

Moreleta Park Congregation Information Bulletin

Process regarding the future of Moreleta Park Congregation

May 2019

1. Background

Moreleta Park Congregation (MPC) endeavours to adhere to Scripture in all of its ways. We believe that the Bible is the truth, authoritatively, infallible and inspired by God therefore, we strive not to deviate from it. The teaching, preaching and various ministries that take place in MPC are founded on Biblical principles. We rely on the inworking of the Holy Spirit and believe that the Holy Spirit lives in all Christians.

We acknowledge that the Dutch Reformed (DR) Church has played a major role in establishing and expanding the Christian faith in our country over a period of many decades. There are, however, currently certain trends in and decisions of the DR Church with respect to Scriptural authority and –interpretation that are of great concern to us, which has compelled us to reflect on MPC’s role and position in the DR Denomination. The issue that MPC is wrestling with is that it is subjected to organisational structures that appear to interpret Scripture in a post-modernistic and liberal manner, and that question its authority. MPC is convinced that the above trends might have a negative and divisive effect in the DR Denomination.

2. Preamble and outcome

During the Church Board Meeting on the 14th of March 2019 the Church Board and Pastors, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, experienced that the Lord was confirming MPC’s road ahead, and was leading them to reflect about our being church and our role as Congregation. During this Church Board Meeting it was decided to fast and pray for a period of 40 days to determine God’s will about the following:

- (a) The future and role of MPC, including MPC’s role inside the DR Denomination.
- (b) The possibility of collaborating with the Hillsong Faith Community.
- (c) The present financial challenges of the Congregation.
- (d) The obedience and willingness of members of the Congregation to make themselves available for leadership positions, including to serve on the Church Board.
- (e) MPC’s involvement in the community, especially Plastic View/Woodlane Village, which is currently creating considerable uncertainty in the neighbouring community.

These prayer points were announced during church services on Sundays for a period of four weeks in order to make the Congregation’s members part of the process. The Congregation’s members were also requested to give feedback regarding what they heard from the Lord. On completion of the 40 days of fasting and prayer the Leadership again gathered on the 25th of April to discuss the feedback that had been received from the leadership, Congregation members and personnel. The feedback, which was repeatedly confirmed, can be divided into two categories.

The first category covers the calling of our Congregation and our relationship with God. It includes the following:

- (a) We must prioritise our personal relationship and intimacy with God. It is, therefore, of cardinal importance to spend quality time in the Word and in prayer. The Word of God plays an extremely important role in our search for- and understanding of God.
- (b) We must realise who God is, that God is Holy, that we must show Him respect and reverence and that, in the first instance, it is all about glorifying Him.
- (c) Confessing our sins is important and we should strive to be humble, to serve and for unity among the leadership and the Congregation. We must strive to be holy because God is holy.
- (d) Our Congregation should fulfil its calling to spread the Gospel and love all people. Our Kingdom vision should include all population groups, languages and cultures.
- (e) Our leadership should stand up for the truth and authority of Scripture without fear, and with courage and

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determination.

The second category covers specific feedback received about the five prayer points:

- (a) Most of the feedback received related to our Congregation's role and it being a part of the DR Church. There were concerns about the current theological direction and controversial decisions of the DR Church. All the respondents agreed that we should reconsider our role in the DR Church. Several references from Scripture accompanied this feedback.
- (b) The feedback regarding a possible collaboration with Hillsong was positive, but it was decided to first do research about their theology in order to establish whether it agrees with what MPC stands for. Considering the momentous decision about MPC's role and position in the DR Church the Hillsong matter has, for the time being, been placed on hold in order not to influence this process and decision.
- (c) During the previous five years MPC's income has decreased due to various factors. The Lord is our Provider, but it remains our responsibility to give our full offering. Therefore, every member must enquire from the Lord whether his / her tithes are in line with what God expects.
- (d) No specific feedback was received about the Leadership. We are continuously praying for humble, Spirit filled leaders, especially given the upcoming Church Board election, as well as for important decisions that have to be taken.
- (e) The importance of our involvement in the community was repeatedly confirmed. It is MPC's desire and calling to serve our Congregation as well as the whole community. MPC has an important reconciliatory role to fulfil in the community.

The above information has been communicated to the Congregation's members during subsequent church services.

3. Our concerns

There are a number of aspects of the DR Denomination that are of concern to us. The Congregation's leadership is in a process of discussing this with the relevant leadership structures of the DR Church. The most important of these are:

- (a) Subscribing to Scripture's accuracy and authority: The risk that decisions are being taken that are not based on Scripture but rather on liberal and humanistic principles. It is of great concern to MPC that the authority of Scripture and the articles of faith of the Church is increasingly being denied, including aspects such as the virgin birth, the physical resurrection, the existence of satan and prescriptions regarding marriage.
- (b) The recent court case: Secular principles were relied on by the court to arrive at their judgement, rather than Biblical principles. The disconcerting aspect of the judgement is that Scripture is deemed to be subject to the country's constitution.
- (c) Theological training: Widespread concern exists about the liberal trends in the theological training of the DR Church at its three faculties. The question is whether this concern is justified and, if so, whether the leadership of the DR Church is giving adequate attention to this matter?
- (d) The media of the DR Church: The Kerkbode is being used as a vehicle to put forward and support the liberal point of view by allocating considerably more space to these views than to conservative opinions.
- (e) The missionary calling of the church: Due to the current structure within the DR Church it has become difficult for MPC to realise its Kingdom vision.

Given the above, an increasing number of our members no longer see their way clear to remain part of the DR Church. Our members are positive about MPC, but have no desire to remain under the DR Church's umbrella whose leadership is perceived to neither acknowledge nor follow the authority of Scripture.

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4. What the decision is *not* about

Many factors *did not* play a role in the decision, amongst other:

- (a) This decision was not taken for financial reasons. MPC will gain a minor financial benefit by leaving the DR Denomination. On the contrary, it could be detrimental, should some of our members not support the decision.
- (b) The same sex relationship court case did not play a direct role in the decision. It did, however, play an indirect role as it showed up the fault lines in the DR Church resulting from its lack of being faithful to Scripture. The non-adherence of the prescripts of Scripture regarding court cases in the church is also a reason for concern.
- (c) The discussions with Hillsong are, at this stage, only preliminary and no possible future co-operation has been decided on. Hillsong approached MPC to hire a venue, which resulted in the discussions. This process has been put on hold for the time being.

5. The process

We have started a process to investigate what the consequences would be, should we decide to leave the DR Denomination. We are convinced that the process of engagement should take place in a loving, peaceful and humble atmosphere, and that we should share all our concerns with the leadership of the DR Church in an earnest search for solutions. Should no solutions or changes be forthcoming we will seriously consider leaving the DR Denomination. Any such a decision will be taken in consultation with the Congregation.

The Bible clearly stipulates that we as believers should reach out in love. Extensive discussions should, therefore, precede our final decision. As a DR Church we are part of a family and for this reason we firstly discuss this at home (Congregation) before discussing it with the family (the Presbytery of Elardus Park and the Eastern Synod). It is unfortunate that many of the articles in the media were based on assumptions and people's opinions which were devoid of the truth and which was not communicated by our leadership.

The process to date and for the foreseeable future is as follows:

- (a) An initial discussion on the 7th of May 2019 took place between the leadership of MPC and members of the Executive Council of the General Synod of the DR Church, including the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Dr Nelis Janse van Rensburg. As the General Synod does not deal with the affairs of individual Congregations the discussions took place in an informal manner, rather than on an official basis (Congregational matters are dealt with by the Presbytery and the relevant Regional Synod). The discussions were meaningful and our concerns were understood and even shared by some of those present.
- (b) The initial discussions with the Presbytery of Elardus Park took place on Friday the 10th of May. The delegates indicated that they did not fully understand our concerns and that they did not necessarily share our sentiments. They, however, indicated that they respected our views and could see that we are proceeding with integrity. They confirmed that they wish to have further discussions and that they would still love us, irrespective of our decision.
- (c) A meeting with the Eastern Synod took place on the 23rd of May 2019. We were able to share our concerns with them and are awaiting their feedback regarding a proposal for the future process to be followed.
- (d) A Church Board Meeting is scheduled to take place on the 13th of June where the matter is on the agenda and a decision regarding the process going forward will be taken.

There are at least three alternatives that MPC can consider for the road ahead:

- (a) The first option is to resign from the DR Church. According to the Church Order a Congregation can, however, not do this. In practise the ministers will have to resign from the DR Church, where after a new independent

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Congregation will have to be founded. The Church's members will have to follow a similar process. In this situation the accreditation of the ministers, MPC's buildings and its bank accounts are affected. The last two remain in the DR Church while the ministers will lose their accreditation with the DR Denomination and would not be able to apply for posts within the DR Church.

- (b) The second option is for the Congregation to show their opposition to the prevailing ideas in the DR Church by mourning ("Doleer" in Afrikaans/Dutch, which is derived from the word "*doleo*" in Latin that literally means "to experience pain"). In practise this means that MPC would remain in the DR Church but would not participate in any of the Church's activities or structures as it would be mourning the current state of affairs. Formal discussions would be held during this time in which we would address the matters of concern to us. The DR Church would then have to indicate whether or not they are willing to attend to our concerns. The decision on whether to leave the DR Church could then be taken at a later stage. Other Congregations and even Regional Synods who agree with us could also join us in mourning.
- (c) The third alternative is that an extraordinary assembly of the Eastern Synod could be requested, during which only this one matter would be dealt with in camera. Representatives of all the Congregations belonging to the Eastern Synod would be eligible to participate in the assembly of the Synod. In this case the Eastern Synod could take one of the following decisions:
 - a. They hear MPC's concerns but do not agree with it and retain the *status quo*. MPC will then have to take its own decisions independently from the other Congregations in the Synod.
 - b. The Eastern Synod could decide to also mourn. This scenario would carry much more weight in discussions with the higher Church structures than only one Congregation could muster.
 - c. The Eastern Synod could decide to resign from the General Synod of the DR Church. The whole Eastern Synod, together with all the Congregations belonging to it, would then leave the General Synod of the DR Church. In the last two instances any Congregations that do not agree with the Eastern Synod could join other regional DR Church Synods, as the whole process works according to a majority vote system.

MPC will take a decision regarding its future after the abovementioned processes have run their due course. This could be a lengthy process and we are uncertain by when it will be completed. We will, however, continue to address our concerns within the DR Church structures and will follow the required processes to reach a solution, which could eventually lead to MPC leaving the DR Denomination if no solution is found.

As on the 14th June 2019, following a Church Board meeting:

Following Moreletapark Congregation's (MPC's) discussions with our family (Congregational members, Presbytery of Elardus Park and the Eastern Synod), where all parties were informed about MPC's concerns / objections, the Church Council of MPC officially met on the 13th of June to discuss the matter.

The outcome of the meeting was as follows:

- To not take an immediate decision regarding the next step w.r.t. our position within the Dutch Reformed denomination;
- To walk in love the road of interaction and discussions with the Dutch Reformed Church before considering further options;
- To follow a process that includes the following:
 - o A request via the church structures to investigate the concerns regarding the theological education at our seminaries and board of trustees.
 - o An envisaged discussion opportunity with other Dutch Reformed congregations.
- To commit to keep the congregation informed on the course of events.

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In obedience to the Lord we want to remain focused on His calling for our congregation.
Thank you for your patience in this matter and please pray that the Lord will clearly show us the way ahead.

As and when new additional information becomes available it will be communicated with the Congregation without delay. The following people have been delegated by the Church Board to communicate with the Press on behalf of our Congregation: the Spiritual leader: Pieter Badenhorst, and the Chief Operating Officer: Pieter Breytenbach. Any enquiries can be addressed to toekoms@moreleta.co.za or 012-997 8000