

Sharing the Body of Christ

Towards an Ecumenically Informed Reformed Theology of
Ministry from a Missionary Perspective

Rein den Hertog



Eburon
Utrecht 2023

ISBN 978 94 6301 485 4

Eburon Academic Publishers, Utrecht, The Netherlands
info@eburon.nl / www.eburon.nl

Cover design: Tineke den Hertog - van der Veer

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PREFACE

The roots of this study lay in the red soil of the Limpopo province in northern South Africa. It was there that in 1999 the journey began that eventually led to this book.

Raised in a family of theologians and ordained ministers, I had resolutely decided to maintain my independence by steering my own course and pursue a very different future. I decided to study history at Leiden University and there was absolutely nothing to suggest that an ecclesial career was on the horizon. On the contrary, I had always made it abundantly clear that my lifepath would take a very different direction. And I meant it from the very bottom of my heart.

However, that was beyond God's guidance. In the summer of 1999, I had just finished the first year of my study when, during a working holiday for Christian adolescents in former Bantustan Venda, I was baffled by the spirituality and practices of the African sisters and brothers who were welcoming us as their guests. The experiences, meetings, and conversations with these culturally different Christians – especially the pastor and his wife who received me and two other boys as guests in their house – made a profound and lasting impression on me because of their deeply rooted joy and faith. Even more, these impressions changed my life. God appeared to be very real in Limpopo. Not only that, but His gospel also gave joy and courage to people seemingly far less fortunate than me.

When, towards the end of our stay, the pastor suggested – or rather posited – that I should dedicate my life to the service of God's kingdom, it was an important indication to me that I needed to rethink the course of my life. On the flight home, I resolved to study theology, although the very prospect did not exactly fill me with joyful longing at the time.

However, the years of study that followed confirmed the turnaround that had begun to take place in Africa, and I came to believe that the path was leading to ecclesial ministry. After completing my studies, I was ordained as a young minister in 2006 in the beautiful town of Zutphen. The congregation patiently endured my inexperience and slowly I learned in practice what was to be expected of a minister of the Word.

As the years progressed, however, this expectation increasingly rubbed shoulders with what I was learning from Scripture about the role of the church in the world. A certain discomfort developed over the fact that much of the minister's work was focused on maintaining an ecclesial culture and satisfying the needs of church members, while dedication to God's kingdom seemed to play only a marginal role. This unease only intensified when, in 2013, I moved to Groningen and found myself engaged in ministerial work that was even more

inward-focused. Was this where the journey that had begun in South Africa was supposed to lead? Was I really ministering God's kingdom, as the pastor in Venda directed me to do? Was this really the role of the church and its ordained ministry?

When, in 2019, the call came from Amsterdam, it was a clear signal to me that I needed to change the priority of my work. No longer should my focus be on maintaining church institutions, but instead far more on the process of the actual embodiment of the gospel of the kingdom. The two small communities I serve in Amsterdam - *Amstelgemeente* and *Via Nova* - are each in their own way searching for ways to contextually express the church's mission to be a witness to the gospel. For me they embody what C.K. Barrett calls the paradox of the church. These congregations know themselves to be only of *peripheral* importance since the church is all about God's kingdom. At the same time, however, they know themselves to be of *central* importance because God's kingdom calls for contextual embodying by concrete communities. I greatly enjoy the privilege of helping these two vulnerable communities discern the work of the Spirit.

In a way, the chapters that follow can be read as an intellectual reflection on my experiences as a minister. The first step for this study was taken in Groningen. At a time when I was struggling with my ministry, this study offered an escape. In the hectic pace of work, the moments of intellectual reflection brought peace. However, high workload prevented it from taking off. Only in Amsterdam did the study really catch on, not least because of the pandemic that resulted in agenda's being somewhat emptied. However, it was not primarily the blank spaces in my schedule that helped advance, but mainly the ecclesial and cultural context of Amsterdam that provided ample opportunities to reflect on ministerial work in a fresh way.

Professor Eddy van der Borght and Professor Stefan Paas were involved in this project from the very beginning as inspiring, helpful, and patient supervisors. Their respective academic work symbolizes the ecumenical and missionary dimensions of the church that is the very focus of this thesis. With their sharp insights and benevolent criticism, they protected me from making major errors several times. However, it was above all their constant willingness to think along with me and their commitment that supported me and helped to bring this endeavour to completion.

In my years as a minister, I have had the pleasure of working with several colleagues. Without wanting to short-change the others, I would like to mention a few in particular. First, I mention Gertjan Klapwijk, who was hugely important for my development in my rookie years in Zutphen. Through his critical but sympathetic questions he kindly taught me to reflect on what I was doing.

I also think of Wouter Moolhuizen, who was first a friend before also becoming a colleague. Partly because of the friendship with him and his wife Nienke, the years in Zutphen were an incredibly joyful period for Tineke and me. I therefore consider it a great honour that he is willing to stand beside me as a paronymph at the defence of my thesis.

The latter also applies to Jan van Helden. Many pages of this book were written while he sat in the same room working on his own dissertation. It was a privilege to complete the lonely undertaking of a dissertation, in a way, together. The friendship with him and his wife Marloes is a real bliss.

I also think of Wilbert Dekker. He and I started our research at about the same time, and we also seem to conclude it almost simultaneously. It was a fine and inspiring experience to share this endeavour, not only as colleagues but also as families.

In the Amsterdam context, I would also like to mention Marinus de Jong. It was delightful to spend years together trying to instruct the adolescents of our respective congregations. I also think of Gert-Jan Roest, who is a constant source of inspiration in the context of *Via Nova* and *City to City Amsterdam*. As a *millennial pastor* David van der Meulen remains a constant challenge and stimulation.

Here I would also like to thank Kees Hemmes who, for a substantial part, made the publication of this book possible. I also mention Kristina Vos-Petersen who helped by providing linguistic corrections.

Of course, my claim that the origin of this book lies in South Africa, fails to give due credit to my loving parents. I am immensely grateful to them for raising me in an environment where love for the gospel and the church were a given. That this was initially beyond me was not on their account. But that I currently minister the churches and the gospel is in large part due to the foundation God wanted to lay through them. In a somewhat different way, the same applies to my parents-in-law.

Although all my late grandparents are equally dear to me, I want to mention Grandpa Willem van 't Spijker here. I used much of his work, as can be seen in the historical chapter. I sadly regret that he is not alive to witness the final defence, but I will certainly cherish the memory of the conversations we had about this research.

Of course, I also think of our lovely children at this point: Gerben and Amber, Miriam, Anna, Michiel and Vera. I know they made many a sacrifice because of what started in South Africa before they were even born. It is a great joy to, for a while, walk along with them in their lives. Of course, Rita and Wendy are also part of the family, and they bring a bit of Africa into our house.

Back to Limpopo. Under the African sky, my heart opened not only to the gospel, but also to a very Dutch girl: Tineke. My idealizing of the short time in Venda will be partly motivated by the fact that thinking back on this holiday reminds me of how our wonderful life journey together began. It is a privilege and an indescribable joy to share my life with her. I thank God for that! Moreover, the way she brings hope in the concrete brokenness of vulnerable and troubled people continues to be an important source of inspiration. And not only for me.

Finally, the many pages of academic musings that follow can also be read as my way of worshipping and thanking the Triune God with the mind. May He

give the desire and strength to churches and Christians in Western Europe to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of the kingdom.

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1. INTRODUCING THE CHALLENGES

Ministry that is both Missionary and Ecumenical

Theology of ministry seems to be in vogue nowadays. There were days – not even so long ago – that thinking through ecclesial ministry was a rather unexpected phenomenon in Reformed circles, reeking of churches being self-centred and unable to meet the missionary and ethical challenges posed to them by an emerging post-Christian culture.¹

Times have changed. There is an increasing awareness that questions of the legitimacy, substance and structure of ecclesial ministry need to be thought through in order to meet the deep desire of churches to be witnessing communities in today's culture. There is less and less suspicion that reflection on ecclesial ministry is born out of an inwardly focused longing for self-preservation. Reflection on missionary presence in today's culture and reflection on ecclesial ministry seem to meet each other.

Moreover, the cultural and missionary challenges that spark the reflection on ministry are by no means only confined to some churches or denominations. On the contrary, they are shared by many, if not all churches. Increasingly denominational discussions on ministry are informed by deliberations in other denominations and by ecumenical documents. Apparently, there is a shared sense that the search for an adequate and credible ministerial expression of the church's mission in today's culture needs to be ecumenically informed.

1.1 Dutch Denominational Discussions

A brief survey of discussions about ministry within Reformed denominations in the Netherlands can illustrate the connection between missionary presence, ecumenical awareness, and ecclesial ministry. I limit myself to the PKN (*Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*), as the largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands, and three small Reformed denominations that have mutually agreed on a form of ecclesial unity, namely the NGK (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*), the GKv (*Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt*) and the CGKN (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*). This choice is justified since there has hardly been any fundamental theological reflection on ecclesial ministry in the other Reformed denominations in the Netherlands.

¹ Van der Borght, *Theology of Ministry*, XI.

1.1.1 Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (CGKN)

I start with the CGKN because missionary awareness prompted reflection on ministry in this denomination before it did in the other three.

There has been an incessant debate about ecclesial ministry in the CGKN since the end of the last century. There are two main topics that have repeatedly been the main trigger for this. First, there is the issue of women and ecclesial ministry, and, in addition, the ecclesial position of the evangelist has played a major role.

Women and ministry – The issue of women and ministry can illustrate how ecumenical developments influenced the reflection on ministry within the CGKN. In 1998 the question concerning women in ministry was prompted partly by conversations and correspondence with other churches of Reformed confession that allowed women in ecclesial ministry.² Ecumenical contacts among others forced the CGKN to undertake its own reflection. The outcome of this was that women were not admitted to ecclesial ministry within the CGKN.

The issue of admission of women to ecclesial ministry was again on the synod's agenda in 2019 after some congregations acted in violation of the 1998 ruling.³ This time the discussion was for a great deal prompted by some local churches that had proceeded to appoint women elders and deacons.⁴ The churches in question were so-called *samenwerkingsgemeenten* (literally: 'cooperation-congregations') made up of two churches from different denominations – a CGKN congregation combined with a GKv or NGK denomination – in the same locality that decided to work together as if they were just one congregation. However, in 2004 the NGK opened all ecclesial ministry for women, and the GKv followed in 2017. In theory, the synod of the CGKN already made it clear in 2013 that in such *samenwerkingsgemeenten* women could not be admitted to ecclesial ministry.⁵ In practice, however the developments in this area within the NGK and GKv proved decisive for some of these congregations. Therefore, as in 1998, the question of women and ministry emerged because of contacts with other churches. Again, ecumenical contacts called for an in-depth reflection on the theology and practice of ecclesial ministry.

The position of the evangelist – The discussion of the position of the evangelist has been going on since the beginning of this century and was prompted by a growing missionary awareness. The emergence of missionary congregations at the turn of the century sparked the discussion on the position

² *Vrouw en ambt*, 11. Two other reasons are mentioned: 1. The question concerns the churches as a whole and 2. So far, a scriptural foundation for the standpoint regarding women and ministry is lacking.

³ *Eindrapport vrouw en ambt*.

⁴ *Eindrapport vrouw en ambt*, 127.

⁵ *Acta 2013*, 262.

of the evangelist.⁶ The developments in some missionary congregations revealed a lingering problem, because these missionary communities considered the gatherings that were led by an evangelist to be official worship services, whereas the Church Order of the CGKN makes clear that this could not be the case. The evangelist is not permitted to conduct a worship service or administer the sacraments. Formally, the sacraments should be administered in the missionary community by a minister of the Word from somewhere else. Since this practice was hard to explain to people who are unfamiliar with the church, the synod decided to address the matter.⁷ The synod of 2004 decided that the evangelist can be an actual minister of the Word with the right to administer the sacraments. He should be distinguished from the traditional minister of the Word, though, by the fact that he is a 'special minister of the Word'. The special character is demonstrated by the different educational requirements, the strict binding to one congregation and his temporary authority. However, the matter of the evangelist was again on the agenda of the synods of 2016 and 2019. The 2016 synod decided to evaluate the 2004 decision and the practice that had since developed. For this the committee of Church Order and Church Law wrote a report on the principles of ecclesial ministry. This report argues that the ministry of the Word fans out into a diversity of ministries and that ecclesial ministry should be thought through from the *missio Dei*. Departing from these presuppositions, the work of the evangelist should be seen as a ministry in its own right within the one ministry to the Word.⁸

The fact that the issue of women and ministry and the evangelist were both on the synod's agenda in 2019, combined with a variety of other subtopics, led the synod to install a commission that should reflect on how a Reformed doctrine of ministry for today's culture can be shaped in a principled-ecclesiological and practical way.⁹ In its report, called *Dienst aan het Woord (Service to the Word)* (2020), the advisory committee calls for a stronger distinction between the various ecclesial ministries. Current times call for a clearer differentiation.¹⁰ Whereas in the sixteenth century, hierarchical thinking was common and the Reformed emphasis on the equality of the ecclesial ministries marked a decisive end to this hierarchy, in the present age equality is

⁶ Admittedly, the question of the position of the evangelist was also addressed in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century, because of uncertainty about the social position of members who were professionally involved in evangelistic outreach. However, the synods of 1977, 1980 and 1983 all concluded that the evangelist should not be considered a lasting ministry of the church but 'only' a worker in the church whose social position should be properly settled. See: *Acta 1977*, 36-38, 204-207, 213; *Acta 1980*, 46, 187; *Acta 1983*, 67-68, 82-83, 316-327.

⁷ *Acta 2001*, 319.

⁸ *Rapport kerkorde en kerkrecht*, 77-79. For the first report, see: *Rapport kerkorde en kerkrecht*, 54-73. Based on the interviews, the committee concluded that the practice that had grown largely corresponded with the vision as laid down in 2004. See: *Rapport kerkorde en kerkrecht*, 64-67.

⁹ *Rapport 13 Commissie 7 inzake ambten*, 92

¹⁰ *Dienst aan het Woord*.

a widely shared ideal and a tiered structure of ecclesial ministry seems an appropriate response. The report also advocates that it be more clearly delineated that a minister of the Word has a position of his own and has certain responsibilities and powers that do not belong to elders or deacons. This applies to the administration of the sacraments.

The report attempts to develop an apt doctrine of ecclesial ministry in conversation with today's culture, and, by excluding the elder and deacon from the ordained ministry, adopts a course that moves towards ecumenical consensus. Yet, beyond the position of the evangelist, the report barely addresses the missionary concerns and leaves the challenge of thinking through ecclesial ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* open.

This brief survey of the situation of CGKN illustrates that even a rather small Reformed denomination faces missionary and ecumenical challenges in the area of ecclesial ministry. The issue of the evangelist shows that there is an increasing missionary awareness within the CGKN. The issue of women and ministry shows that also a relatively small denomination like the CGKN is confronted with ecumenical challenges.

1.1.2 Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN)

Ever since the formation of the PKN in 2004, there have been discussions about ecclesial ministry. Initially, the debate focused almost exclusively on the position of the non-academically trained theologian. In particular, the conversation focused on whether non-academically trained theologians could be authorized to minister the Word and celebrate the sacraments. A period in which several, sometimes conflicting reports appeared was concluded when the synod decided to begin a process of substantive theological reflection on ecclesial ministry.¹¹

In this period of theological reflection, a memorandum was released that attempted to answer the question for a well-defined view of ministry for the PKN by discussing the articles of the church order pertaining to ecclesial ministry.

¹¹ The report *Pastor in beweging (Pastor in motion)* (2006) suggested opening the ministry of the Word to non-academically trained theologians. The 2007 report *Werk in de wijngaard (Work in the vineyard)* argued for denying non-academically trained theologians the admission to the ministry of the Word. A subsequent report – *De hand aan de ploeg (Hand on the plough)* – followed in 2009 offering an opening to theologians with a bachelor's degree. In 2011, the synod accepted the report *Positie van de HBO-theoloog – kerkelijk werker (Position of the bachelor theologian – church worker)* which states that non-academic theologians can be installed as elder or deacon and can receive the authorization to administer the sacraments under the supervision of a minister of the Word. Also in 2011, however, the report *Met vreugde en vrucht (With joy and fruitfulness)* on career development and differentiation among pastors was published. During the discussion on this report, a motion was submitted requesting that a well-defined theology of ministry of the Protestant Church should be formulated. For the text of the motion, see: *Notitie over de ambtsvisie* (6). From then on, a process of substantive reflection on ecclesial ministry within the PKN begins.

Also, there followed a series of seven pastoral letters on the subject of ecclesial ministry from the secretary of the Synod of the PKN to the various bodies in the PKN and also to the Dutch Roman Catholic bishops' conference.¹² In several letters, the church's apostolic calling and today's missionary challenge regarding ministry comes to the fore. Increasingly, missionary urgency and ecumenical awareness set the tone.¹³

The discussion took a definitive missionary turn in 2019 with the report *Mozaïek van kerkplekken* (*Mosaic of church places*). *Mozaïek van kerkplekken* seeks to answer practical and fundamental questions facing the church because of the proliferation of new missionary forms of church. Since 2005 some 250 new ecclesial communities emerged within the PKN, and in 2019 the question was on the table what this meant in practice for ecclesiology and ecclesial ministry.¹⁴ The report introduces the term *kerngemeente* (*core-congregation*) for new ecclesial initiatives for which a modest form of independence is needed and then lists ten ecclesiological essences for such initiatives.¹⁵ It further proposes that a *kerngemeente* requires three ministers, one of whom is authorized to administer the Word and the sacraments.¹⁶ Ecclesial ministry is necessary for keeping the church focused on Christ, as for pursuing and representing unity and continuity. The report furthermore suggests that non-academically trained pastors should be allowed to administer the Word and the sacraments in new church places. At the same time, it argues that a broader reflection on ministry is needed.¹⁷

¹² The first impetus to this substantive reflection is a memorandum from 2012 called *Notitie over de ambtsvisie van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (*Memorandum on the vision on ecclesial ministry of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands*). A memorandum entitled *Het ambt in discussie* (*Ecclesial ministry in discussion*) followed in 2013. The memorandum identifies seven problematic issues concerning ecclesial ministry and emphasizes that in these missionary times, more emphasis is placed on the personal dimension of ministry: 'This calls for a different type of preacher than that of the corpus christianum. Virtues like courage and candor are needed.' In 2014, a series of seven letters from the secretary of the Synod of the PKN to the various bodies in the PKN and to the Dutch Roman Catholic bishops' conference on the subject of ecclesial ministry follow. The next important landmark is the vision document *Kerk 2025: Waar een woord is, is een weg* (*Church 2025: Where there is a word, there is a way*) (2016), which is intended to reflect on the shape of the church of the future.

¹³ In a letter to church councils, the secretary underlines that the church and its ministries are apostolic and therefore sent into the world. In a separate letter to missionary workers and pioneers, the secretary also emphasizes this and explicitly asks for input on a possible new ministry of evangelist. Finally, in a letter to the bishops, he calls explicit attention to the church's apostolic vocation in the world and suggests that precisely the present urgency in that matter may open the door to mutual ministerial recognition.

¹⁴ *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 5.

¹⁵ *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 26.

¹⁶ *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 52.

¹⁷ *Mozaïek van kerkplekken*, 49 ff.

This further reflection takes place in the 2020 report *Geroepen en gezonden (Called and Sent)*. This report wants to reflect on the questions concerning ecclesial ministry from the *missio Dei*.¹⁸ The report argues that the fundamental question about ministry is how it contributes to God's mission as it is expressed in the announcement of the coming kingdom. It further argues that the ministry of the Word is a public ministry, and therefore also by definition missionary. From an ecumenical point of view, the report advocates the term ordination in the case of ministers of the Word, as opposed to elders and deacons. However, the report does broaden the group of ministers of the Word, proposing that all elders, deacons, and church workers who have received the authority to administer the sacraments under the laying on of hands should also be considered ordained ministers.¹⁹ The lack of academic formation need not be an impediment to this, as historically and ecumenically there is no requirement for academic formation of ordained ministers.²⁰

Fundamental theological reflection is further offered in the report *Geroepen door Christus (Called by Christ)* (2022).²¹ The starting point in this report is also the *missio Dei*. Fundamentally, the report seeks the uniqueness of the Protestant vision of ministry in a two-track approach in which both ordained ministry and the charismatic congregation go back to Christ. Ordained ministry is not about the performance of a particular task, but about being called by Christ. This gives ordained ministry a more substantial place than has usually been the case in the history of Protestantism and corresponds to what has been taken for granted in the ecumenical movement since the appearance of the report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*.²² The priesthood of all believers, according to the report, relates primarily to the vocation of believers in the world.²³ This could give the impression that ordained ministry is mainly inwardly focused. However, the report comes to a different conclusion. Ordained ministers also share in God's mission in this world since Christ's called servants are sent into the world to

¹⁸ *Geroepen en gezonden*, 6.

¹⁹ *Geroepen en gezonden*, 20.

²⁰ *Geroepen en gezonden*, 20. However, the report does suggest that non-academically trained ministers of the Word should be called *pastor* instead of *predikant*. Based on this differentiation within the ordained ministry, there is also the possibility of differentiation in education and remuneration.

A first elaboration of the proposals of *Geroepen en gezonden* followed in the study *Geroepen om te dienen (Called to serve)*. By means of quantitative and qualitative research, this study attempts to help in the search for an answer to the question of the status of the church worker.

²¹ *Geroepen door Christus*. The report's text was also published as a book in 2023. Included were discussion questions at the end of each chapter. (Wisse, *Geroepen door Christus*) In what follows, I quote from the original report.

²² In referring to this report, I will use the abbreviation BEM followed by a slash and the part of the report I am referring to. So, BEM/m means the part of the report that discusses ministry. The letter 'b' refers to Baptism and 'e' to Eucharist.

²³ *Geroepen door Christus*, 43.

proclaim the gospel and to make disciples of the nations. Furthermore, the ordained ministry also has a sacramental dimension, in the sense that it represents God's perspective in this world. In doing so, it should be clear that ministering the gospel cannot be limited to the boundaries of the existing church since it is a service in and to the world. However, on what exactly then is the role of ordained ministry in the world and how it represents God's perspective in it, the report says little.

The survey of the discussion on ecclesial ministry in the PKN shows a marked development. At first, the discussion focused mainly on the position of the church worker. In particular, whether he should be allowed to administer the sacraments was up for debate. From 2012, however, it was evident that a thorough reflection on the foundations of Reformed theology of ministry was required. From 2019 onwards there is a desire to think through theology of ministry from the *missio Dei*. This insight was largely driven by an increasing missionary awareness, which in turn arose from the missionary practice of churches and new church initiatives. Moreover, the conversation within the PKN shows a growing ecumenical awareness. Two fundamental reports offer stimulating and fundamental insights. However, the need for further reflection on ordained ministry from the perspective of the *missio Dei* remains since more clarity is needed regarding the question of what constitutes the vocation, task, scope, and authority of the ordained minister from a missionary perspective.

1.1.3 Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv)

Since the discussion of ecclesial ministry has been much less intense within the NGK and GKv, there is no need to devote a section to each separately.

NGK – The *Landelijke Vergadering* (National Assembly) of the NGK in 2013 discussed the report *Om de heiligen toe te rusten voor het werk in zijn dienst (To equip the saints for work in his service)*.²⁴ This report does not provide an elaborated vision on ecclesial ministry, but rather seeks to share some fundamental considerations regarding the challenges that evolving culture poses to churches. Specific questions addressed concern the priesthood of all believers, the meaning of ministry in relation to the community of believers, the strong position of the minister of the Word and the relationship between ministry and the administration of the sacraments. After considering developments in other denominations in a few subsections, the report focuses on the NGK. Among other things, the report notes the absence of the missionary element in its own church order (*Akkoord voor Kerkelijk Samenleven*).²⁵ The report concludes that

²⁴ *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*. In 2015, the report *Ambt en homoseksualiteit: een Bijbels verantwoord perspectief? (Ecclesial ministry and homosexuality: a biblically warranted perspective?)* was published, but since it does not offer a substantially different view from the 2013 report, I will not discuss it here.

²⁵ *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*, 7.

there is no need to develop a theology of ministry, although further research is required.²⁶ Here the report explicitly refers to the ecumenical dimension.²⁷

GKv – Within the GKv, the discussion around ministries has focused on the question of women's access to ecclesial ministry. The 2017 synod, after discussing the report *Samen dienen (Serving Together)*, decided to open all ecclesial ministries to women.²⁸ Since the report *Samen dienen* focuses primarily on the question surrounding the admission of women to ministry, there is less room for fundamental reflection on ecclesial ministry in general. The report dedicates one single chapter to the subject and limits itself to a discussion of some biblical data, confessional writings, and liturgical forms, especially from the point of view of what these sources tell about the question of whether ecclesial ministry can be opened to women. It is noteworthy, however, that an entire chapter is spent on the opinions of sister churches on this issue, thereby indicating a clear ecumenical awareness.²⁹ In its final considerations, the report explicitly calls attention to the question of the extent to which ecclesial ministry serves the spread of the Word of God in our time.³⁰ Unfortunately, the report does not elaborate on this substantively, leaving unclear what this means in practice.³¹

Both the discussion in the NGK and in the GKv show that although there are beginnings for reflection on ecclesial ministry from the perspective of the church's missionary calling, these are insufficiently elaborated. However, there is a clear awareness that thinking about the church's ministries should be done from a basic ecumenical stance.

²⁶ *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*, 22. The report states that one way to do this is by joining the process within the PKN.

²⁷ *Om de heiligen toe te rusten*, 25.

²⁸ *Samen dienen*. This issue was also discussed at the 2014 Synod. The report *Mannen en vrouwen in dienst van het evangelie (Men and women in the service of the gospel)* served as the starting point. Only briefly does this report discuss ecclesial ministry in general, emphasizing the divine institution of ecclesial ministry. (*Mannen en vrouwen in dienst*, 25)

²⁹ *Samen dienen*, chapter 5. But also section 6.3.1.

³⁰ *Samen dienen*, 61. The committee states that today's time and culture pose challenges that need to be met in order to discern '*how the word of God can be further spread in our time* (my italics) and how we can give substance to our common task with the gifts that Christ gives to men and women in the church.' (...*om te bekijken hoe in onze tijd het woord van God verder gebracht kan worden en om te bekijken hoe we invulling kunnen geven aan onze gezamenlijke opdracht met de gaven die Christus in de gemeente aan mannen en vrouwen geeft.*) (Italics mine)

³¹ A third report called *Elkaar van harte dienen (Serving each other wholeheartedly)* was published in 2020. This report addressed all the revision requests that had been submitted in response to the 2017 ruling. Because this report does not provide substantially different insights into the topic of ecclesial ministry and mission from the previous reports, I will give it no further attention.