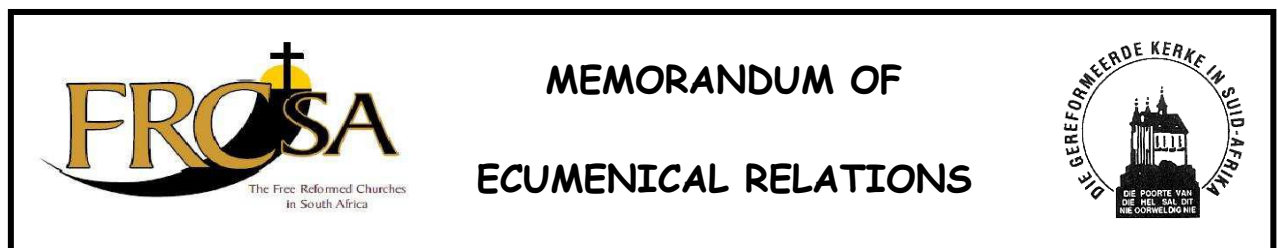


SUPPLEMENTARY report of  
*Deputies for Contacts with Churches in South Africa*  
to Synod Mamelodi 2024

**1. Name of deputies: Deputies for Contacts with Churches in South Africa**

**2. Date of Supplementary report: 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2024**

**3. Reason for supplementary report:** In our initial report, dated 5th of April 2024, deputies mentioned under point 7 that a meeting was planned for 15 April 2024 with Deputies Ecumenicity of the RCSA. This meeting indeed took place, and the minutes are added to this report as an addendum. The main outcome of this meeting was the decision to write a memorandum of ecumenical relations between the FRCSA and the RCSA, which describes the status quo of our relationship and sets out a broad roadmap towards unity. A committee, consisting of members from both deputyships, compiled this memorandum and distributed it to both deputyships. On the 29th of July 2024 another meeting was held to discuss the memorandum (due to time constraints the minutes of this meeting had not been finalized at the time of writing this supplementary report). With some minor changes the memorandum was approved for distribution to the respective federations for discussion and approval. As the FRCSA will only meet in synod again in 2027, it was deemed important to submit this supplementary report to the synod meeting of 2024. Below you will find the English and Afrikaans versions of the memorandum.



## **1 DEFINITION OF RELATIONSHIP**

The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) and the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) have a common Reformational heritage which is especially evident in a common faith in our Triune Lord who reveals Himself in his Word. This faith is expressed in our common confessional basis, which in everything agrees with the Word of God:

- 1.1 The three ecumenical creeds, namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed, in which we commit ourselves to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, and
- 1.2 The Three Forms of Unity, namely the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort, in which we commit ourselves to the reformed tradition.

Both the FRCSA and the RCSA maintain in church government the principles of the Church order of Dort, as accepted in 1618/19.

Where both the FRCSA and the RCSA have obtained the same faith through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, and want to confess and maintain it together, the FRCSA and the RCSA recognize each other as churches of Christ.

## **2 GROWTH IN RELATIONSHIP**

Since 1950, however, the sad situation exists that the FRCSA and the RCSA live side by side as two church communities. The core reason for this was, at first, the RCSA's ongoing correspondence with the *Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (syn.)*. During the course of the past 75-year period, continuous discussions were held during which attempts were made to bridge the separation between the two church communities and to obey the biblical call to unity. The FRCSA and the RCSA – alternately – requested each other, on the one hand, to recognize the other church community as true church and, on the other hand, to indicate why they could not live together.<sup>1,2</sup>

Both the FRCSA and the RCSA recognize that we, as the body of Christ, are called to make visible the unity that exists in Christ, and not to acquiesce in this separation. Given our common confession and our praying together of Christ's prayer that *they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me* (John 17:21), we want to do everything in our power to seek concrete unity in our Lord Jesus Christ by word and by deed! In this way, we as church communities want to grow together in Christ in order to also understand the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ together.

Therefore we also recognize as follows:

- 2.1 We believe that our Heavenly Father, for Whom we are set apart and through Whom we live, leads us on the path of ecclesiastical unity and that his name is glorified through the expression of unity;
- 2.2 We realize that ecclesiastical unity is not something that we can work in our own strength, but that it flows as a precious gift from the reconciliatory work of the Son. Only in his power can we also obey the command to seek and realize the unity more and more;
- 2.3 We willingly place ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is only the Spirit Who leads us in the full truth of his Word, and therefore also into the riches of unity which the Father has unlocked for us through his Son;
- 2.4 We commit ourselves to a growing relationship, as well as discussions about and search for a further embodiment of unity;

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<sup>1</sup> *From the side of the Deputies of the RCSA it has again been confirmed that currently there are no issues standing in the way of church unity.*(GKSA – Acta, 2012:190)

<sup>2</sup> *From the side of the FRCSA it has been decided during Synod 2021 to continue with the discussions, but to indicate that the following three issues form stumbling blocks to reach unity* (VGKSA – Acta, 2021:23):

- a. *The Memorandum of Ecumenical Relationship with the DRCSA;*
- b. *Allowing women to the office of deacon, without distinguishing their position from how the diaconal office is defined in the Belgic Confession (Art 30) as set forth in the Church Order;*
- c. *The acceptance of the Cloete versification of the Psalms.*

- 2.5 Within the framework of the reformed confession and church government, we undertake to support each other in the fight for sound teaching, to call each other to a walk of life in the service of the LORD and to pray for each other.

### **3 NATIONAL CONTACT AND COOPERATION**

Although there are differences between our church communities, we are prayerfully working towards unity. In the meantime, we actively live together and focus on consolidating, deepening and widening the existing areas of cooperation so that the unity that already exists can become more visible. Currently this cooperation is – and in the future will be – visible through collaboration in the following areas:

- 3.1 Mutual sharing of the reports of the deputies who conduct the ecumenical discussions between the two church communities, for information and perusal, before they are forwarded for the agenda of the respective synods.
- 3.2 Mutual delegation of a maximum of two delegates with speaking voice to each other's respective general synodal meetings.
- 3.3 Mutual availability of ecclesiastical decisions and Acta of general synodal meetings to each other.
- 3.4 Joint involvement in local and international ecumenism.
- 3.5 Joint participation in Bible translation.
- 3.6 Joint study and translation of the confessions and liturgical forms.
- 3.7 Joint study of the Church Order.
- 3.8 Joint study on ethical issues.
- 3.9 Joint reflection on theological training.
- 3.10 Joint involvement in mission.
- 3.11 Joint involvement in educational issues.
- 3.12 Joint testimony towards the authorities and the community.
- 3.13 Mutual ministry of members in places where there is no congregation of the other church community.

### **4 LOCAL CONTACT AND COOPERATION**

#### **4.1 Origin and history**

Although discussions between the FRCSA and the RCSA have continuously taken place at the level of deputies since the 1950s, since the early 1990s there has been a mutual realization that churches should also get to know each other at a local level. Local discussions have given the contacts between the FRCSA and the RCSA a considerable impetus, something that could not (yet) be realized at a national level. For the progress at the local level, both church communities express their gratitude to the Lord.

#### **4.2 State of affairs**

Taking into account the different views about local discussions, we recognize what the Lord is doing through his Spirit at the local level.

- 4.2.1 In the Gauteng Moot there is mutual recognition of each other as churches of Jesus Christ between the RC Die Kandelaar / Meintjeskop / Oos-Moot / Totiusdal and the FRC Maranata / Pretoria. These churches accept each other's attestations, practice pulpit exchange, live closely together on different levels, and meet from time to time in the so-called *Plaaslike Tussenkerklike Vergadering* (English: Local Inter-Church Assembly).
- 4.2.2 In the Bellville area of the Western Cape there is mutual recognition of each other as churches of Jesus Christ between the RC Bellville / Bellville-Oos and the FRC Cape Town. These churches accept each other's attestations, practice pulpit exchange, and coexist with each other on different levels.
- 4.2.3 Discussions between the RC Wilropark and the FRC Johannesburg are in an initial phase.
- 4.2.4 There are good contacts between the RC Ramotse and the Sotho-speaking Free Reformed Churches that have grown (or are currently growing) from the missionary work.

### **4.3 Practical implications**

Several practical implications flow from this growing unity and cooperation:

- 4.3.1 Mutual delegation with speaking voice to the respective classes of which the above churches form a part. Such delegation is already taking place in some cases, and where it is not yet taking place, it can be seriously considered.
- 4.3.2 Communication of the respective classes' decisions to each other.
- 4.3.3 Cooperation in the field of joint testimony in the geographical areas where the respective classes are located, as well as coordination of the various classes' work of mercy that is done in common areas. This cooperation and coordination is already taking place, and can be further developed.
- 4.3.4 The cooperation between local congregations of the FRCSA and RCSA does not take over the functioning and decision-making of local classes of the two church communities and does not hinder it either, but serves the unity of local churches in the joint faith that is being professed in the respective church communities.
- 4.3.5 In line with what is already happening at the local level, other congregations in the two church communities are also encouraged to start doing the same. This encouragement does not mean that a local congregation (either from the FRCSA or from the RCSA) must necessarily join an existing discussion - there is also room for one-on-one discussions separate from the existing groups (provided that it will not act against the already existing discussions).

With this Memorandum we declare that we strive for true mutual unity, and that we as the body of Christ in the world bear witness to the true faith.

Submission to groups of Deputies (for submission to respective General Synods)

2024-07-29



# MEMORANDUM VAN EKUMENIESE VERHOUDING



## 1 OMSKRYWING VAN VERHOUDING

Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (VGKSA) en die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) het 'n gesamentlike Reformatoriese erfenis wat veral na vore kom in 'n gemeenskaplike geloof in ons Drie-Enige Here wat Hom in sy Woord openbaar. Hierdie gesamentlike geloof kom tot uitdrukking in ons gemeenskaplike belydenisgrondslag wat in alles met die Woord van God ooreenkom:

- 1.1 Die drie ekumeniese geloofsbelydenisse, naamlik die Apostolicum, Nicea en Athanasius, waarin ons ons aan die een, heilige, algemene en apostoliese kerk verbind, en
- 1.2 Die Drie Formuliere van Eenheid, naamlik die Heidelbergse Kategismus, Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis en Dordtse Leerreëls, waarin ons ons met die gereformeerde tradisie verbind.

Beide die VGKSA en die GKSA handhaaf in die kerkregering die beginsels van die Dordtse kerkorde, soos aanvaar in 1618/19.

Waar beide die VGKSA en die GKSA deur die genadige werking van die Heilige Gees dieselfde dierbare geloof verkry het, en dit saam wil bely en handhaaf, erken die VGKSA en die GKSA mekaar as kerke van Christus.

## 2 GROEI IN VERHOUDING

Sedert 1950 bestaan egter die hartseer-situasie dat die VGKSA en die GKSA as twee kerkgemeenskappe langs mekaar leef. Die kernrede hiervoor was aanvanklik die GKSA se voortgaande korrespondensie met die Gereformeerde Kerke Nederland (syn.). Deur die loop van die afgelope bykans 75 jaar, is voortdurend gesprekke gevoer waarbinne gepoog is om die geskeidenheid tussen die twee kerkgemeenskappe te oorbrug en aan die Bybelse eis tot eenheid gehoor te gee. Die VGKSA en die GKSA het – afwisselend – mekaar enersyds versoek om die ander kerkgemeenskap as ware kerk te erken en andersyds om aan te dui waarom daar nie saam met mekaar geleef kon word nie.<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Van die kant van die GKSA se Deputate is weer eens bevestig dat daar tans geen sake is wat in die weg staan tot kerklike eenheid nie. (GKSA – Acta, 2012:190)

<sup>4</sup> Van die kant van die VGKSA is tydens Sinode 2021 besluit om wel met samesprekings voort te gaan, maar aan te dui dat die volgende drie sake struikelblokke vorm om eenheid te bereik (VGKSA – Acta, 2021:23):

a. Die Memorandum van Ekumeniese Verhouding met die NGKSA;

Beide die VGKSA en die GKSA erken dat ons as liggaam van Christus geroep is om die eenheid wat in Christus bestaan, ook sigbaar te maak en nie by die geskeidenheid te berus nie. Gegewe ons gemeenskaplike belydenis en ons sáám-bid van Christus se gebed dat *hulle in Ons een mag wees, sodat die wêreld kan glo dat U My gestuur het* (Johannes 17:21) wil ons alles in ons vermoë doen om met woord en daad sigbare, konkrete eenheid in ons Here Jesus Christus te soek! So wil ons as kerkgemeenskappe sáám met mekaar in Christus groei om sodoende ook sáám met mekaar die breedte, lengte, hoogte en diepte van die liefde van Christus te begryp.

Daarom erken ons ook saam as volg:

- 2.1 Ons glo dat ons Hemelse Vader, vir Wie ons afgesonder is en deur Wie ons leef, ons op die pad van kerklike eenheid lei en dat sy Naam deur uitdrukking van eenheid verheerlik word;
- 2.2 Ons besef dat kerklike eenheid nie iets is wat ons in eie krag kan bewerk nie, maar dat dit as kosbare gawe uit die versoeningswerk van die Seun voortvloei. Alleen in sy krag kan ons ook die opdrag om die eenheid steeds meer te soek en te laat realiseer, gehoorsaam;
- 2.3 Ons stel ons gewillig onder leiding van die Heilige Gees. Dit is die Gees alleen wat ons in die volle waarheid van sy Woord lei en daarom ook in die rykdom van eenheid wat die Vader vir ons deur sy Seun ontsluit het;
- 2.4 Ons verbind ons tot 'n groeiende verhouding, asook gesprekke oor en soeke na 'n verdere vergestaltung van eenheid.
- 2.5 Ons onderneem om binne die raamwerk van die gereformeerde belydenis en kerkregering mekaar te ondersteun in die stryd vir die gesonde leer, mekaar op te roep tot 'n lewenswandel in diens van die HERE en vir mekaar te bid.

### **3 NASIONALE KONTAK EN SAMEWERKING**

Alhoewel daar verskille tussen ons kerkgemeenskappe is, werk ons biddend daaraan om tot eenheid te kom. Intussen leef ons daadwerklik saam met mekaar en fokus ons daarop om die bestaande terreine van samewerking te bestendig, te verdiep en te verbreed sodat die eenheid wat reeds bestaan, meer sigbaar kan word. Hierdie eenheid word tans en in die toekoms sigbaar deur samewerking op die volgende terreine:

- 3.1 Wedersydse deurgae van die rapporte van die deputate wat die ekumeniese gesprek tussen die twee kerkgemeenskappe voer, vir kennisname en insae, alvorens dit vir die agenda van die onderskeie sinodes deurgestuurd word.
- 3.2 Wedersydse afvaardiging van maksimum twee afgevaardigdes met spreekstem na mekaar se onderskeie algemene sinodale vergaderings;

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b. Die toelaat van vroue tot die diens van diaken, sonder om hul posisie te onderskei van hoe die diakonale diens in die Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis (Artikel 31) gedefinieer word, soos uiteengesit in die Kerkorde.

c. Die aanvaarding van die Cloete-versifikasie van die Psalms.

- 3.3 Wedersydse beskikbaarstelling van kerklike besluite en Acta van algemene sinodale vergaderings aan mekaar.
- 3.4 Gesamentlike betrokkenheid by plaaslike en internasionale ekumene.
- 3.5 Gesamentlike deelname aan Bybelvertaling.
- 3.6 Gesamentlike studie en vertaling van die belydenisskrifte en formuliere.
- 3.7 Gesamentlike bestudering van die Kerkorde.
- 3.8 Gesamentlike studie oor etiese kwessies.
- 3.9 Gesamentlike besinning oor teologiese opleiding.
- 3.10 Gesamentlike betrokkenheid by sending.
- 3.11 Gesamentlike betrokkenheid by onderwyskwessies.
- 3.12 Gesamentlike getuienis teenoor die owerheid en gemeenskap.
- 3.13 Wedersydse bediening van lidmate op plekke waar daar nie 'n gemeente van die ander kerkgemeenskap is nie.

## **4 PLAASLIKE KONTAK EN SAMEWERKING**

### **4.1 Ontstaan en geskiedenis**

Hoewel samesprekings tussen die VGKSA en die GKSA sedert die 1950's deurentyd op deputate-vlak plaasgevind het, het daar sedert die vroeë 1990's 'n wedersydse besef gekom dat kerke mekaar ook op plaaslike vlak moet leer ken. Plaaslike samesprekings het aan die kontakte tussen die VGKSA en die GKSA 'n aansienlike stimulus gegee, iets wat (nog) nie op nasionale vlak gerealiseer kon word nie. Vir die vordering op plaaslike vlak spreek beide kerkgemeenskappe hulle dankbaarheid teenoor die Here uit.

### **4.2 Stand van sake**

Met in agneming van verskillende sienings rondom plaaslike samesprekings, erken ons wat die Here deur sy Gees op plaaslike vlak besig is om te werk.

- 4.2.1 In die Gautengse Moot is daar wedersydse erkenning van mekaar as kerke van Jesus Christus tussen die GK Die Kandelaar / Meintjeskop / Oos-Moot / Totiusdal én die VGK Maranata / Pretoria. Hierdie kerke aanvaar mekaar se attestate, beoefen kanselruil, leef nou met mekaar saam op verskillende vlakke en kom van tyd tot tyd saam in die Plaaslike Tussenkerklike Vergadering.
- 4.2.2 In die Bellville-omgewing van die Wes-Kaap is daar wedersydse erkenning van mekaar as kerke van Jesus Christus tussen die GK Bellville / Bellville-Oos én die VGK Kaapstad. Hierdie kerke aanvaar mekaar se attestate, beoefen kanselruil, en leef nou met mekaar saam op verskillende vlakke.
- 4.2.3 Gesprekke tussen die GK Wilropark en die VGK Johannesburg is in 'n beginfase.
- 4.2.4 Daar bestaan goeie kontakte tussen GK Ramotse en die Sotho-sprekende Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke wat vanuit die sendingwerk ontstaan het of besig is om te groei.

### **4.3 Praktiese implikasies**

Uit hierdie groeiende eenheid en samewerking vloei verskeie praktiese implikasies:

- 4.3.1 Wedersydse afvaardiging met spreekstem na die onderskeie klassisse waarvan bogenoemde kerke deel vorm. Sodanige afvaardiging vind in sommige gevalle reeds plaas, en waar dit nog nie plaasvind nie, kan dit ernstig oorweeg word.
- 4.3.2 Kommunikasie van die onderskeie klassisse se besluite aan mekaar.
- 4.3.3 Samewerking op die terrein van gesamentlike getuieis in die gebiede waar die onderskeie klassisse geleë is, asook koördinerings van die onderskeie klassisse se barmhartigheidswerk wat op gemeenskaplike terreine gedoen word. Hierdie samewerking en koördinerings vind reeds plaas, en kan verder ontwikkel word.
- 4.3.4 Die samewerking tussen plaaslike gemeentes van die VGKSA en GKSA neem nie die werking en besluitneming van plaaslike klassisse van die twee kerkgemeenskappe oor nie en belemmer dit ook nie, maar dien die eenheid van plaaslike kerke in die gesamentlike geloof wat in die verskillende kerkgemeenskappe bely word.
- 4.3.5 In lyn met dit wat reeds op plaaslike vlak gebeur, word ander gemeentes in die twee kerkgemeenskappe ook aangemoedig om dieselfde te begin doen. Hierdie aanmoediging beteken nie dat 'n plaaslike gemeente (hetsy van die VGKSA of van die GKSA) noodwendig by 'n bestaande samespreking moet inskakel nie – daar is ook ruimte vir een-op-een samesprekings los van die bestaande groepe (met dien verstande dat dit nie teen die reeds bestaande samesprekings sal inwerk nie).

Met hierdie Memorandum verklaar ons dat ons na ware onderlinge eenheid streef, en dat ons as liggaam van Christus in die wêreld vir die ware geloof getuig.

*Aanvaar deur die Deputate-groepe (vir voorlegging aan onderskeie Algemene Sinodes)  
2024-07-29*

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#### **4. Additional recommendations to Synod Mamelodi 2024**

In addition to the recommendations made in our initial report, deputies DCCSA would (in this supplementary report) like to add a few more recommendations, based on the above memorandum. Deputies DCCSA therefore recommend:

- 4.1 To accept this supplementary report of deputies DCCSA.
- 4.2 To accept and approve the above memorandum (both in English and in Afrikaans) as a truthful description of the status quo of our relationship with the RCSA, and as an acceptable broad roadmap towards unity.

*Ground: Deputies deem it of the utmost importance that the status quo of our relationship with the RCSA as well as the goal of our deliberations with them are stated clearly in order to show our serious intention to work towards unity.*



4.3 To discuss the status of the three stumbling blocks mentioned in footnotes 2 (English version) and 4 (Afrikaans version) of the memorandum, as was formulated by Synod Belhar 2021.

*Ground: This was a question posed to deputies DCCSA by the deputies of the RCSA, and deputies DCCSA are of the opinion that the FRCSA have to be very clear on the nature and weight of these stumbling blocks.*

4.4 To discuss the long-held conviction in the FRCSA that "there cannot be two true churches in one place" and formulate our position on it.

*Ground: This was a question posed to deputies DCCSA by the deputies of the RCSA, and deputies DCCSA deem it important to get clarity on this matter.*

4.5 To add to the mandates already proposed in the initial report:

4.5.1 That deputies DCCSA use the approved memorandum as basis for further discussions with deputies of the RCSA.

4.5.2 That deputies DCCSA convey synod's position on recommendations 4.3 and 4.4 to deputies of the RCSA, and determine what the impact of these positions are on further deliberations.

4.5.3 That deputies DCCSA make a concerted effort to familiarize the congregations of the FRCSA with the contents of the approved memorandum.

## **5. ADDENDUM**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 APRIL 2024 AT 09:00 AT FRCSA PRETORIA**

#### **1 OPENING**

Rev. E van Alten read from Psalm 110 and Heidelberg Catechism, LD 48 and lead the meeting in prayer.

#### **2 WELCOMING**

Everybody attending were welcomed.

#### **3 ATTENDANCE AND PERSONALIA**

FRCSA George Mnisi, Dirk Boersma, Erik van Alten

Apology: Hannes Breytenbach, Paul Bouwman, Samuel Matlhokoane

GKSA Stefaans de Bruyn, Anton Dednam, Petrus Venter, Pieter Kurpershoek, Coen Vrey (online)

#### **4 NOTES OF MEETING**

4.1 September 1st, 2022: Deputies

4.1.1 No formal minutes of the meeting were taken, but the notes from Rev. Dirk Boersma were tabled as an overview of the discussions.

4.1.2 Discussions took place about the content of the notes as well as certain specific formulations in the notes.

4.1.3 It should be remembered that these notes were not meant to be used as formal minutes and that the specific formulations cannot be attributed to persons named, as the utterances were not a verbatim version of everything discussed.

Decision

4.1.4 As these notes are personal notes, the meeting does not take responsibility for the content and the meeting only takes note of it.

4.2 28 October 2022: Deputies with representatives of local churches

4.2.1 The minutes were distributed in November 2023.

4.2.2 The minutes were not discussed during the meeting.

## 5 ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda has been adopted as noted in the minutes.

## 6 THE WAY FORWARD

6.1 An open discussion is held about the way these discussions will have to develop.

6.2 Matters raised during these discussions are:

- What is the status of the three factors keeping us apart?
- Would the Deputies of the GKSA advise the FRCSA to become part of the GKSA?
- How is unity seen?
- Is there a way to constructively move forward?

6.3 The meeting reiterates that a distinction should be made between personal view points and the official point of view of the respective Church federations.

6.4 The ecumenical setup of the GKSA and the way the GKSA describes the different ecumenical relationships is explained and discussed.

Decisions

6.5 Rev. Stefaans de Bruyn will distribute the overview of the GKSA about ecumenical relationships.

6.6 A memorandum will be drafted as a working document to aid future discussions.

6.7 The memorandum should cover at least the following matters:

- History of the relationship between the two Church Federations and the discussions about unity – including the request from the side of the GKSA in 2006-2008.
- The three factors keeping the Church Federations apart.
- Both Church Federations' vision on unity (the formal decisions should be added as addendums)
- Possible ways to cooperate
- The local discussions
- Attention to points agreed to in the past (representatives at each other synods, sharing of reports to synods)

6.8 The first draft of the memorandum should be finalised by 15 July 2024.

6.9 Two persons from each Church Federation will compile the first draft of the memorandum (with Rev. Erik van Alten to convene the subgroup)

## 7 NEXT MEETING

7.1 Date: 29 July 2024 – in the morning

7.2 Place: RC Pretoria-Annlin

7.3 Organised by: GKSA

## 8 PRAYER OF THANKS

Rev. Anton Dednam leads in prayer.