

**NEDERDUITSE GEREFORMEERDE KERK
IN AFRIKA**

(ALGEMENE SINODE)

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GREETINGS TO THE SYNOD OF FRCSA 10/8/17

Dear fellow believers and fellow followers of our Lord Jesus Christ

It is a privilege to bring these greetings to your synod on behalf of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKA/DRCA). The DRCA was born from the mission work of the DRC. After 1994 it went through a schism when part of the DRCA united with what was then known as the NG Sendingkerk to form the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa. This schism caused great harm to the ministry in both churches. The DRCA who previously had 7 synods with more than a thousand congregations was left with about 200 congregations, mainly Sotho- and Tswana speaking with a few Xhosa- and Venda speaking congregations. They are being taken care of by about 60 fulltime ministers and a number of tentmaker (part time) ministers. The majority of congregations do not have ministers. This has one positive result namely that elders and members (especially through the different movements) play an important role in the ministry. The absence of the minister (teaching elder) has however a negative impact on teaching in the church (preaching, catechism etc.) The movements also tend to be inward looking so that the task to do mission is not attended to.

Against this background it will be understandable why two of the most important challenges before the DRCA is the theological training of ministers and to provide sustainable ministry by fulltime ministers of the Word - challenges that present themselves to churches throughout Africa. The result is that throughout Africa the apostolicity (theology) of the church is in jeopardy, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the quantitative growth. As Reformed Churches we should therefore not only have as purpose of theological training

to provide ministers who can maintain (in stand hou) congregations. The purpose must also be to provide good theologians, captured by the Word of God and by the Holy Spirit, who can steer the church of Christ in Africa through all the powerful currents which try to divert her from her course. The regression (agteruitgang/kgutlelo morao) of the apostolicity/theology has an immediate impact on the quality of the life of the church in the world, its Holiness, as well as its catholicity, to bring through its mission all people and all things (ta panta) under the rule of Christ (Ephesians 1:10). What is therefore at stake today for the church in Africa is the task God granted to her namely to be a light and salt for the world.

However, before we become discouraged because of the state of affairs of the church in Africa, let us remember the Gospel about the church as we find it in Ephesians 1:15-23 - Jesus IS the Lord and the power of His resurrection is working in and through us. Therefore we can fulfil our calling filled with hope. Let us also remember the condition of the church when Luther nailed his dissatisfaction to the door in Wittenberg 500 years ago. Yet our Lord kept His church in His hands these 500 years so that today you have this wonderful opportunity to meet with fellow believers who with you ask only this one question, the same question Luther asked, and which Paul asked long before him on the road to Damascus: "Lord, what it is it that YOU want us to do."

That we find it difficult to discern the Lords will, in spite of asking the right question, became clear already in the time of Luther when the reformers differed so strongly about certain matters that they eventually went different ways. Until today we have this reality that Reformed Churches struggle to hear the Word of God and the voice of the Spirit clear enough so that they can make that other precious attribute of the church visible: its unity. The apostolicity (confession/theology) is or should be the foundation of the unity.

Yet, divided as we are, churches with the same LONGING to honour the Lordship of Christ in the church and in the world have to find ways through which they can help and support one another to serve the church in Africa with good theology so that it can be a light and salt throughout this continent. We must discover how to do this without compromising our convictions and how

to be both critical (where necessary) and supportive. We do not pretend that the DRCA is a model of a reformed church. There may be issues on your table about which you are very concerned, but which is not even on the table of the DRCA. About other issues the DRCA may differ from you (like woman in office). The DRCA is also presented by the challenge that it is a church which more and more come home in the culture of her members, e.g. in the liturgy and worship. The positive thing is that they are involved and enjoy their church and find wholeness when they come together and pour out all their challenges and sufferings before the Lord. The negative side is that it is difficult for meetings where only one culture is represented to be critical of that culture where it may be in conflict with the Word of God. It may also bring the unity with the (reformed) church at large and with believers from other cultures (her catholicity) under pressure. It is a sad state of affairs that after having people from countries like China, Pakistan and Bangladesh in our midst for so many years none have so far converted to Christianity and became members of our congregations.

However, we are thankful to inform you that the LONGING we mentioned above still lives in the DRCA. Our 2015 synod expressed this longing stating that it want to be a true Reformed Church, obedient to Christ and His Word.

In the light of all we said above, it is our prayer that the Lord in His mercy will reveal His will to you through His Word en Spirit, and that in His mercy He will also grant to you to share it with the church in Africa - so that with you it may be a light and salt for Africa, so that, as the hymn, Plea for Africa goes, "Africa may be saved and God may bless her sons and daughters."

AM Hoffman

Scribe: DRCA (General Synod)