

4.3.1 Exposition

During written presentations and conversational opportunities, it came to light that church meetings do not differentiate in decisions taken, the difference between “average” and “substantial” matters (also referred to as matters of “principle” and “marginal” matters). The churches that emphasized this matter, also portrayed that this is binding people’s conscience when binding decisions are made concerning “average” matters.

4.3.2 Finding

The Belgic Confession art 32 professes that “all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way”, should be rejected. Only that is accepted “what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.”

Decision: Points 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 noted.

4.3.3 Recommendation

That the General Synod should guide churches with regard to the difference between substantial matters and matters that should not bind people’s consciences (see 6 of this Report).

Decision: Approved.

4.4 *Difference concerning the authority of the Synod’s decisions*

4.4.1 Exposition

In the presentations by certain churches to Deputies, it is conveyed that decisions “based on the majority of votes and not God’s Word” are taken as binding for the conscience and therefore individual churches are forced to make alternative decisions. According to some churches the GKSA is acting “synod-cratic”.

4.4.2 Finding

It is evident indeed that there are churches who are convinced that the phrase “we and the Holy Spirit decided” is used erroneously concerning many decisions taken by the Synod. It is evident that these churches differ about the authority of the Synod’s decisions and the consequent binding thereto for churches.

Decision: Points 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 noted.

4.4.3 Recommendation

That the Synod will pay attention to the difference about the authority of the Synod’s decisions, by making sure that the procedure followed in decision making will lead to agreement concerning the authority of Synod decisions (see 5 and 6 of this Report).

Decision: Approved.

4.5 *Application of the Church Order*

4.5.1 Exposition

Some churches said in their presentations that “the Church Order rules matters that are no more relevant and for that reason not all churches apply it anymore”; “The Church Order is according to us not keeping up with the challenges of our times. It contains many rules that are not inevitably principles that appear in the Scriptures.”

Another frustration aired is that “the Synod takes too long to make decisions.” The following is also remarked, “the delegates should comprehend that because we have a Presbyterian church governing system, it often happens that the Synod is acting reactively instead of pro-actively. It has often happened in the past that churches in the religious denomination made changes a long time ago and then the Synod afterwards made a decision regarding these matters.”

4.5.2 Finding

There are indeed churches that have serious concerns whether the Church Order (or some articles thereof) really are relevant and applicable in church practices today.

Decision: Points 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 noted.

4.5.3 Recommendation

That the Synod will pay attention to the enforceability/applicability of the Church Order (see 5.3.3 of this Report).

Decision: Approved.

4.6 *Difference concerning churches' independency/interdependency*

4.6.1 Exposition

Some churches emphasized the dependency and interdependency in written and oral presentations to the delegates. These churches put forward that one church denomination does not mean that we have to be similar at all. With reference to 1 Cor 12 it is remarked that: “We are not all the same, though there is a wonderful unity.” Others remark: “The common accord is not respected by some congregations.

Each does what seems to be right in his own eyes.” A city congregation said the following: Our congregation exists out of a variety of children, youths, adults and seniors that come from a wide collection of backgrounds. Consequently there is a great meaningful diversity in the congregation. We value it and it is important to accommodate this diversity.”

4.6.2 Finding

Churches differ about the independency/interdependency of churches in one denomination.

Decision: Points 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 noted.

4.6.3 Recommendation

That the Synod should attend to this matter (see 5.3.3.1, 5.3.3.2, 5.4.3.3 of this Report).

Decision: Approved.

5. Advice with reference to the instruction (see 3.3 of instruction)

5.1 *How unity and variety can serve our missionary call (see 3.3.1 of instruction)*

5.1.1 Exposition

According to the Bible it is evident that the manner how believers act, is of utmost importance in the eyes of the world. The believers' conduct should – according to the Bible – be to glorify God on the Day of his coming. Unbelieving men might convert due to their religious wives' conduct (1 Pet 3:1-2). Where believers serve Christ in unity irrespective their differences (e.g. language, culture etc.), they are respected – also by disbelievers (Rom 14:18). The conduct of believers during sermons should not result in disbelievers making the wrong conclusions (1 Cor 14:23).

It is further evident from the Bible that the unity amongst believers is of critical importance in the spreading of the gospel to disbelievers. Jesus makes it clear that where there is unity among believers and their love for each other is visible, it testifies that the believers are his followers (John 13:35). From the unity of believers the disbelievers learn much about the unity among the three Persons of the God Tri-unity and also about Jesus Christ's mission to this world (John 17:20-23).

Where believers live in unity, it creates a positive attitude (Acts 2:46-47). Discord in a congregation results in negative comments about the good that believers received (Rom 14:16).

It is thus evident and of critical importance that believers and churches should carefully pay attention to the message that their conduct conveys to the world. In the execution of our missionary call it is of critical importance that the world should experience and see the unity that we have in Christ.

From past incidents it is evident that during majority assemblies an image of discord in the GKSA is portrayed to the outside world.

Petitions of protest and appeals miniaturize other more important and urgent matters on the agenda (due to the weight awarded). Differences among delegates at majority assemblies are newsworthy and therefore this is presented as sensation in the press. This portrays an image of discord to the outside world, but on the contrary there is by far consent and enthusiasm about most matters during majority assemblies.

It also sometimes happens that delegates differ with each other at majority assemblies in such a way that it contradicts the unity that we have in Christ. This way of difference not only carries out an image of discord, but also results in the fact that the discord in the GKSA deepens and that so much attention is devoted to differences that the call to spread the gospel disappears in the background.

The way churches sort out their mutual differences, sends out an image of mutual discord to the world. When churches do not deal with differences orderly and thoroughly, but instead accuse each other of “liberalism”, “ultra-conservatism”, or that the other church is “Scripture critical” or “fundamentalistic”, a message of unity is definitely not conveyed to disbelievers. This results in a clear obstacle in the execution of the church’s missionary call.

5.1.2 Finding

5.1.2.1 The way how our churches behave in the execution of our missionary call in the eyes of the world, is of utmost importance.

5.1.2.2 The way differences (amongst others in the media) are reported, is of importance in the moulding of viewpoints concerning unity in variety in the GKSA.

5.1.2.3 The unity of churches amongst each other is of critical importance in the preaching of the gospel to disbelievers.

5.1.2.4 The way churches deal with each other when they differ, is of critical importance in the preaching of the gospel to disbelievers.

Decision: Points 5.1.1 to 5.1.2.4 noted.

5.1.3 Recommendation

5.1.3.1 That the Synod should pay attention to the way churches are supposed to deal with differences, so that the unity and variety can serve the missionary call of churches (see 5.3 and 6 of this Report).

Decision: Approved.

5.1.3.2 That the Synod gives attention to pro-active liaison with the media in order to contribute to the spreading of a balanced image of the GKSA.

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

5.1.3.3 That the Synod gives attention to the role that diversity plays within the churches in the edification of the unity of the churches and the expression of our missional calling.

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

5.2 *When freedom in variety turns into disobedience to the Word (see 3.3.2 of instruction)*

5.2.1 Exposition

The fact that “those who govern the churches ..., ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us” (Belgic Confession, art 32) entails on the one hand that human fabrications and all laws that humans attempted to establish to serve God and to bind and to force the conscience,

should be rejected. On the other hand it also entails that "those who govern the churches" should not consider "freedom in variety" as disobedience to what Christ teaches in his Word. Believers and churches should not be allowed to deviate from fundamental matters under the cloak/disguise of freedom in variety. The whole manner how we should serve God, is described in detail in the Bible and nobody, even not the apostles, may teach differently as we are already taught by the Holy Scripture (Belgic Confession, art 7).

5.2.2 Finding

Because Christ is the only Head of the church (Eph 1:22), it is of utmost importance that we should take great care that decisions of church assemblies are obedient to that which Christ teaches and demands in His Word. Would it be that such decisions were taken and churches still demand so-called "freedom in variety" to deviate from these decisions, then this "freedom in variety" changes into disobedience to Christ.

Decision: Points 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 noted.

5.2.3 Recommendation

5.2.3.1 That the Synod pays intensive attention to the way churches/church assemblies should bind each other to only the Word of God and the Confession, thus ensuring that decisions come down to obedience to Christ.

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

5.2.3.2 That with decisions based on what Christ teaches and demands in His Word, there will be no room for churches to deviate because of so-called "freedom in variety."

Decision: Approved.

5.3 *When decisions and actions of the local church compromise the common accord (see 3.3.3 of instruction)*

5.3.1 Exposition

The words "common accord" originate from the Dutch words "gemeen accoord". These words occur in specific articles of different Church Laws that are dealing with mutual agreement between churches and how these specific agreements can be changed. The Afrikaans Church Order, article 86 substituted the words "gemeen accoord" with "general votes". The meaning of "general votes" indicates that which everybody finds good, accepted by everybody, by general votes (common accord) and made their own.

Within the GKSA the common accord comes to the front with respect to two pertinent matters namely confession (creed) and Church Order. There is referred to the accord of religion (confession) and the accord of church governing (Church Order). When a church (by means of its delegates) should refuse to abide by the confession or to abide by the Church Order, it compromises the common accord.

As far as practice is concerned, there are some churches that allege that other churches compromise the common accord. However according to the accused churches, they do not deviate from confession or the Church Order. It is evident that there is not always agreement on what the ground principles are of the confession and / or different Church Order articles .

5.3.2 Finding

The common accord is compromised by the local church when:

5.3.2.1 The actions/decisions/viewpoints of a local church go against the confession, without the actions/decisions/viewpoints of the mentioned church being subjected to applicable church judgement according to Scripture and Confession (as undertaken by the signatory formulary of the office bearer).

5.3.2.2 The actions/decisions/viewpoints of a local church are against the decisions of majority assemblies, without the actions/decisions/viewpoints being subjected to applicable church judgement according to Scripture and confession.

5.3.2.3 The actions/decisions/viewpoints of a local church obviously set aside the ground principles of the Church Order.

Care should be taken not to formalistically associate each deviation from the Church Order merely with the violation of the common accord. Where actions/decisions/viewpoints of a local church indeed jeopardize the ground principles of an article of the Church Order, and the church, after majority assemblies acted according to the appropriate Church Order articles, continue in this way, the church indeed compromises the common accord and therefore steps *de facto* out of the church denomination.

- 5.3.2.4 To prevent that each deviation from the Church Order is formalistically seen as a violation of the common accord, clarity and agreement should exist concerning which particular ground principles are in question in each article of the Church Order.

Decision: Points 5.3.1 to 5.3.2.4 noted.

5.3.3 Recommendation

- 5.3.3.1 That the Synod should name Deputies to elucidate the existing Church Order in such a way that at each article, the ground principles and the practical implications of the principles, are clearly defined.
- 5.3.3.2 The Synod should make it clear that it is the local church's obligation in the first place to subdue matters/decisions/practices when regarding it necessary to deviate from the existing Church Law, to majority assemblies to determine if the ground principles of the Church Order are jeopardized or not.

Decision: Points 5.3.3.1 and 5.3.3.2 approved.

5.4 *When Church decisions burden the humans' consciences (see 3.3.4 of the instruction)*

5.4.1 Exposition

The conscience is a deep spiritual consciousness of a human, the awareness whether his attitude or deed is right or wrong. Man's conscience can bother him (1 Sam 24:6), accuse him (1 Cor 4:4), condemn him (1 John 3:20-21) or can testify with him (Rom 2:15) and assure him that his conduct was right (2 Cor 1:12). The believer's conscience is a conscience before God and is the working ground of the Holy Spirit (Rom 9:1). A clean conscience is only possible in reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ (Heb 9:14). It should be part of the church community of believers, to consider each other's conscience (1 Cor 10: 25-29).

In the Belgic Confession art 32 it is explicitly confessed that "all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way", should be rejected. Only that is accepted "what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.". This confession that the believers' conscience should not be bound by what Christ did not institute, is based on the Scripture. In Rom 14-15 the apostle Paul clarifies that people in the congregation that were convinced that they may not eat certain food, (or may eat) and that they should maintain certain days (or not), should have the freedom to act according to their conscience. It is evident from Scripture and confession that the binding of the conscience should be seen as disobedience to God.

Church decisions burden the people's conscience when believers are forced to believe something or not to believe, to do or not, what is not based on God's Word or what is in conflict with God's Word.

Conscience freedom is when room is left to believe and/or to do as prescribed by the conscience. However if someone sees freedom of conscience as a right to judge on his own what is right or wrong and act upon it, without taking fellow believers or the church into consideration, runs the risk of obstinate, wilful individualism. In church practice freedom of conscience means in everything concerning service to God, the believer is free from human innovations and is only bound by God's Word (Belgic Confession, art 32).

One of the ways to prevent the binding of the conscience is a “church orderly way” of revising decisions by the church (CO, art 31 and 46). However it does not take away frustrations with the fact that the way of the church is slow and can also be exhausted (see 4.5 of this instruction).

5.4.2 Finding

- 5.4.2.1 Conscience binding takes place when decisions are human innovations and laws established to serve God.
- 5.4.2.2 Conscience binding does not take place when decisions protect and promote concord and unity and when these decisions can be maintained, preserve in obedience to God.
- 5.4.2.3 Freedom of conscience is not a right to make self-decisions and to act accordingly without taking fellow believers or the church’s judgement into consideration.
- 5.4.2.4 Church assemblies should guard - with great care - against binding the conscience with decisions.

Decision: Points 5.4.1 to 5.4.2.4 noted.

5.4.3 Recommendation

- 5.4.3.1 That church assemblies should guard - with great care - against binding the conscience with decisions.
- 5.4.3.2 That the General Synod should provide practical guidelines from within the Scripture to prevent binding of the conscience by decisions (see 6 of this instruction).
- 5.4.3.3 That the Synod should draw attention to the fact that churches should not act individually and obstinately when they judge that their consciences are bound by decisions of majority assemblies. Churches should present differences to churches according to the appropriate “church orderly way” (CO, artt 31 and 46).

Decision: Points 5.4.3.1 to 5.4.3.3 approved.

5.5 *How the Reformed Churches can be freed from a paralyzing perception of a dying church to a clear image of our missionary calling (see 3.3.5 of this instruction)*

5.5.1 Exposition

The instruction of the Synod alleges that a perception is perceived within the churches that the GKSA is a fading church. This perception is strengthened by amongst others: points of dispute currently raging (among as well as within some churches) that are seemingly not dealt with in the ways according to the Scripture. More reasons are decreasing numbers, negative public media reports concerning the GKSA, deficient inadequate information within the church denomination concerning churches’ loyal fulfilment of their call.

As a result of this perception and strengthening factors, it is assumed that the fading GKSA cannot fulfil its call effectively in this world. This perception paralyses the missionary vocation alignment.

The fact that perceptions occur does not mean that they are justified. An example of this is the deduction from decreasing numbers without taking the following into consideration: emigration, depopulation of rural areas, and smaller numbers of children. Another example is the deduction concerning the GKSA from media exposure without taking into consideration that the reports might be biased, unfounded or even malevolent.

5.5.2 Finding

Negative perceptions, founded or unfounded, influence the churches’ missionary alignment.

Decision: Points 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 noted.

5.5.3 Recommendation

- 5.5.3.1 That churches should take the impact of negative perceptions in “being church” into consideration.
- 5.5.3.2 That churches should identify founded negative perceptions and address them in an orderly church way.

5.5.3.3 That churches should identify unfounded negative perceptions and address the reasons for them in an orderly church way.

5.5.3.4 That the to be named Deputies of the General Synod should identify founded/unfounded negative perceptions that affect the whole church denomination and make recommendations.

Decision: Points 5.5.3.1 to 5.5.3.4 approved (amendment already added – Deputies Acta).

6. Practical advice for the management of matters in compliance with 4 and 5 of this Report

6.1 *Advice concerning the difference between substantial and non-substantial matters*

6.1.1 Explanation

It is evident from the Scripture that the unity of believers is a very important matter and that differences should be managed in a Biblical way and in the spirit of Christ. Instructions in this regard appear almost in every book of the New Testament (compare Eph 4:3; 1 Cor 12:13, 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 5:22; Phil 2:2; 1 Thes 5:13; Col 3:15).

When Paul deal in Romans 14 and 15 with the maintenance of days and eating of food, he demands that the church in Romans should tolerate each other's differences and not judge or despise each other. It is clear that Paul regards these matters as non-substantial.

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul deals with the maintenance of times (Gal 4:10) days, months, festivities and years). Different from the letter to the Romans, here Paul leaves no room for differences. He says with reference to the people who still maintain "days, months, festivities and years" he toiled and moiled in vain (Gal 4:11). Different from the letter to the Romans, Paul addresses a situation where ministers falsified the gospel. They proposed a kind of legality, according to which the maintenance of times is regarded as a necessity for merit to sanctification. That, which they preached, was a return to the "inferior and miserable lawful religious rules." Their preaching was in total conflict with the gospel according to which man can only be saved, redeemed through the grace in Christ and without deeds. This was a different gospel than the true gospel and this "while there is no other" (Gal 1:8, 9). Paul therefore rejects it here, where he allowed it in Rome (where there is no evidence of false teachings).

In Colossians Paul deals not only with the maintenance of specific times (Col 2:16-17 and 4:10), but also, as in Romans 14-15, with what believers may eat and drink (Col 2:16-17 and 20:23). It is very clear in the letter to believers in Colossians that Paul rejects a doctrine of people who had very specific prescriptions about what should be eaten and drunk, and which festivals should be held. Paul leaves no room – different from Romans 14-15 – that believers should accept this doctrine. In Col 2:20 he says: "You have died with Christ and are set free from the ruling spirits of the universe. Why then, do you live as though you belonged to this world? Why do you obey such rules...?" Of these teachings he says: "Of course such rules appear to be based on wisdom in their forced worship of angels and false humility and severe treatment of the body, but they have no real value in controlling physical passions" (Col 2:23). Paul rejects these prescriptions clearly because people who stood for the maintenance of these prescriptions did not hold on to the Head, Jesus Christ (Col 2:19) – the full content of divine nature lives in Christ (Col 1:15-20 and 2:9). They did not admit the full salvation that Christ deserved (Col 1:19-20).

From Galatians and Colossians it is clear that the differences in these congregations dealt with substantial matters because it jeopardized the teachings of the sufficiency of the belief in Christ as sole Saviour.

In the Reformed Church polity, a difference in weight of matters that are managed by church assemblies, is distinguished, although the distinction is not seen or described in the same way all over. For example the CO, art 85 of the GKSA refers to “average issues” of churches overseas with different customs than ours, that should not be condemned. See the Synod of Dordrecht 1578 (art 23).

The Westminster Confession, art 6 also confesses a distinction, even between matters that should generally be maintained. There is matters that are “either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” and certain matters that affect amongst others, the governing of the church, “which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word.

6.1.2 Finding

It is evident that the Scripture distinguishes between substantial and non-substantial matters.

Decision: Points 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 noted.

6.1.3 Recommendations

6.1.3.1 That church assemblies should distinguish between substantial and non-substantial matters in decision making.

6.1.3.2 That the following should serve as guidelines between substantial and non-substantial matters:

Substantial matters

6.1.3.2.1 Matters that are derived directly from the Scripture and could be justified with Scripture references and/or

6.1.3.2.2 matters that can be derived from the Scripture on grounds of direct Scripture principles and/or

6.1.3.2.3 customs that are based on examples of the apostles grounded in the Scripture.

Non-substantial matters

6.1.3.2.4 Matters that are not directly/explicitly prescribed by the Scripture or cannot be directly derived from the Scripture and/or

6.1.3.2.5 matters that cannot be derived from the confession and/or

6.1.3.2.6 matters that are not essential and because of inevitable reasons, that need not be maintained by everybody everywhere and all the time and/or

6.1.3.2.7 matters that are according Scripture and apostolic habit left for churches’ own discretion and/or

6.1.3.2.8 matters that should be agreed upon to be able to live in agreement as churches of the same denomination, but will not jeopardize the overall belief or being truthful church, or will disrespect God’s honour.

Decision: About point 6.1.3 – see amendments at the report of the Commission – pt O.

6.2 *Advice concerning dealing with non-substantial matters*

6.2.1 Exposition

Romans 14:1-15:13 deals in detail with differences within a congregation referring to matters that are non-substantial. Paul gives clear instructions about the way the congregation should deal with these differences and therefore the deputies paid special attention to this part.

From the study of this part by the Deputies of Unity in Diversity, the following emerges:

6.2.1.1 Synoptic exposition of a structure of Romans 14:1-15:13

Romans 14:1-15:13: Structure

14:1 **Two basic instructions to the strong in their relationship with the weak**

14:1 a: Receive those who are weak (instruction A).

14:1 b: The strong should not receive the weak just to convince / to judge (instruction B).

14:2-12 **The situation in the congregation and general instructions to the strong and the weak**

14:2-4: The situation with regard to eating of food and instructions:

- The strong should not despise
The weak should not condemn.*
- 14: 5-12 The situation with regard to the maintenance of days and instructions:
*The weak should not condemn
The strong should not despise.*
- 14: 13a Crossing aimed at both groups:
Do not judge.
- 14:14-23 Three expansions of basic instruction B and two statements concerning the responsibility of the strong despite their freedom**
- 14:13b First expansion of the instruction to not only be aimed at convincing/judging the weak (instruction B):
Do no place obstacles in the way of the weak (introduced by "οὐκ").
- 14:14-15b Emphasis on the responsibility of the strong – a responsibility despite the freedom that they received in Christ:
The strong should act with love towards the weak.
- 14: 16-18 Second expansion of instruction to not only aim at convincing the weak (instruction B):
The strong should take care that the freedom in Christ should not get a bad name (introduced by "οὐκ").
- 14:19 Third expansion of the instruction to not only aim at convincing the weak (instruction B):
Chase peace and building up (introduced by "οὐκ").
- 14:20-22 Emphasis of the responsibility of the strong – a responsibility despite the freedom that they received in Christ:
If the expression of freedom in Christ will affect the weak negatively, the strong should take care that their freedom is a matter then between them and God.
- 15:1-13: Expansion if basic instruction A and two blessings, benedictions**
- 15:1 First expansion of instruction to accept the weak (instruction A):
The strong should carry the weak of those who are not strong and should not please themselves.
- 15:2-3 Motivation why the strong should carry the weaknesses of the weak:
The strong should please their fellow man but in that specifically which is good for them and which will build them up.
- 15:3b-4 Call of the Scripture:
Christ is an example to the strong.
- 15:5 Blessing:
That God who is the source of peace and constancy, steadfastness, will give unanimity, harmony.
- 16:6 Expected outcomes:
They will glorify God unanimously.
- 15:7 Second Expansion of the instruction to accept, embrace the weak (instruction A):
The strong should accept, embrace the weak as Christ had done it.
- 15:8-12 Call of the Scripture: Jesus Christ is an example to the strong.
- 15:13a Blessing:
That the God of hope should fill them with joy and peace.
- 15: 13b Expected outcomes:
They will be filled with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

6.2.1.2 A clear distinction between believers who comprehend their freedom in Christ thoroughly and believers who do not show insight into their freedom in Christ

Paul distinguishes in Romans 14:1 to 15:13 clearly between two groups of believers within the congregation.

The one group was believers (probably mostly Christians from paganism) who comprehended their freedom in Christ thoroughly and were convinced in their consciences before God that they were free to eat certain food (probably meat that was sacrificed to gods) and not to maintain certain festive days (probably Jewish festivities). Paul calls these people *strong*. With strong he specifically refers to their insight in the freedom that Christ acquired for them.

They were however not stronger in other respects in their belief than the other group believers. In light of the fact that this group consisted of those who felt free in their conscience to do certain things and to refrain from doing other things they can be described as the **conscience-free**.

The other group believers within the congregation of Rome was believers (probably Jewish Christians and probably a few not from the Jews) who were convinced that they did not have the freedom to eat the food in question and to refrain from the festive days. They were convinced in their conscience that they are bound as part of their sanctification not to eat certain food and to maintain certain festive days.

Paul calls them weak in their religion, referring specifically to the fact that they, as far as food and festive days are concerned, did not thoroughly comprehend the freedom Christ acquired. This did not mean that they were weaker in their belief in any other regard (e.g. religious conviction, knowledge of their complete sanctification or earnest strife against sin) than the other group believers in the congregation. Because they did not have thorough insight in the freedom that Christ acquired, they regard it as being bound in their conscience to maintain certain conduct. This group might then be described as the **conscience-bound**.

To guide the congregation in Rome (with its differences concerning non-substantial matters) that they glorify “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ unanimously with one voice” (Rom 15:6), Paul gives very specific instructions to the conscience-bound and the conscience-free.

6.2.1.3 Responsibilities of the conscience-bound

6.2.1.3.1 Do not condemn the conscience-free

The conscience-bound are warned not to condemn the conscience-free (Rom 14:3, 10). The conscience-bound should not condemn the conscience-free, because they are convinced that they (the conscience-free) in seizing certain freedom for themselves, they are disobedient to Christ and they are therefore not true believers and will come to a fall. They should remember that true believers belong to God and that He will keep those in His service going (Rom 14:4).

6.2.1.3.2 To God accountable for own viewpoints

The conscience-bound are cautioned, reprimanded to be honestly certain in own mind, heart of own conceptions (Rom 14:5). They should know that they will appear before God with their conceptions (Rom 14:10). They should make sure that they act to the glory of God and thank Him in the matters they consider themselves bound (Rom 14:6). The conscience-bound are cautioned to examine with great care under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whether their conceptions are really based on God’s will (compare the similarity between Rom 14:6 and 12:1-2) or whether they are not attached to their own preferences.

6.2.1.4 Responsibilities of the conscience-free

6.2.1.4.1 Do not despise the conscience-bound

The conscience-free are cautioned to not despise the conscience-bound (Rom 14:3, 10). They should not, because the conscience-bound do not have proper insight in the freedom that Christ acquired, look down on the conscience-bound.

6.2.1.4.2 To account before God concerning own conceptions

The conscience-free should really be convinced in own mind concerning own conceptions (Rom 14:5) and should know that they are accountable to God (Rom 14:10). They should make sure that in the matters they are convinced they received the freedom in Christ, they indeed act to glorify God’s Name and also thank Him (Rom 14:6).

The conscience-free should with great care examine under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whether their conceptions are truly based on God's will (compare the similarity between Rom 14:6 and 12:1-2) or whether they are not focussed on own preferences.

6.2.1.4.3 Embracing the conscience-bound

The conscience-free receive the instruction to really embrace the conscience-bound as part of them (Rom 14:1a). They should accept the conscience-bound as Christ accepted them (Rom 15:1). If the weaknesses of the conscience-bound burden the conscience-free by not living up to the freedom in Christ, they should be willing to carry the weaknesses of the conscience-bound just as Christ has set the example (Rom 15:1-4).

6.2.1.4.4 Responsibilities towards the conscience-bound despite the freedom in Christ

Paul leaves no doubt with his readers that believers in Christ have the freedom to eat the food in question and not to maintain the festive days in question (Rom 14:4). He however makes it clear that they still have a responsibility towards the believers in the congregation that are convinced otherwise. They still have a responsibility towards those who believe that they are still bound in their conscience to not eat the food and to maintain the festive days in obedience to Christ (Rom 14:14-15 and 14:20-22). When the conscience-bound are convinced in their hearts that something is wrong, then it is wrong according to them and they would have sinned if they act contrary to their consciences (Rom 14:14, 23). The conscience-free should therefore not place obstacles in the way of the conscience-bound by demanding that the freedom in Christ of the strong should be prime priority (Rom 14:13). They should not ignore the consequences that a demand to act upon freedom would contain for the conscience-bound (Rom 14:15). If they demand their freedom in Christ despite the weakness of the conscience-bound, they will bring the freedom in Christ/the Kingdom of God in ill repute (Rom 14:16-18). The conscience-free should, if necessary, sacrifice their freedom in Christ and thus pursue peace and the building of the congregation. (Rom 14:17).

It is love that should urge the conscience-free to willingly, for the sake of the conscience-bound, not demand their practising of freedom in Christ (Rom 14:14-15b). Although they sacrifice the freedom received, they do not have to part with the freedom in Christ. They could still be joyful about their insight in the freedom in Christ (Rom 14:2-22). Where believers can practise their freedom in Christ without offending the conscience-bound, there need not be any impediment.

6.2.1.5 Trust in God by conscience-free and conscience-bound

Paul inserts two blessings in the part dealing with the differences in the congregation in Rome (Rom 15:5-6 and 15:13). He stresses that God who is the Source of constancy, firmness and hope (Rom 15:5a and 15:13a), is the One that can give them unanimity, joy and peace (Rom 15:5b and 15:13b). He is the One enabling the congregation to glorify God with one voice (Rom 15:6) and be filled with hope (Rom 15:13c). Both the conscience-free and the conscience-bound are guided towards prayerful dependency of this God.

6.2.1.6 The shared responsibility of the conscience-free and conscience-bound

It is derived from the fact that Paul addresses both the conscience-free and the conscience-bound in this given situation, that both groups (despite their difference in opinion) in the first place share the responsibility to preserve and promote the unity of the church (that is the will of Christ – Rom 15:5).

The ideal outcomes striven for, is a church that glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ unanimously with one voice” (Rom 15:6) and a church filled by belief with joy, peace and hope in abundance (Rom 15:7). To achieve these outcomes, the conscience-free and the conscience-bound both should:

- 6.2.1.6.1 Approach God submissively and prayerfully, in Whom all “patience and encouragement ”are found “to have the same point of view” among ourselves (Rom 15:5) and in Whom all hope is found to have hope in abundance (Rom 15:13);
- 6.2.1.6.2 Every one of them then will have to give an account of themselves to God about their own opinion on the day of judgement (Rom 14:12), and to come to own conclusion that the opinion is indeed one that everyone is convinced of without a doubt (Rom 14:5), because all doubtful matters that are not based on faith are sin (Rom 14:23);
- 6.2.1.6.3 To deal with their different viewpoints in such a way that God is glorified and thanked in all respects, because nobody lives for himself and nobody dies for himself (Rom 14:6-8);
- 6.2.1.6.4 To acknowledge the reign of Christ over each other by approaching each other primarily from within the shared relationship with God in Christ (and not from the different viewpoints). The conscience-free should see the conscience-bound as someone that is fully embraced, accepted by God (Rom 14:3) and the conscience-bound should regard the conscience-free as someone that God fully keeps maintained (Rom 14:4);
- 6.2.1.6.5 Take care that the focus is not drawn from the main focus of the Kingdom of God (by different ways dealing with the matters) namely justice and peace and joy in the holy Spirit (Rom 14:17);
- 6.2.1.6.6 Will see it as an important call to follow the example of Christ by (also in the difference and the way dealing with it) not pleasing themselves, but their fellowman “in order to build them up in the faith (Rom 15:2-3).
The important instructions in Romans 14:19 “to always aim at things that bring peace and help to strengthen one another” (and are commissioned primarily to the conscience-free in the context of Romans 14:1 to 15:13), is a call throughout the Scriptures for all believers (compare 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11; 1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:29). It affects all activities in essence that can promote the *koinoonia* of the church. It is also a shared responsibility of both the conscience-free and the conscience-bound; that peace can only be pursued by those prepared for peace and building-up can only take place with those that are focused on it. The fact that “peace” and “building-up” are given as a joint instruction, means that peace should support the building up and the building-up should support peace. The building-up of a congregation occurs according to Eph 2:20 always as “you too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself”, and thus based on the Scripture.

6.2.2 Finding

When believers differ about non-substantial matters and some are convinced in their conscience that they have the freedom in Christ to certain conduct and some others are convinced that they do not have this freedom in Christ, Romans 14:1-15:13 indicates a clear way to follow.

Decision: Points 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 noted.

6.2.3 Recommendation

When there are differences concerning non-substantial matters in church assemblies and some are convinced in their conscience that they have the freedom in Christ to certain conduct (conscience-free) whilst others are convinced that they do not have the freedom (conscience-bound), the following path should be followed:

- 6.2.3.1 The conscience-bound should refrain from condemning the conscience-free as forlorn or as believers already busy falling.

- They should remember that true believers are the possession of God and that He will maintain the people in His service.
- 6.2.3.2 The conscience-bound should examine their own opinions based on conscience before God. They should make sure that they act solely to glorify and thank God in the matters they regard themselves as conscience-bound.
 - 6.2.3.3 The conscience-free should not despise the conscience-bound (Rom 14:3, 10). They should not look down on the conscience-bound because according to them they do not have proper insight in the freedom that Christ contrived.
 - 6.2.3.4 The conscience-free should really be convinced in their hearts of their viewpoints. They should make sure that their conduct is aimed at glorifying and thanking the Lord concerning matters accepting the freedom in Christ.
 - 6.2.3.5 The conscience-free should embrace the conscience-bound as Christ embraced and accepted them. When the weaknesses of the conscience-bound burden the conscience-free, by not fully acting upon their freedom in Christ, they should be prepared to carry the weaknesses of the conscience-bound as Christ has set the example.
 - 6.2.3.6 Although the conscience-free are convinced of their freedom in Christ, they still have a responsibility towards the conscience-bound. They have to comprehend that when the conscience-bound are in their hearts convinced that something is wrong then it is wrong according to them. The conscience-bound will sin if they act against their consciences, in spite of the fact that the conscience-free are convinced that believers are not bound in this specific regard.
 - 6.2.3.7 The conscience-bound should not place obstacles and stumbling blocks in the way of the conscience-bound by demanding to act upon the freedom that they have according to their conviction.
 - 6.2.3.8 The conscience-free should comprehend that it will have very bad consequences if they act upon the freedom in Christ (which they are convinced of) and thus ignoring the consequences brought about for the conscience-bound. This will result in the fact that the freedom in Christ / the Kingdom of God will be brought in ill repute.
 - 6.2.3.9 The conscience-free should – in their difference with the conscience-bound- strive for peace and the enrichment of the congregation.
 - 6.2.3.10 Love especially should urge the conscience-free to be willing for the sake of the conscience-bound not to demand their freedom in Christ. They could still rejoice themselves in their relationship with God, because they have insight in the freedom in Christ.
 - 6.2.3.11 Both the conscience-free and the conscience-bound should place their trust concerning their differences, prayerfully dependent in God. He is the source of steadfastness and hope. He is the One that can work unanimity, joy and peace with each other despite differences. He is the One that can enable believers to glorify God unanimously and be filled with hope despite differences.
 - 6.2.3.12 Both the conscience-free and the conscience-bound should regard it high priority and take care for the maintaining and promotion of unity of the church.
 - 6.2.3.13 Both the conscience-free and the conscience-bound should take care that in dealing with differences, the attention is not distracted from the main matter which is the Kingdom of God, namely justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
 - 6.2.3.14 The building-up of the conscience-free and the conscience-bound is based on the layout and application of the Holy Scripture (the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as cornerstone).

Decision: Points 6.2.3 to 6.2.3.14 approved.

6.3 *Advice with regard to dealing with substantial matters*

6.3.1 Exposition

As already indicated in this Report, unconditional obedience to the Head of the Church is demanded in dealing with substantial matters. In the case of a difference about a substantial matter, churches should prayerfully determine from the Scripture how they should be obedient to Christ in the respective matter. Churches that are disobedient in substantial matters that were agreed upon (after the church orderly way without solution was fully pursued) place themselves outside the denomination. From 4 and 5 of this Report, it is evident that the way the GKSA deal with differences currently, is in some case not satisfactory. Examples of shortcomings of the current method are:

- 6.3.1.1 The difference between substantial and non-substantial matters is not particularly taken into consideration in decision making.
- 6.3.1.2 The General Synod does not have sufficient time to determine and clear up substantial matters thoroughly and in depth due to overloaded agendas and limited time.
- 6.3.1.3 This results in the fact that decisions concerning substantial matters are determined by means of a vote that portrays significant discord and division. Because of the seriousness of these matters and deep conviction, is it mentally unreasonable to expect that the minority should conform there and then. The Biblical ideal of unanimity is destroyed.
- 6.3.1.4 As a result of the work- and mental load that serious differences place on the General Synod, other urgent matters are neglected and differences over emphasized.

6.3.2 Finding

It is necessary for churches with differences that they continue as far as substantial matter are concerned, to attempt to deal with them within the framework of principles of the Church polity to determine together from the Word of God the will of God.

Decision: Points 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 noted.

6.3.3 Recommendation

- 6.3.3.1 That Special Synods should be held according to a General Synod's decision when substantial matters with a serious potential of division cannot unanimously be resolved/completed by the General Synod, to then by proceeding study and consideration, eventually bring matters to unanimity to then complete and resolve the differences.

Decision: Approved.

- 6.3.3.2 Regional Synods should appoint delegates for these possible Synods before each General Synod, namely four reverends and four elders as well as the necessary secundi.

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

- 6.3.3.3 A Special Synod should be constituted for the first time under the leadership of the Chairman and Scribe of the previous General Synod and then appoint their own Moderamen dealing with the matters referred to them by the General Synod.

Decision: Approved.

- 6.3.3.4 Special Synods gather as often and as long as enquired for the completion of their instruction and provide in an appropriate manner opportunity to members, congregations, and churches with whom we have ecumenical unity ties to make representations iro tabled matters.

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

- 6.3.3.5 Special Synods complete matters referred to them when they are in agreement about the matter/matters and inform the churches thereafter accordingly.

Decision: Approved.

6.3.3.6 The Special Synods appoint delegates, to meet and inform the churches that are specifically affected by the decisions of the Special Synods, if so requested.

Decision: Approved.

6.4 That the recommendation iro the diversity among the churches and the role that it can play in the edification of the unity and the expression of our missional calling is referred to the Deputies Turnaround Strategy (Church Growth Ministry).

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

7. Instruction 3.2: “To study the Petitions of Protest and to Report in 2015”

7.1 Exposition

The Petitions of Protest in question were served during the General Synod’s session in 2012. They were referred to specific Commissions that compiled Commission Reports and presented them to the Synod for decision making. The Synod did not settle the Commission Reports and Petitions of Protest in question on grounds of an Order motion due to problems as presented in 3.3 of the motion. These Petitions of Protest and Commission Reports were referred to these Deputies to study them and to Report on them. In the light of the study, the findings and advice/recommendations to which these Deputies came, the Petitions of Protest and Commission Reports were verified and it appears that the grievances indeed dealt with the kind of matters affected by the recommendations of this Report.

7.2 Finding

The referred Petitions of Protest can only be completed after the General Synod 2015 dealt with 4-6 of this Report.

Decision: Points 7.1 and 7.2 noted.

7.3 Recommendation

7.3.1 That in case the recommendations of points of 4-6 are approved, the referred Petitions of Protest should be dealt with by way of these applicable decisions.

Decision: Approved.

7.3.2 That the Synod with approval of 7.3.1 should judge whether these matters are substantial or non-substantial.

7.3.2.1 In case these matters are substantial, the Synod should judge (see 6.3.3 of this Report):

- a. If the matters have serious division potential,
- b. Whether General Synods of the past could reach unanimity about these matters,
- c. Whether the matters, in the light of the above mentioned, should be referred to a Special Synod.

7.3.2.2 In case these matters are judged as non-substantial, the Synod should

- a. judge who the conscience-free and the conscience-bound are (see 6.2.1.2 of this Report).
- b. to apply the recommendations in line with Rom 14 and 15 (see 6.2.3 of this Report) and to complete the Petitions of Protest.

Decision:

a. That referred Petitions of Protest are essential.

b. That the matter has serious potential to divide.

c. That the Petition of Protest confirm that the General Synod could not reach consensus in the past.

d. That in the light of abovementioned decisions (a and b) the matters are referred to a Special Synod and that an ad hoc commission will advise the meeting on:

- 1. dealing further with Petitions of Protest at Synod 2015 regarding the same matter, and**
- 2. a way in which a valid Special Synod can be convened as soon as possible.**

8. As far as financial implications are concerned

8.1 Recommendation

In case the Synod approves 5.3.3.1 and/or 6.3.3.1 of this Report, the financial implications must be referred to the Deputies/Synod concerned, which will deal with the financial implications in co-operation with Administrative Bureau.

Decision: Approved.

O. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION (pt 6.1.3)

1. Mandate

To replace the wording of Report Deputies Unity in Diversity (21.1) at point 6.1.3 with the wording of Point of Description Regional Synod Pretoria: Guidelines for distinction between essential and non-essential matters' points 1.1 and 1.2.

Decision: Noted.

2. Argumentation

The mandate was to formulate a meaningful replacement of the words at point 6.1.3 with point 1.1.1 below in the light of discussion and proposals by the Synod:

2.1 Current wording

6.1.3 Recommendations

6.1.3.1 That church assemblies should distinguish between substantial and non-substantial matters in decision making.

6.1.3.2 That the following should serve as guidelines between substantial and non-substantial matters:

Essential matters

6.1.3.2.1 Matters that are derived directly from the Scripture and could be justified with Scripture references and/or

6.1.3.2.2 matters that can be derived from the Scripture on grounds of direct Scripture principles and/or

6.1.3.2.3 customs that are based on examples of the apostles grounded in the Scripture.

Non-essential matters

6.1.3.2.4 Matters that are not directly/explicitly prescribed by the Scripture or cannot be directly derived from the Scripture and/or

6.1.3.2.5 matters that cannot be derived from the confession and/or

6.1.3.2.6 matters that are not essential and because of inevitable reasons, that need not be maintained by everybody everywhere and all the time and/or

6.1.3.2.7 matters that are according Scripture and apostolic habit left for churches' own discretion and/or

6.1.3.2.8 matters that should be agreed upon to be able to live in agreement as churches of the same denomination, but will not jeopardize the overall belief or being truthful church, or will disrespect God's honour.

2.2 Replace with

1.1 Essential matters

1.1.1 Matters (convictions, doctrines, rules of order) which come directly from Scriptures.

1.1.2 Matters which can be deduced from explicit Scriptural principles in a valid way.

1.1.3 Matters which rest on a normative example of the apostles.

1.1.4 Matters which contains the following "weights":

1.1.4.1 it concerns the truth of the Word of God;

1.1.4.2 it concerns faith in God;

1.1.4.3 it is expressed in the confession of the church;

1.1.4.4 it concerns conscientious, actual obedience to the Lord;

- 1.1.4.5 it is necessitated by grave and unavoidable causes.
- 1.1.5 It boils down to this: It is matters which affects in themselves or in the way in which they are motivated or used, the honour of God, the salvation of people and/or the trueness of the church.
- 1.2 *Non-essential matters*
- 1.2.1 Matters which are not explicitly contained in Scriptures or can't validly be deduced from explicit Scriptural principles.
- 1.2.2 Matters which are not explicitly mentioned in the confessions or can't be validly deduced form them.
- 1.2.3 Matters which needn't be maintained by all and everywhere for grave and unavoidable reasons.
- 1.2.4 Matters which, according to Scriptures and the apostolic practice, were left to the discretion of the different churches.
- 1.2.5 Matters which have to be agreed upon to live together as churches, but which don't directly affect the honour of God, or the salvation of persons, or the trueness of the church.

The Commission heard two delegates and some of the proposals of the Synod were kept in mind, and also adjudge that the expansion of the Point of Discussion under points 1.1.4 to 1.1.5 is unnecessary and can be omitted.

Decision: Noted.

3. Recommendation

That point 1.1.1 is amended as follows and the wording of point 6.1.3 is replaced in its entirety.

(Proposed amendments printed in bold and omissions indicated.)

- 1.1 *Essential matters*
- 1.1.1 Matters which come directly **and clearly** from Scripture and can be proved with appeal to Scripture.
- 1.1.2 Matters which can be deduced from direct Scriptural principles from Scripture.
- 1.1.3 Matters (customs) which are based on a normative example of the apostles.
- ~~1.1.4 Matters which contains the following "weights":~~
- ~~1.1.4.1 it concerns the truth of the Word of God;~~
- ~~1.1.4.2 it concerns faith in God;~~
- ~~1.1.4.3 it is expressed in the confession of the church;~~
- ~~1.1.4.4 it concerns conscientious, actual obedience to the Lord;~~
- ~~1.1.4.5 it is necessitated by grave and unavoidable causes.~~
- ~~1.1.5 It boils down to this: It is matters which affects in themselves or in the way in which they are motivated or used, the honour of God, the salvation of people and/or the trueness of the church.~~
- 1.2 *Non-essential matters*
- 1.2.1 Matters which are not explicitly contained in Scriptures or can't validly be deduced from explicit Scriptural principles.
- 1.2.2 Matters which are not explicitly mentioned in the confessions or can't be validly deduced form them.
- 1.2.3 Matters which needn't be maintained by all and everywhere for grave and unavoidable reasons.
- 1.2.4 Matters which, according to Scriptures and the apostolic practice, were left to the discretion of the different churches.

- 1.2.5 Matters which have to be agreed upon to live together as churches, but which don't **directly** affect the honour of God, or the salvation of persons, or the trueness of the church.

Decision: Approved with the following amendments: Addition of 6.1.3.1 and 6.1.3.2 of the original Report (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).

6.1.3.1 That church assemblies should distinguish between substantial and non-substantial matters in decision making.

6.1.3.2 That the following should serve as guidelines between substantial and non-substantial matters:

Substantial matters

6.1.3.2.1 Matters that are derived directly from the Scripture and could be justified with Scripture references and/or

6.1.3.2.2 matters that can be derived from the Scripture on grounds of direct Scripture principles and/or

6.1.3.2.3 customs that are based on examples of the apostles grounded in the Scripture.

Non-substantial matters

6.1.3.2.4 Matters that are not directly/explicitly prescribed by the Scripture or cannot be directly derived from the Scripture and/or

6.1.3.2.5 matters that cannot be derived from the confession and/or

6.1.3.2.6 matters that are not essential and because of inevitable reasons, that need not be maintained by everybody everywhere and all the time and/or

6.1.3.2.7 matters that are according Scripture and apostolic habit left for churches' own discretion and/or

6.1.3.2.8 matters that should be agreed upon to be able to live in agreement as churches of the same denomination, but will not jeopardize the overall belief or being truthful church, or will disrespect God's honour.

P. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Task

To advise the Synod about

1.1 The further handling of the written objections that has been referred to the Deputy Unity in Diversity as well as the two written objections of the Reformed Churches Potchefstroom-Die Bult and Krugersdorp that is of the same matter and that serves on this Synod.

1.2 A method whereupon a Special Synod can be called up as soon as possible.

Decision: Points 1.1 and 1.2 noted.

2. Recommendation

2.1 All the relevant written objections are about the woman in the special service. In the light thereof that the Synod decided that the matter of the woman in the special service is a substantial matter, it is recommended that all the objections be referred to the Special Synod.

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

2.2 The following are recommended with regard to the calling of the Special Synod:

2.2.1 That the respective Regional Synods will perform the necessary delegation to Special Synod 2015 according to own arrangements.

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

2.2.2 That apart from the primus delegates that also 8 secundus delegates be nominated. (Delegates should be made aware of the possible long time span of the Special Synod.)

Decision: Approved.

2.2.3 That the Reformed Church Potchefstroom be nominated as called and correspondent Church Council of the Special Synod.

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

Q. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF FINANCES

1. Mandate

21.1 Report Unity in Diversity, pt 8.1.

The General Synod decided to hold a General Synod. The financial implications are referred to the Financial Commission.

Decision: Noted.

2. Matters that the Synod take note of

2.1 *What is budgeted for?*

2.1.1 Travel expenses

2.1.1.1 The scope of the travelling costs is determined by who the delegates will be.

2.1.1.2 We suggest that Regional Synods budget for this and reimburse it themselves.

2.1.2 Accommodation and meals.

2.1.3 Printing work and translation into English.

2.1.4 Translators/Interpreters during the Synod.

2.1.5 To estimation the *raming* can cost about R6.00 for every confessed member per year.

2.1.5.1 The estimated costs for Synod 2015 are R1.6 million. That is R715 for each delegate per day for 8 days.

2.1.5.2 R715 x 56 delegates = R40 040 per day.

2.1.5.3 R6 for each confessed member in *ramings* from 01-7-2015 will make R300 000 available per year.

2.1.5.4 For a special General Synod of 7 days per year will be R280 000.

2.1.6 The Planning Commission for the Special General Synod is requested to make use of modern technology in their methods during meetings.

2.2 *Ramings*

2.2.1 *Ramings* for the current financial year is already determined.

2.2.1.1 The estimation for the new budget will only be done from 1 July 2015.

2.2.1.2 *Ramings* are determined on a yearly basis by Management of the Administrative Bureau during budgeting.

Decision: Points 2.1.1 to 2.2.1.2 noted (amendments already added – Deputies Acta).

3. Matters that the Synod decide on

3.1. That the Regional Synod themselves should make provision for travelling expenses to the Special General Synod.

Decision: Not approved.

3.2. The financial implications to hold a special Synod be referred to the Management of the Administrative Bureau.

Decision: Approved.