STRATEGY

1. PREVIOUS STRATEGY

Previously the Northern Synod functioned, as did presbyteries and congregations, by means of standing commissions. For *ad hoc* cases temporary commissions were usually appointed. In later years the designation changed to service councils.

Over time a dissatisfaction with this method of operation developed, among other things because of the following:

- The members of the commissions/service councils seldom varied, and therefore often only selected people had the opportunity to serve in this way;
- Commissions/service councils mostly had an omnibus assignment, e.g. Youth or Outreach. This often caused the work to take a very long time to be concluded. This meant that the work of the synod took four years to complete, and if the synod was then not quite satisfied with the outcome, it was referred back to the commission. Sometimes, then, it took up to eight years for an assignment to be completed.
- The wheels of the church turned very slowly compared to what congregants experienced in their ordinary life and work. The rapid development of technology heightened the contrast in pace between society and church. The strong need for something new gradually gained force.
- This growing dissatisfaction eventually led to a culture shift in the Northern Synod after the session in 2012. At that session the first decisions in this regard were taken. In 2016 the decisions were repeated and then purposefully applied, which consequently led to more decisions and a further refinement of the strategy.

2. CURRENT STRATEGY

Due to the above process the Northern Synod currently works as follows:

2.1. Task teams

2.1.1. Commissions/Service Councils were replaced by task teams. In a sense, it meant that all the existing work was taken off the table, and it was decided anew what was essential.

2.1.2. This means that task teams currently have the following characteristics:

- Task teams are appointed by the SSC (Synodal Service Council), and task teams then also report to the SSC.
- As soon as a task team's assignment has been completed, the report is immediately made available to the congregations for them to implement.
- A task team is only created if there is a clear need for it.
- A task team has one assignment.
- A task team has a starting date and a completion date. Its life span may vary from three to twelve months.
- If possible, a task team's due date can be moved on.
- If a task team's assignment has a longer term, e.g. Induction or Ministry Development, a task team can again be appointed after twelve months with the same assignment. Task team members, however, then have the opportunity to be replaced.
- The SSC appoints task team leaders, usually when the executive committee recommends them.
- As soon as a task team and a task team leader have been appointed, people are invited via the *Verskil* newsletter to become involved as task team members.
- The task team can, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, approach people to serve in the team. In this case diversity is regarded as important: rural areas/city, sex, age, experience, etc.
- When a task team has completed its assignment, the SSC can give the team a further instruction resulting from the previous one.
- When a task team does receive a further instruction, any of the team members can withdraw and other people can join as members.

2.2. Moderamen

Previously, members of the executive committee or moderamen also chaired the service council. Every member of the moderamen therefore had a defined portfolio, which meant that the moderamen sometimes consisted of up to twelve people. Consequently, the moderamen came to require a smaller executive committee of three members within the bigger executive committee.

With the new dispensation of task teams, the moderamen was downsized to seven persons with a clear leadership function. The moderamen therefore functions as an executive committee which gives clear-cut guidance to the SSC, especially regarding urgent matters, strategic thinking, and contentious concerns. The fact that the moderamen is so small, makes it possible for it to meet more often should urgent matters arise. The small number is also more supple, and so the moderamen can move meetings more easily to ensure that everyone is present.

2.3. Synodal Service Council (SSC)

The fact that task teams report to the SSC makes the role of the SSC as decision-making body more and more important between sessions of the synod. The SSC members' role—to ensure that their presbyteries are wholly part of the decision-making process and therefore also accept ownership of the guidance given by the SSC, gives growing weight to the presbyteries' responsibility to pay serious attention to the nomination of SSC members.

It also means that presbyteries and congregations must hold their representatives on the SSC accountable for faithful attendance as well as regular and comprehensive feedback after SSC meetings.

2.4. Sessions of the synod

The fact that in the new dispensation reports are presented to the SSC, means that synodal sessions can begin moving away from reporting and accountability to visioneering meetings. Since 2016, then, synodal sessions have built the content of a session around a theme. In 2016 the theme was **HOPE**, and in 2022, **WISDOM IN TIMES LIKE THESE**.

Also, things naturally have developed in such a way that fewer decisions have to be made at sessions of the synod. The focus has moved from debate to discussion. The former focuses on winning or losing. The latter focuses, as befitting family members, on mutual understanding, making room for one another, and joining hands.

2.5. Management

We saw the first signs of this culture shift around 2010, but it only took shape after decisions in 2012 when it focused anew on the need for good management and institutional leadership. Consequently, in the SSC's meeting in June 2014 the initial decision not to appoint an executive officer after Gerrit Cloete's retirement was revoked. It was therefore decided to create a new post with new content and a new name.

This post was filled in February 2015 when Paul Grobler was confirmed as *Director of the Northern Synod*. This happened at a special session of the synod regarding the possible amendment of Article 1 of the Church Order. At the SSC's meeting in June of this year, Rehan Rheeder was called to be Paul's successor. The designation of the post was changed to *Chief Executive Officer*, and Rehan will be confirmed as such at the coming session of the synod.