

The Reformed Churches Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland/ GKN)

Concise Presentation

The name of the church federation which was realized on November 26, 2009 is De Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland, (GKN). *Literally translated the name would be The Reformed Churches Netherlands. For the sake of this document, this federation will be called the GKN.*

These churches acknowledge Holy Scripture as God's Word, and desire to live according to it. Therefore, they accept the Three Forms of Unity, namely the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt. They adhere to the Reformed Church Order as compiled by the General Synod, Groningen-South, 1978. In doing so, they uphold the confessions of the Reformed Churches as they were maintained via the Secession in 1834 from the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, (Dutch State Church), the 'Doleantie' in 1886, the Union in 1892, and the Liberation in 1944.

The alliance between the individual churches in the federation takes form through pulpit exchange, recognizing each other's church discipline, open LORD's Supper table between members of sister churches according to the Church Order, article 60, and meeting in broader assemblies such as classis and synod.

The Churches

The Churches belonging to the GKN federation are:

Classis North

- The Reformed Church of Assen-Kornhorn, with meeting places in Assen and in Kornhorn;
- The Reformed Church of Dalfsen;
- The Reformed Church of South-east Groningen;
- The Reformed Church of Hardenberg and area;
- The Reformed Church of Kampen (Ichtus);
- The Reformed Church of Zuidhorn and area;

Classis South

- The Reformed Church of Ede and area, with satellite meeting places in Amersfoort en 's-Hertogenbosch;
- The Reformed Church of Enschede and area;
- The Reformed Church of Harderwijk and area;
- The Reformed Church of Zwijndrecht and area, with a satellite meeting place in Goes (Vliedberg congregation);
- The Reformed Church of Zwolle and area, with satellite meeting places in Apeldoorn and Den Helder

The Offices

There are seven ministers in active office, namely:

- Dr. A. Bas in Kampen and Dalfsen;
- Ds. R. Douma in Enschede;

- Ds. P. Helmus in Zuidhorn;
- Ds. L. Heres in Assen and Kornhorn;
- Ds. A. Jongeneel in Zwijndrecht and Goes;
- Ds. J.R. Visser in Ede, Amersfoort and 's-Hertogenbosch;
- Ds. R. van der Wolf in Hardenberg.

The emeriti are Ds. F.J. Bijzet, Ds. A. H. Driest, Ds. H. Drost, Ds. A. Geelhoed, Ds. E. Hoogendoorn, Ds. A. de Jager and Prof. Dr. F. van der Pol.

The central task of the ministers is the proclamation of the Word of God. The preaching is Scriptural, redemptive-historical, and Christocentric, and it requires a response of faith and repentance. Exegesis takes the highest priority in preparation of sermons. The congregation is addressed as the covenantal community of the Lord Jesus Christ, but without covenant automatism. The promises of the Gospel as well as the requirements of the covenant are preached. Moreover, the congregation is called and encouraged to believe the promises with true faith, and to accept the warnings against forsaking God's Word. In the preaching, the life of a covenant congregation in today's world is addressed in a normative manner, without allowing personal experience and concrete situations of the moment to determine how the Scriptures should be understood and interpreted.

Besides the preaching, the catechism teaching and further equipping the congregation is a priority for the minister.

In all churches, elders and deacons serve to equip and encourage the members for service and to edify the body of Christ.

Church Services

The preaching of Gospel takes a central place in the church services, amidst the singing of God's praises, thanksgiving and prayers of supplication.

The services are conducted according to the order of Middelburg, 1933, and of Kampen, 1975. The churches make use of the Bible translation, the "Herziene Satenvertaling", *which is comparable to the New King James Version*.

In the morning service, the reading of the Decalogue has a fixed place. In the afternoon service, the Christian faith is professed by reading the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. Sometimes the confession is sung by the congregation. As a rule, God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is expounded once every Sunday.

The churches use the Gereformeerd Kerkboek, (1984/1985). It contains 150 versified Psalms and 41 hymns, the above mentioned two orders of service and the liturgical forms.

In the absence of a minister, a sermon is read, or an audiovisual recording of a service elsewhere is used.

Congregational Life

Church members take care of each other as fellow believers. This is not always easy as many of the churches are regional churches. After church services, it is usual to have a coffee social, giving the members the opportunity to engage in fellowship.

There is an annual national meeting day. The main reason for organizing this day is to equip and encourage members through lectures, seminars, workshops, and socializing. Attention is given to the position and meaning of being church in these times, especially because many congregations are small and isolated from neighboring sister churches. There are also activities for the youth of the church within the federation. Equipping and informing members is also achieved by articles in church bulletins and in the monthly church magazine called “Weerklank”, *meaning ‘resonance’, or ‘echo’*. Moreover, lectures are given for both young and old within the GKN as well as for the disconcerted members of the Liberated Churches, and possibly members of other denominations.

Ecclesiastical Assemblies

At this moment in time, the GKN has three church assemblies, namely, the consistory, the classis and general synod. Any tasks and authority given to regional synod, as stipulated in the church order, have been assigned to general synod as long as there is no regional synod.

Classis meets a minimum of three times annually. Every consistory sends two delegates to classis meetings.

General Synod meets once every three years, as a rule. Every classis sends six delegates. The churches and classis gives the delegates the authority and mandate to act and deliberate according to the Word of God, in dependence on the Three Forms of Unity and in compliance with the adopted Church Order. The churches, in accordance with article 31 of the Reformed Church Order, receive as binding decisions made with a majority vote.

Committees and Deputies

In compliance with the mandate of synod, a number of committees/deputies have been appointed. This includes:

- Mentoring theological students;
- Relationships with Churches Abroad;
- Matters of Appeal;
- Financial Management;
- Unity of Reformed Believers;
- Deputies ad Article 49;
- A clerk.

Classis also has deputies for Matters of Appeal, Ad examina, Examiners, Church Visitors, Financial Deputies and a deputy clerk.

A committee for the mentorship of theological students has been appointed because the GKN churches do not have their own theological seminary. Theological students who study at another Dutch or foreign University can receive counselling and further tutoring.

The GKN supports the work of the Reformatorisches Theologisch Seminar in Heidelberg. The GKN church of Hardenberg has been appointed as church responsible for coordinating the support by the federation.

Development

The GKN federation was initiated in 2009. Most members were originally members of the Liberated churches, *that is the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt, (GKv)*. They separated from the Liberated churches because of increasing criticism of Scriptures and the irreverent and non-committal attitude toward God's Word in the GKv. Letting go of the authority of Scripture is the main reason.

There is a slow but steady growth in the number of church members in the GKN.

Current Relations with the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt

The churches are deeply concerned about the course of the GKv and the direction in which it is further distancing itself from reformed theology and church government. There is no official contact with these churches. However, there are informal contacts, both with concerned members as well as GKv ministers. In the GKv there is room for a method of exegesis which is not guided by Scripture itself but rather by the context of the reader or hearer, and the experience of people. Human words are mixed with God's words. This has severe consequences for the authority of Scripture, preaching, the nature of the church, Sunday observance, the content of worship services, baptism and communion, discipline, the significance of the law, homosexual marriage; in short, for the entire teaching of Scripture and for life according to this doctrine. Therefore, many could no longer live with the course of the church, and, with sorrow, after repeatedly calling for a return to Scriptures and Confessions, felt compelled to say farewell to the GKv. As long as the GKv does not reform, there is no room for return to the GKv.

Contacts with De Gereformeerde Kerken hersteld (DGK) or the Reformed Churches (restored)

On October 6, 2018, the General Synod of the GKN recognized De Gereformeerde Kerken hersteld, (DGK) as a church of Christ, which stands on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The decision was based on their public confession and on discussions and dialogues between the two churches. Though the General Synod recognized that there are some differences between the two churches, these differences are not issues that stand above the importance of Scripture and the Confessions. The DGK church can therefore be accepted within the breadth of the holy Catholic Church.

On July 6, 2019, the General Synod of the DGK also recognized the GKN as church of Christ. The discussions between the deputies of both churches are now focused on joining together

in one federation. In September 2021 the deputies presented a joint report with proposals to be discussed at the next synod of each of the churches. Deputies have concluded that there are no issues to hinder further bilateral recognition and mutual admission to one federation.

Contact with Churches Abroad

There are regular conversations and discussions with delegates of Reformed churches in Australia, Canada and South Africa. These churches have clearly expressed their concern about the developments in the GKv and have announced that they have ended their sister relations with the GKv, or are planning to end them. The GKN is open to a sister-church relationship with the Free Reformed Church of Australia, (FRCA), de Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika, (VGKSA), the American and the Canadian Reformed Churches, (CanRC).

The Gereformeerde Kerk Nederland, (GKN) desires to become an active member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, (ICRC).

The General Synod of the GKN made the decision on March 17, 2018 to start a sister-church relationship with the Selbständige Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche (SERK) in Germany.

Contact with Other Churches

The GKN has the heartfelt desire to seek ecumenical fellowship with all who want to live in accordance with God's Word and the Reformed Confessions, under Reformed church polity. Developments in our own country are closely followed in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, (in *Canada known as the Free Reformed Churches*), the Gereformeerde Gemeente, (in *Canada known as the Reformed Congregations*), and the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk, (a church federation formed by an orthodox wing that separated from the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* when it amalgamated with the(synodical) *Reformed Churches and the Lutheran Churches, to form the Protestantse Kerk Nederland, or PKN*). There is some contact with the above churches. The GKN churches pray that the LORD may give ecclesiastical unity among all of His children, in accordance to His Word, and for wisdom and mercy to this end.

The Future

The churches follow the teaching of the Reformation and wish to maintain the authority of Holy Scripture in doctrine and lifestyle. The norm is what God's infallible Word says about life in the Church and the personal lives of its members, about salvation through grace alone, based on the redemptive work of Christ, about the renewing work of the Holy Spirit to a life of obediently following Christ, living reverently according to God's holy Law. In all of this, the church expects Christ's return and an inheritance in God's Kingdom. The future of the church is safe in the hands of our LORD.

In the Netherlands, the churches and her members grow ever more isolated. To be a faithful church in the Netherlands means facing hostility. It requires attentive listening to the Word of the LORD, it requires prayer, and it requires a dialogue of repentance and reflection amongst church members. The churches want to preserve the true preaching of God's Word,

and contemplate together about how to teach the younger generation in the church. The calling God gives the members of the church is to be an example, to witness and spread the Gospel message in the place God gives, as well as summoning all to repentance and return to God's Word alone. Christ charges us that we do not stand in our own power, but that we bow under His yoke to maintain the unity of the church in brotherly love, and thus to be a light in the world.

The 'Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland' (GKN) knows itself to be dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ who gathers, defends and preserves His church through His Spirit and Word in the unity of true faith. He does this worldwide, throughout all of history, in every place He establishes His church, until He returns on the clouds of Heaven.

We cry out for the fulfillment of His own promise! "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelations 22:20)

Information

More information can be found on the website of the GKN:

<http://www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl/>