

# THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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DE CHRISTELIJKE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN IN NEDERLAND (CGKN)

The background of the cover is a monochromatic blue-toned photograph. It depicts a wide expanse of water in the foreground, with gentle ripples and waves. In the distance, a range of low mountains or hills stretches across the horizon. The sky above is filled with soft, white clouds, creating a serene and atmospheric scene. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of blue, from light sky blues to deep, dark blues in the water and shadows.

## WHO ARE WE?

The name CGKN gives expression to the fact that these churches desire to be Christian churches as well as Reformed churches. The first part of the name (Christian) indicates that we are one with the catholic (universal) church of all ages. The second part of the name (Reformed) expresses that we have our origin with the 16th and 17th century Reformation, which shaped the churches in the Netherlands, thus following in the footsteps of John Calvin, the great reformer of Geneva. This was especially expressed at the General Synod of 1618-1619 (Dordrecht) when the reformed confessional standards, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort (the Three Forms of Unity) were adopted.

In addition to the three ecumenical creeds, these so called Three Forms of Unity are the confessional basis of our churches. All our office bearers have signed a document that they promise not to teach anything that contradicts this basis. With respect to church government, we abide by the Church Order of Dordrecht adopted by the 1618-19 Synod, which is adapted according to changing circumstances. Our confessional basis is not meant to be a purpose as such, but it is to function as a pilot to be a reformed church in a secularized society. By means of this basis we try to understand our call to be the salt of the earth.



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### “NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR” “...and yet not consumed” (Ex.3: 2)

These words with a picture of a burning bush form the seal of our churches, as the illustration indicates. We believe our churches are like that burning bush. By this burning bush the LORD symbolized to Moses that He wanted to be in their midst and that He actually was in the midst of His oppressed covenant people. His presence with us always will be a matter of grace alone. From the beginning until now the LORD has been pleased to use the CGKN for His purposes, even though many transgressions testify against us. It is our deepest desire and prayer that the LORD will use the services of our churches in our country and throughout the world, to the glory of His holy Name and the salvation of many people until Christ's second coming.

## WHERE ARE OUR ROOTS?

In the 18th century harmful philosophical influences began to increasingly threaten the confessing character of the church. Especially the Enlightenment proved to be a great danger to spiritual life. In spite of the decline of the church, many church members continued to long for true biblical spirituality. In the 19th century the Church Order was replaced by a set of rules, imposed upon the church by the secular government. At the same time, the reformed confessions were no longer considered to have a binding character. From this time on, the Dutch reformed churches were referred to as 'Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk' (NHK).

When protests were raised against these developments in the church, a Secession followed, beginning in 1834 at Ulrum in the province of Groningen, where Hendrik de Cock was pastor. From this Secession-movement the CGKN springs. Another movement in the church of the 19th century was the so-called Doleantie of 1886, which took place under the leadership of Dr. Abraham Kuyper. His aim was to restore the “Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk” from within; but his action resulted in a second secession.

At first the CGKN sympathized with the Doleantie. However, certain objections prevailed. These objections concerned the way the Doleantie viewed the 'Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk', and especially the teachings of the influential Dr. Kuyper regarding the doctrines of baptism and regeneration. Yet, in 1892 a great majority of churches joined in the unification process by which the churches stemming from the Secession and the churches of the Doleantie were united. These united churches were called the 'Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland' (GKN). A small segment of the CGKN found it impossible to join with this merger of churches; they held that their objections had not been solved satisfactorily. Therefore, they remained as the continuing CGKN. They were not motivated by sectarianism but they simply desired to remain faithful to the Scriptures and the Confession of the church. They valued very strongly the heritage of both the Reformation and the Second Reformation, which emphasized the personal experience of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. During the first years after 1892 the CGKN paid much attention to questions regarding the differences with the GKN. The CGKN was convinced that the doctrine of presumptive regeneration is unbiblical. During these years there also was the necessity to rebuild and renew ecclesiastical life.

In 1892 the Theological School at Kampen joined the GKN. For that reason the CGKN had to start its own theological school to train future ministers. This theological school, established in 1894, is now called the Theological University and is situated at Apeldoorn (since 1919). The denomination grew from some 1,000 members to more than 74,000 members today. There are 185 churches with 165 ministers. The last few years the membership has held steady. As churches that exist in a western society, we face all the problems connected to the progressive secularisation process that is taking place. The CGKN are also increasingly confronted with spiritual indifference and apostasy.

## HOW DO WE FUNCTION?

Churches that are situated in close proximity usually meet twice per year by way of classis meetings. At these meetings the churches seek to mutually assist one another and exercise oversight over each other. Theological candidates, eligible for a call by one of these churches, are examined at these meetings. Three or four classes meet together annually in what is called a particular or provincial synod, of which there are four in the CGKN. Once every three years, the churches meet in a General Synod. The Synod is made up of 52 office bearers who are delegated by the four particular synods. The professors of the Theological University at Apeldoorn are present as advisers.

The various tasks of the churches are dealt with by several committees, appointed and mandated by the General Synod. These committees remain responsible to Synod for the way they fulfil their mandate. The reformed structure of church government implies that during the time between the meetings of a classis or a synod there is no ecclesiastical ruling body except for the local consistories. This means that the CGKN have no central hierarchical authority structure.

With gratitude we mention the fact that during the time of its existence the CGKN have been spared the pains of a church split, although a number of individual ministers and congregations have left the denomination. The preservation of the bond of unity has not always been easy, since there are different emphases and nuances in respect to the way personal faith is experienced and preached. On the one side there are those who strongly emphasize the covenant of grace by way of "covenantal preaching." On the other side, there are those who emphasize "experiential preaching." At times, this results in definite tension. To a certain point, the roots of these problems lie in the past. There are also certain theological developments (e.g. in hermeneutics) that cause friction. However, there still is unity within the CGKN, a unity that is determined by the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions.



We are mindful of the words of the well-known 17th century theologian, Gisbertus Voetius, who said that true theology is a science that must always be connected to piety. There is also close contact and cooperation with the university of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in Kampen.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTACTS

### National

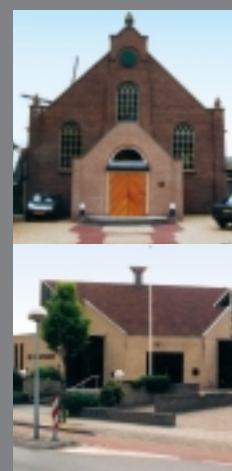
Our churches recognize the call to seek unity with all who in truth love Christ. We seek to obey this call, first of all, in our own country. That there are so many different reformed denominations in our country proves that the church is divided and should cause us to feel shame and humble us.

The last decade especially two contacts have developed, namely with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) (GKV) and with congregations within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) who sincerely agree with the Three Forms of Unity. There are also a number of our churches which have close contacts with the Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK).

### International

On the international level the CGKN have been involved in ecclesiastical fellowship with several Reformed Churches. Besides the relations mentioned below, there are also contacts via our Mission Committee with some other churches, which are originated in the mission work (Geraja Toraja Mamasa (Indonesia), the Synod of Soutpansberg and the Synod of Midland (South Africa)). In our ecumenical relations we discern three levels of relationships (like many other churches). Correspondence, then, includes e.g. opening the Lord's Table to each other and opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers besides the offering of spiritual support wherever and whenever is possible. In 'Complete Correspondence' mutual acceptance of each other's (membership) attestations and mutually considering each other's ministers eligible for call. By means of 'Contact' we want to offer some spiritual support and other cooperative activities of common responsibility.

- **Complete Correspondence**
  - Free Reformed Churches of North America
  - Free Church of Scotland
  - Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)
  - Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
  - Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid- Africa
  - Igrejas Evangelicas Reformadas no Brasil
  - Reformed Churches of New Zealand
- **Limited Correspondence**
  - Eglises Réformées Evangéliques Indépendantes de France
  - Dutch Reformed Church of Botswana
  - Reformed Churches of Botswana



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## WHAT ARE OUR MINISTRIES?

The CKGN (CRCN) is involved in quite a few activities:

- **Foreign Missions**

The first mission field was in Indonesia (Sulawesi). Nowadays the Toraja church in Indonesia functions independently with partial assistance of one of our missionaries. Currently, in South Africa, mission work and proceeding and accompanying activities are carried on in Venda, KwaNdebele, Botswana, Mozambique and Bangui. Some of the mission workers there are involved in special assignments such as lecturers in Bible Schools or Colleges (e.g. the FATEB, Bangui). Others are active in Bible translation work (amongst the Bushmen).
- **Home Missions**

A number of evangelists work in this field, both in the Netherlands and in Belgium. Recently, church planting projects have started in some of our bigger cities. The advisors at the Mission Facilities Centre in Veenendaal offer expert advice in facilitating this work.
- **Witness to the Jews**

Since 1960 a few pastors have resided in Jerusalem to work among the Jews and to dialogue with the Jewish people in all diversities. Since 2001 our churches take part in a Study and Advice Centre in Ede, which is connected with a college. Recently, an appointment has been made for a missionary worker among the Jews in Israël as well as in our own country. Church members are actively involved in several organizations that support the Jewish people.
- **Special Ministries**

A number of our pastors have accepted special ministry positions, such as chaplains in the military services, in hospitals and in jails. In addition, there are pastors who are employed to provide pastoral care as teachers in schools and to the handicapped.
- **Diaconal Tasks**

During the last few decades more attention has been given to the diaconal tasks of the church. Support and aid is given for special needs in our congregations, as well as in our society and throughout the world.

Important as these activities are, they are not the only essential part of our church-life. Of greatest importance is what takes place when the congregation gathers around the Word, twice on Sundays and at set times during the week. There, first of all, is experienced what it means to be a church.

## THEOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Since 1968 our university is open also to those who do not seek training for the ministry in the CGKN, but who have a desire to study theology, especially reformed theology, for other aims. During the last two decades many international contacts with our university have been established and are still increasing. As a result, every year some students from outside our country study in Apeldoorn. Since 1980 the university is allowed to grant a doctor's degree (ThD) in theology. Apeldoorn is one of the few universities in the Netherlands where truly reformed theology is being taught.

- Orthodox Presbyterian Church of North America
- Reformed Church in Japan
- Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)
- Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

- **Contact:**

There are quite a few CGKN congregations that have some ties with congregations in Eastern Europe. Not all of these are reformed churches, but they are faithful to the authority of God's Word. For this reason the General Synod of 2001 agreed to this third form of ecumenical relationship, especially with churches in Eastern Europe.

Additionally, our membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) provides us with the opportunity to exercise fellowship with even more churches. It is our opinion that this body could be of great importance for giving mutual assistance and encouragement to reformed churches worldwide, especially with those that are very small.



## SOME IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

Website: [www.cgk.nl](http://www.cgk.nl)

Information about committees is available on this site, such as Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Relief Projects, as well as other links.

Website Theological University: [www.tua.nl](http://www.tua.nl)

Inter-church Relations Committee:  
 Secretary: Drs. B. de Graaf, Whemelaan 6, 8071 GZ Nunspeet, The Netherlands;  
 Tel. 0031 341 260207, Email: [b.degraaf@hetnet.nl](mailto:b.degraaf@hetnet.nl)