



**Decisions of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Ede 2014 concerning
'Man and women in the church'**

authorized translation

(Material: see the original Dutch version)

Decision 1:

to relieve the committee "m/f in the church" of their duties.

Decision 2:

- a. not to agree with the grounds of the conclusion of the committee "m/f in the church" that it belongs within the bandwidth of what may be called Scriptural and Reformed, when beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices;
- b. the view that beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices must be open for free debate, provided that arguments are based on Scripture.

Ground:

the message of Scripture shows two lines. One line is that of equivalence of man and woman; the other is that of the difference in responsibility that God gave to man and woman. Both lines must be accounted for.

Decision 3:

- a. to appoint a new committee "m/f and office" to investigate:
 1. how the offices can be structured so that women can be active for God's kingdom within that structure; thereby taking into account the ground mentioned under Decision 2;
 2. what the consequences are of such a structure, relative to the current forms and the church order;
 3. what the opinions are within sister churches concerning the implementation of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon; this with a view toward maintaining the catholicity of the church;
- b. to inform the sister churches, both nationally and internationally, concerning this Decision 3, and to request advice.

Grounds:

1. a continuing reflection on the questions concerning men and women in the offices of minister, elder, and deacon will be served by a critical study of the current structure of offices within the Reformed Churches in the light of the whole teaching of Scripture;
2. the structure of offices originating in the times of the Reformation, of ministers, elders, and deacons, is not directly derived from Scripture and may therefore be modified and/or extended according to circumstances;
3. not all activities of the current officers deal directly with bearing responsibility for the spiritual leadership in the congregation; it is profitable to investigate which tasks may be executed by men as well as women;
4. a different implementation and definition of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon may have consequences for the content of the forms in current use, as well as for the rules of the church order;
5. according to the rules for sister church relations (Synod of Ommen, 1993), sister churches ought to be informed about the intended study and its results.

Decision 4:

to appoint a new committee “m/f in the church” with the following duties:

- a. to work on integration of Biblical education, the confessional norms, and the practice of the Reformed Churches in connection with the roles and functions of women and men in their mutual relations, by:
 1. describing actively how and on what ground in Reformed Churches men and women in various situations use their talents in the congregation;
 2. noting in connection to this strong points, best practices, but also difficulties and points of controversy, giving a first assessment of these matters, and communicating this to the churches;
 3. entering and remaining in conversation about these observations and considerations with especially the employees of the Theological University and the Praktijkcentrum;
 4. stimulating and supporting the conversation in the churches about the calling and right of women also to use their talents, with a view toward a practice that reflects the manifold message of the Scripture, with special attention to:
 - a. Scriptural and obedient reading of the Bible;
 - b. the influence of society on the thought and actions of Christians;
 - c. the special and complementary differences between man and woman.
 5. in all the aforementioned activity, specifically asking about the various experiences and convictions of women.
- b. if there are developments in the churches in this respect that converge sufficiently, so that it is responsible to make general decisions, to submit proposals to the next general Synod;
- c. to communicate relevant proposals to sister churches, both national and international, though the Contact Committee.

Grounds:

1. at this moment it is wise not to settle for one or more of the submitted “directions toward a solutions” in the questions surrounding potential female office bearers, but to continue the discussing more broadly;
2. the developments in the churches concerning the roles and functions of men and women in the congregation deserve good support and interaction;
3. the different practices in the churches today require a more communal process of raising awareness and learning from one another. This is felt more urgently today than in the past.
4. by investigating one another’s practices, as churches together and in mutual relationship, we complement each other and grow in unity;
5. input from the Theological University and the Praktijkcentrum is necessary for a theologically and empirically responsible guidance of the ecclesiastical developments and preparation of potentially necessary decision-making;
6. regardless of the conviction concerning the permissibility of female office bearers, much can be gained in a continued conversation about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the church:
 - a. there is difference of opinion about the way in which we draw conclusions for our lives today from what the Biblical authors initially wrote for their audiences;
 - b. the committee “m/v in the church” in their report rightly noted the tension that many experience between the roles and functions that women fulfill in the churches and in society;
 - c. the real differences between man and woman demand its own consideration, for instance by giving attention to “gender studies”;
7. in the discussion about the calling and right of women also to use their talents in the churches their own input is indispensable;
8. it is good to take time to allow general decision-making to come up out of the churches, and to allow as much like-mindedness as possible to grow;
9. the agreements with sister churches, both national and international, must be honored as carefully as possible.