

Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

Short English presentation

Introduction

The ***Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland*** (Reformed Churches Netherlands)(GKN), without the insert 'in' and without further postal or informal addition, is the name of the federation as decided on November 26, 2009. A federation of local Reformed churches who, from the Protestant Reformation, through the secession of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834, the Doleantie in 1886, the Union in 1892 and the Liberation in 1944, 2003 and subsequent years want to live in 2013, only according to the Holy Scripture.

Foundation

The churches find themselves called to maintain the unity of the church, through contact with all those who have been committed to the foundation of Holy Scripture and the Reformed confessions in recognition that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is the only Head of the Church, His Church of all times and places . The churches have founded a federation due to the unity in faith according to the Scriptures, the infallible Word of God. We confess that this Word of God *never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Petr.1: 21; NIV). Therefore, we may be sure that God's Word is true in all respects.

The churches can at all-time be held accountable to the three ecumenical creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian Creed and the Nicene Creed of and the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. These confessions, confirming God's Word, are to be accepted as binding. The churches accepted the Church Order of Dort (revision 1978), containing regulations for the maintenance of good order in the congregation.

Composition

De Gereformeerde Kerk Dalfsen e.o.¹, de Gereformeerde Kerk Hardenberg e.o., de Gereformeerde Kerk Kampen(Ichthus), de Gereformeerde Kerk Zwolle e.o. en Gereformeerde Kerk Zwijndrecht e.o. including the district congregation Gereformeerde Kerk Assen e.o., are part of the GKN. GK Assen e.o. has its own

¹ e.o. means: *including neighbourhood*

district council, while the consistory of the GK Hardenberg e.o. is ultimately responsible. Early 2014, a new district congregation was formed as GK Twente under the responsibility of the GK Hardenberg e.o. The GK Zwijndrecht e.o. has also two districts congregations each with its own place of worship: GK Ede-Veenendaal e.o. and GK Goes e.o. The members of these congregations fall under supervision and responsibility of the consistory of GK Zwijndrecht e.o. Overall, the federation has 9 places of worship: Assen, Zwolle, Ede-Veenendaal, Goes, Hardenberg, Kampen, Twente, Zwolle and Zwijndrecht. Services are held twice on Sundays.

Two assemblies of the Church

The churches have apart from the consistory only one additional assembly, the assembly of the ***Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland***. This assembly is in general called together 4 times a year. This Assembly is formed by representatives of the five churches. A total of 15 delegates including one on behalf of the district congregation of Assen. The churches are in rotation responsible to call the churches and taking the presidency.

The churches give their delegates *burden and power of attorney* to decide and act, according to the Word of God and in bondage to the Three Forms of Unity and in accordance with the prevailing church order. The churches will, in accordance with Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt, accept the decisions made by majority vote as binding.

Limitations

The federation is small and subsequently cannot commit to all the agreements listed in the articles of the Church Order. Therefore appeal to subsequent assemblies is very limited. Judgments on appeal will only be made in exceptional circumstances. Consultants have not yet been identified. Own theological training is not in the offing. Missionary activities are not even considered yet. Regarding the limitations in the church order, the federation was initially called a provisional federation. Due to incorrect association of the word 'provisional' with 'temporary' this term is obsolete and deleted.

Committees and deputies

Commissioned by the assembly of the GKN are a number of committees and deputies active, including: committee for counselling theology students, deputies of examinations, deputies' visitations, Committee on Foreign churches, committee financial management and deputy-clerk. Furthermore, a committee looking at the availability of sermons.

Offices

The churches have currently (2013) three ministers in active service. Rev. E Hoogendoorn in Kampen, Rev. R. van der Wolf in Hardenberg and Rev. L. Heres in Zwijndrecht. One brother is preparing for the ministry. Elders and deacons serve in the churches. The election of office bearers is a matter of the whole congregation. Caring for the congregation is a primary task for the office bearers. Yearly, two elder visit the members of the congregation in their homes. The deacons do visits with *an open Bible*, to encourage, to comfort and to arouse the ministry. The deacons provide support where needed. Preaching, catechism and equipping the congregation have priority for pastors. In special situations vacant congregations can call them for support.

Church services

The church service is rich and yet sober in design. Preaching the Word is central. The services run according to the order of Middelburg-1933 or Kampen-1975. The churches use the 1951 edition of the *Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap* Bible. Reading the *ten commandments* will take place during the morning services. During the afternoon service, the *Apostles' Creed* is read or when appropriate the *Nicene Creed*. Sometimes the confession is sung by the congregation. Once every Sunday the Heidelberg Catechism is used as a guideline for the preaching. The churches use the Reformed church book (1984/1985). This includes the 150 Psalms and 41 gezangen², the confessions, orders of service and liturgical forms. A disproportionate number of sermons are read, some congregations also use video and audio services previously recorded. Due to personal limitations, age and illness, and the large travel distances, visiting two services on Sunday is not always possible. Services can be monitored via internet.

Church life

The congregations know themselves in service of King Jesus who lives in the congregation and its members. Much attention is paid to be(come) active members of the congregation through Christ. There are differences in members due to their origin and date of becoming a member. This requires space and time and is the subject of study and discussion. The congregations cover a large territory. In small congregations, the youth often stand alone and isolated. Hence, after the church coffee-breaks and conversation are indispensable. In a broader context, there are yearly *country wide* activities for children and young

² Hymns

people. Every year there is a national contact day. The focus of these activities is: equipping as Gods children and meeting fellow members. Together we ponder what *church of these times* means to us , often in solitary positions and how it should be shaped.

Much energy is invested in equipping and providing information, e.g. by writing a catechism method, articles in Church magazines , the digital magazine Pietas and the monthly newsletter called *Weerklank* ³. Additionally, there are speeches and lectures for young and old within the GKN and for troubled members of the GKv.

Development

After the 2009 local churches GK Zwijndrecht e.o. (until 2006 DGK⁴) , GK Hardenberg e.o. (until 2008 DGK) and GK Kampen (Ichthus) (until 2008 GKv⁵) GKN formed the federation of the GKN , the developments do continue . There is a cautious growth. Individual church members from GKv and DGK joined as members, as well as separated churches and groups.

In 2010 former brothers and sisters from the DGK who were meeting seperated in Veenendaal since 2006 became members of the GK Zwijndrecht e.o. and the GK Zwolle e.o. , formerly DGK, were admitted to the GKN .

In 2011, part of an independent congregation (separated from the GKv in 2010) in Dalfsen was admitted as GK Dalfsen e.o. In the same year the brothers and sisters from the GKv in Assen and Goes followed and brothers and sisters coming from a DGK congregation in Peize joined the GK Assen e.o..

The growth in membership creates a lot of work, especially in the local churches. Scriptural preaching, Catechism for our children and Bible studies are a real blessing to us. At the same time, there is sorrow about past conflicts and the fractures in families or between church members that were caused subsequently.

³ = resonance

⁴ Reformed Churches restored

⁵ Reformed Churches liberated

Relationship to the Reformed Churches liberated (GKv)

The churches have great concern about the direction of the GKv that is increasingly draining the Reformed doctrine and church government. There are no official contacts with these churches. Informally we have contact with concerned church members and some ministers.

In the GKv method of exegesis which is not Scripture itself but often the context and the experience and perception of people towards points, gets all the space. Men's words are mixed with God's words. As a consequence, there is room for men's interpretations with regards to: Services, Sunday holiness, baptism and communion, discipline, law, gay marriage, authority of Scripture and preaching. A lot of GKv members therefore got stuck and since 2003 and beyond, we were forced to part our ways, sometimes personally, sometimes as a congregation. Return is not possible without a reformation and reversal in the GKv

Contacts with the Reformed Churches restored (DGK).

All though we are very close in reformed perspective, a conversation between DGK and GKN is not possible. However, there was mail exchange by the GK Kampen (Ichthus). In June 2012 the Synod of DGK was advised again to contact the GKN. Unfortunately, DGK's position has not changed. Talks with GKN will not be possible until GK Zwijndrecht, GK Zwolle and GK Hardenberg will make a confession, and do accept their suspension (from the DGK) and synod statements about them. On local level a meeting was held between GK Hardenberg e.o. and DGK Bergentheim / Bruchterveld in 2011 and informative discussions were held between GK Zwijndrecht e.o. and DGK Berkel & Rodenrijs / Bergschenhoek and between GK Assen e.o. DGK Assen in 2013.

Contacts with churches abroad.

There have been meetings with deputies of Reformed churches in Australia (FRCA), Canada (CanRC) and South Africa (VGKSA) several times. The GKN have asked the VGKSA to continue contact. The GKN also asked the CanRC to be positive about maintaining a form of contact.

Contacts with other churches.

The GKN want to practice contact with all who want to stand on the foundation of God's Word and the Reformed confessions and comply with the provisions of the Church Order.

They follow the developments in the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK), the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* and the *Hersteld Hervormde Kerk*. There are no

formal contacts. The churches pray the Lord for mercy, wisdom and insight to actual come to union of all Reformed denominations in the Netherlands in a federation.

Future

The churches are in the line of the Reformation, and comply to what the Scriptures teaches about church life and society by following Christ obedient, and respectful living according to God's holy law.

Dwindling Scripture authority, placing people word above God's Word, releasing the confession, self-willed use of the sacraments and discipline, disturbed relationships, and lack of trust, forced us to say goodbye and return to the infallible Word of God, the Gospel of salvation and living by grace alone.

The future of the church is safe in the hands of our Lord. In the Netherlands, the churches and its members are increasingly under attack and marginalized. The time of the reformed organizations, private schools, direct influence in politics is past tense. For Good? Only God knows. To be Church in Netherlands currently and Christian in a hostile environment is for us a new situation and calls for continuous conversation and reflection. The churches want to keep God's Word pure and think together about teaching the youth of the church. Set the example, witnesses and propagate the gospel in their own environment and to repent and return to the Word alone. Christ's commands us not to stand on our own, but to bend us under His yoke and maintain the unity of the church in brotherly love.

The GKN know they can depend on our Lord Jesus Christ, who gathers his church, protects and maintains it by His Spirit and Word in the unity of the true faith . He does that globally, throughout history, in every place where he represents the Church. We confess our guilt, our mistakes and shortcomings in our Christianity to our Father, how we acted with brothers and sisters, how we function in our church and be patient with those who are our responsibility. Our prayer to our Father is to forgive our guilt, sin, deficits and impatience through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ in heaven.

Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland

Kampen, December 2013.

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