

Steering committee "Work in the vineyard" comes with final report

Utrecht, March 31, 2009 – Steering Committee 'Work in the vineyard' presented the Board of the General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands with its final report "Hand to the plow". In the report proposals are being made on nine topics offering guidance to the changing processes which the steering committee considers to be necessary. The proposals concern the mutual support to congregations, the career development of the vicar, the alliances between vicars and religious workers, the guidance of the cooperatives and the position of religious workers. The report will be discussed in April during the assembly of the general synod.

One of the starting points of the report is the mutual solidarity of congregations. In order to be able to give that more substance the contribution for the solidarity fund will be increased to ten Euros per confessing member. This makes it possible to make an amount of seven million Euros available for support to congregations (of which half a million Euros for congregations that actively want to preserve the Lutheran tradition).

Also there should be three salary-scales for the compensation of vicars. In view of the cooperation of vicars and religious workers is returned to the obligatory cooperatives of the Church Order. For the professionalizing of the guidance and quality control of vicars and religious workers is proposed to appoint a 'pastor pastorum' on the level of the General Classical Assembly. This figure also officiates as a trusted representative for the church boards in the region.

In view of the position of the religious workers the present report proposes to define this position clearly. In special circumstances a religious worker with a completed HVO¹ education theology can be admitted into the profession of vicar after an ability assessment and complementary education.

Prehistory

The report in hand is the third report on this subject. The direct cause for reflection on this subject is the problems of the small congregations in relation to the new compensation system, which was introduced with the foundation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. A "broad study committee" was asked to investigate the future of the vicar within the united church and also to take along the position of the religious worker. In March 2007 this committee presented the report "Work in the vineyard". Amongst other things that report presented a vision regarding the staffing of vicars in the long term in various types of congregations, the utilization of the corps of vicars as a whole and financing of staffing.

Subsequently the Synod decided to install a steering committee, with the assignment to elaborate the policy lines which were proposed in the report. In the first report of the committee proposals were made to reinforce (small) congregations, cooperatives of congregations and classical assemblies in order to promote the mutual solidarity of congregations. Also was proposed to bring vicars and religious workers together in teams and among other things professionalize the guidance and application of professionals within the church. In November the Synod dedicated a first discussion to the proposals and now has to decide on the elaboration.

Note for the editors not meant for publication:

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¹ HVO= Higher Vocational Education