

## Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

Synode Mamelodi 2024



On Sunday evening 22 September, Synod 2024 of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) was opened with a prayer meeting in the hosting church, the Free Reformed Church of Mamelodi. Pastor Erik van Alten led the service using Mark 11: 1-26. He encouraged the churches and delegates to look up and follow the Lord of the church. Delegates can so easily be caught up in the administrative aspects of synods that they forget why and for whom they are working.

As delegates and church, we, as servants of Christ, must prayerfully seek His will in all things, and expect everything from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who will turn our barrenness into bearing fruit for his kingdom and for his glory.

Before the blessing, the church united in confessing our faith using the Nicene Creed. This was a powerful moment as children from across the world, different cultures, and different languages expressed the unity of the true faith in the bond of peace.

Each day was opened and closed in worship as we read, sang, and prayed seeking the Lord's guidance for the day, and thanking him for each day. Prayer was also offered up for the churches with whom we have sister church relations, as well as for the RCSA (GKSA).

### Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA)

After the executive committee was chosen, synod was constituted. Following some housekeeping matters, synod deliberated over the report of deputies with churches abroad. Synod expressed deep gratitude to God for our sister church relationships with the Canadian and American Reformed churches (CanRC), and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). This spiritual unity in Christ Jesus has found visible expression in several different ways, not least among them the use of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) for our students (and the financial contribution this entails), and for the gracious financial contributions from the FRCA. The unity that we have in Christ was also visible as delegates from both federations were present for the duration of synod and their advice was invaluable.

The chairman also expressed with sadness that this was the first synod in the history of the FRCSA that the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (GKv) were not represented. When the GKv united with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) on May 1, 2023, they ended their sister church relationship with the FRCSA.

Yet out of these churches was formed at first two federations, the De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gerefomeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) who have decided to be one church federation under the name Gereformeerde Kerken (GK). Synod had the honour of welcoming Rev. Rob Visser on behalf of these churches. After deliberation, Synod decided to extend sister church relationships at the first official synod of these churches in 2026, Lord willing. Hopefully this can be done together with the CanRC and the FRCA.

We also continue to be thankful for the ICRC and the unity of the faith that is expressed in this international body. Synod is thankful that we, as FRCSA, can host the ICRC Regional Conference in Cape Town in October 2024. This is a means of seeking greater unity among the reformed churches spread across the continent of Africa.

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### Relationship with Churches in South Africa (DCCSA)

Regarding our relationship with the churches in South Africa we are grateful for every church that shares the reformed faith with us and continue to desire to seek fellowship with likeminded reformed churches.

This is particularly true of the GKSA churches, as we had the privilege of welcoming Rev. P. Kurpershoek at the synod on behalf of the GKSA. He was given the opportunity to speak, and the synod responded in encouragement and prayer.

Synod decided that that we would cautiously continue to build toward unity with the GKSA churches. The caution was expressed due to the internal struggle that the GKSA are having regarding women in the office of elder and pastor. Nevertheless, synod is thankful that we were able to adopt a memorandum as a basis on which to have further discussions. There was also a framework adopted in which to grow the local contacts.

### Bible Translations

As bond of churches, we hold strongly to the cry of the Reformation: “Sola Scriptura”. In this regard we are thankful for the work of the Deputies for Bible Translation. Synod decided to test more intensely the use of the 2020 Bybel Vertaling by using it in the preaching. The reason for this is to receive feedback from the pastors who are familiar with the underlying Greek and Hebrew texts. Synod would also like to alert the churches that the introductions to the respective Bible books in the 2020 Bybel Vertaling are written from a liberal perspective and are not to be accepted at face value. Nevertheless, we are grateful that the text itself gives no indication of such a bias.

Synod also acknowledged that there are a variety of translations being used in the churches such as the NIV 1984, ESV, Sotho translations among others. Synod encouraged the English medium churches to remain with the English Standard Version (ESV) or the New International Version (1984) for use as a pulpit Bible.

### Forms and prayers

Our liturgy has historical and theological roots, and we desire everything to be done in “a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:40). Synod gave thanks for the deputies and the work that they put into supporting the churches in this regard.

Synod especially gave thanks for all the work that was put into making available a reprint of the Sepedi liturgical book for the churches, called Puku ya Kereke. This book includes the Three Forms of Unity and all the liturgical forms, and future reprints will also include a translation of the church order in Sepedi. This translation was accepted with thanks.

Synod also decided to ask deputies to study the objections and recommendations received from the churches regarding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord’s Supper Form used withing the GKSA and give a recommendation to Synod 2027.



### Liturgical Music

In Colossians 3:16 we read, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Synod seeks to support the churches in obedience to this command, and help the churches understand what this looks like. To do this, synod accepted a document called “Laat die Woord van Christus ryklik in julle woon,” and asked that it also be translated into English. This document is recommended to the local councils and churches, as it answers many of the questions and objections that we may have regarding the singing of hymns.

Synod also acknowledged that we need to support all the churches in guiding them to some kind of approved hymn book. In this regard synod asked deputies to investigate and assist in forming a hymn book for the churches on the Cape Flats.

We continue to test the *Lifela tsa Sione* for use in the Sotho-speaking churches.

Based on the decisions of previous synods to expand our hymnal based on themes less covered in our hymnal, synod provisionally approved 15 hymns for use in the Afrikaans-speaking churches. Deputies explained that at this point the available Afrikaans Hymnbooks have been exhausted and therefore the likelihood of new hymns is slim at this point.

### Mission Deputies

In obedience to the command of Christ to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:17), synod wants to encourage the local churches to continue to spread the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every church in our federation is called to be a missionary church, and we must not let money dictate when and how we do missions. Mission deputies made clear that funds can be made available if well thought through proposals are sent to them. ZAM has continued to commit to supporting 50% of the mission (and possible new projects). Synod is grateful for all those who partner with us in spreading the Gospel, and praise God for his abundant provisions.

### Article 11 Needy Churches

Synod wants to emphasize that, simply because a church is needy, does not make this church less of a church. In fact, every church is needy and wholly dependent on her Lord for life. Through Deputies article 11 we simply want to fulfil what we have promised together as churches in article 11 of our church order.

Therefore, synod commits to support the local consistories in supporting a minister of the Word according to the guidelines of previous synods. Also here, synod expressed gratitude for the financial contributions of the FRCA.

Because of the growing need in our bond of churches, synod asked the deputies article 11 to organize a meeting with other deputyships to discuss how we as a church federation can continue to grow while at the same time being sustainable. This report will be discussed by the

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churches and a proposal will be presented at the synod in 2027. We trust that the Lord who builds his church will guide and lead them in this.

### Theological Training

We praise the Lord for what He continues to do to raise up students for the ministry of the Word. Synod had the privilege of welcoming Dr. Jason van Vliet to the floor of synod, and he conveyed deep appreciation for the relationship with South Africa and spoke highly of the students that are currently attending CRTS. Synod expressed gratitude for the work of the deputies and for how they have supported the students both in South Africa and in Canada. It was only 8 years ago that the churches were vacant, and our prayer was that God would raise up pastors to lead the new generation in South Africa.

Rev. Gerard Meijer was welcomed on behalf of the GTA (Gereformeerde Teologiese Akademie) that is being started by the GKSA.

Synod discussed the theological vision of the churches regarding theological training and decided to call a meeting to find a unified vision for the churches.

### Finances

Paul writes to the church of Philippians: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” We hear these words echo through to our day as we are so richly supported in our churches, both locally and internationally. Synod wants to encourage all the churches to continue to prioritize the giving for the sake of the preaching and spreading of the gospel. In this regard synod approved the increased budget without putting an undue burden on the churches. The treasurer was thanked for his conscientious work with the funds of the federation.

### Stated Clerk

After many years of faithfully serving consecutive synods and making sure that everything is in place for the delegates, the stated clerk, br. Kees Roose, decided to step down. The chairman expressed gratitude for all his work, and the Lord’s blessing going forward.

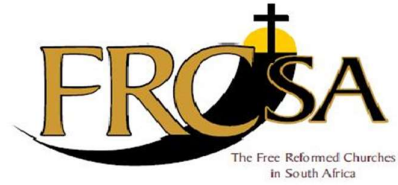
### Closing

In closing the foreign delegates spoke words of thanks and appreciation for the work of synod and for all the work that the FRCOSA is involved with. The chairman expressed words of appreciation for the church of Mamelodi and for all the work the church of Maranata put into hosting the synod. The sisters were also recognized for all the work that they put in behind the scenes preparing meals, and making sure that the delegates were amply supplied for. Appreciation was expressed for how the bothers worked together, and consequently article 48 was not made use of.

Rev. Mnisi closed with the reading of Colossians 4 with a focus on verse 12, “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.” It was God himself

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who through the prayers of Epaphras caused the church to stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured. Rev. Mnisi called the delegates and the churches up to continue in prayerful dependence of God.

In the words of Ephesians 3:20-21, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”