



NEDERDUIITSE GEREFORMEERDE KERK DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

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Dear Member

We as members of the executive of the General Synod are concerned about the state and course of events in the world and in South Africa. We address this letter to you to share some of our concerns, but also to express our compassion for members who currently experience discomfort and tension in our world. As seldom before we, as members of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), are challenged to renew our commitment to follow Christ.

The ecological crisis with global warming and the depletion of the earth's resources, economic factors, reckless extremists who threaten the safety of people and immigrants streaming to the West are disruptive on many levels and also currently challenge believers' trust in God.

South Africans are also subject to a growing tension between those with assets, interests and much to lose, and those who have nothing to lose. We know this gap in South Africa is one of the largest in the world. The symptoms and implications of this tension are reported in the daily media. The ongoing political transformation in our country requires great political and economic adjustments.

This makes huge demands on members of the DRC. For historical reasons many of our members enjoy more economic and social privileges than the average South African. The demands for the redistribution of wealth, access to study and work opportunities and a greater share in the economic resources of the country by people who previously did not have equal access to it, therefore have implications for our members in privileged positions. As followers of Christ, we are also serious that justice should prevail for all people and therefore we wholeheartedly participate in measures to heal our land.

We are also grateful to be part of a church family that addresses the needs of people in a wonderful way. Too little recognition is given to the way in which we live and work to serve across the boundaries of church membership. The annual financial contribution through our Dutch Reformed Church and DR Church family's diaconal services is more than R1,2 billion. We provide annual professional social services to more than a million people. It affects nearly 5 million people's lives. But much more than that are the contributions of congregations and members in the execution of their personal call to

the welfare and support of people who are suffering. There is no congregation, and almost no members who do not give and assist without expecting anything back. This assistance takes place across all boundaries of race, language and background. We do not keep the score or advertise the contents of such services. We answer to the plight of South Africa with our lifestyle. Through our lives we became a serving church and we call on congregations and members to continue to live as a serving church, particularly at this current time.

We are also concerned about the culture of contempt and stereotyping that has developed in our country over the past years. Almost all indexes indicate that the social cohesion in our country is under increasing pressure and as a result racial tensions also increase. The way in which people, including our members, are stereotyped, excluded and threatened and are sometimes insulted malignantly, is worrying. Many of our people, like other South Africans, live under extreme pressure due to economic factors. Add to this the farm attacks and murders that radically affect and destroy thousands of believers' lives. Land claims that linger for years and years, deprive farmers of their security and future vision. The government's proposed limitation of the area of land that farmers may own, also does not take into account the demands of successful commercial agriculture and this is a threat to food security. The rise in food prices affects everyone in our country, but especially the poorest are hit hard. Obviously this situation also puts pressure on our ability to help those who are poor and are suffering. In addition the drought has put our agricultural community under tremendous pressure. The lack of basic services and the essential maintenance to roads, electricity and water supply networks also give cause for great concern and frustration.

We continuously hear stories of young members of the DRC with outstanding academic achievements in matric but who do not get selection for their preferred courses at tertiary institutions. Pressure on public schools to monolingual instruction in English also has implications for members' language and education preferences.

The continuous disruption on several university campuses is a source of great concern. The way in which students are victimized and are put under pressure, the impact of greater political agendas that are entertained on campuses and which affect the students' lives, the way Afrikaans is treated as a medium of instruction, as well as the highly threatening and flammable conditions in which students find themselves, on a large-scale contributes to people's sense of threat and tension. The apparent lack of balanced leadership by the government – to take the interest of everybody equally serious – greatly exacerbates the sense of insecurity.

We understand that many members currently suffer on an emotional level, are disrupted through public disrespect, experience discrimination and in addition undergo deep feelings of humiliation and rejection.

Together with our sister churches we currently are in a Season of Human Dignity. We really want to work together to restore respect between people. We also want to

compassionately listen to people and as it becomes believers we want to embrace one another. In this Season we again commit ourselves to self-sacrificial love. In this way we wish to render a powerful testimony about the alternative kind of lifestyle that Jesus taught us. In this stressful time one can easily become a participant of the group of South Africans who are disrespectful. You can join those who talk about others without ever having listened to them or had put themselves in the shoes of the others. You can withdraw yourself and choose not to assume responsibility for the country or for people who are different than you are. One can also choose to simply blame and condemn and contribute nothing to justice and the healing of our land. You can play along and nurture racism. There are many options.

The vast majority of the DRC's people, we believe, has however chosen to make a constructive contribution, decided to continue their involvement with others, to be respectful regardless of anything that may be said or even be done to ourselves, to embrace our fellow human beings and to listen to others' stories and opinions, to love and as such to follow in Christ's footsteps. Daily, again and again, we make the decision to act as followers of Christ and to respond differently from those who do not know Him. We choose for respect and to listen, to embrace and to love, in view of the importance of the other. We understand that God gave this land to us all and that we can only be happy when the interests of all and justice for all are accounted for.

We, the executive of the Dutch Reformed Church General Synod, therefore pray that the Holy Spirit will personally comfort each one who suffers and hurts, because of disrespect and a lack of understanding and love of fellow citizens in these days. We pray for you for wisdom and depth of insight in order to live a Godly life. We pray that Philippians 1: 9 and 10 will be true for you: "I pray that your love will keep on growing more and more, together with true knowledge and perfect judgement, so that you will be able to choose (discern) what is best". We encourage you to discern your calling from within a deep personal relationship with God. We pray that your life will daily be a witness about the transforming power that comes from our Head, Jesus Christ. May you experience his peace and truth, his inspiration and strength, and may your own life contribute to the writing of an alternative story for South Africa.

The Lord be with you!

In Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nelis van Rensburg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small flourish at the end.

Nelis Janse van Rensburg
On behalf of the General Synod Moderature