

**Business Committee Report (BUSCOM)
GLG Spring Presbytery, 2022**

**GLG 22-1: Paper from A. Kuehner, endorsed by Southfield Session,
proposing minor revisions to RPCNA queries.**

This communication proposes minor revisions to the grammatical construction of two vows in the Covenant of Communicant membership and two vows in the Ordination Queries. Your committee concurs that streamlining the grammatical construction of these queries, which do not alter the content in any way, would significantly help the readability and understandability of these important statements of faith, especially at the time of subscription.

Recommendation 1: That the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery transmit this paper to Synod with endorsement.

**GLG 22-3: Paper from A. Kuehner outlining proposed advice for
presbytery's nominating committee.**

GLG 22-3 recommends, “*That presbytery advise the nominating committee that, in the future, when exercising its freedom to nominate AIC members from a variety of local sessions, it should make an effort to avoid proposing more than two nominees (including the moderator) from the same state,*” and offers a number of reasons drawn from recent presbytery events and perceived regional dynamics within our current boundaries.

We note that Mr. Kuehner’s recommendation does not suggest that we alter the new practice of AIC’s incorporating members of different congregations, as opposed to the historic practice of a rotation of sessions with one additional external member. Nor does it propose a rigid formula that must be followed by NOMCOMs when considering the annual composition of the AIC. Rather, it proposes that NOMCOMs “*should make an effort to avoid proposing more than two nominees from each state, including the moderator.*” In other words, NOMCOMs would be encouraged by presbytery to take into account the regional diversity of our presbytery when making their assignments, and follow the algorithm of no more than two nominees from the same state.

We appreciate the goal of a more inclusive AIC composition at a time when we are conscious of the need for unity within the presbytery, however, we are concerned that this algorithm, while not imposing a strict *necessity* upon NOMCOMs, is unduly formulaic. It is possible that this good-faith effort to ensure inclusion of AIC members from certain states might unintentionally be misconstrued as the exclusion of others. Since our presbytery comprises smaller congregations with fewer ruling elders in different states, it seems inevitable that over the course of many years, a greater burden of work would be expected by fewer men, simply because of their geographic location, to the exclusion of men from larger sessions, again, simply because of their geographic location.

While not strictly part of our remit, we also note that last year’s circumstance of the moderator of presbytery serving also as moderator of the AIC constitutes an undue burden on one man’s shoulders, and this too should be taken into consideration when NOMCOM makes its recommendations.

We therefore make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That NOMCOMs make every effort to nominate a regionally-diverse AIC.

Recommendation 2: That NOMCOMs avoid placing undue pressure on the moderator of presbytery by assigning him the additional burden of moderating the AIC.

GLG 22-11: Bloomington Session Communication re. IRPC

We are conscious that this paper addresses contentious issues, and stirs emotions that are close to the surface. There are many hurting people in our presbytery. We have sought to address the concerns raised by the Bloomington session in a manner that honors God, is consistent with our standards and seeks to achieve maximum consensus.

GLG 22-11 contains four straightforward recommendations with specific proposed actions of presbytery attached.

The paper's first recommendation levels several serious charges against the integrity of the Synodical Judicial Commission (SJC), which is currently prosecuting its mandate in the IRPC case. These charges may be summarized as:

1. Opposition to the SJC's use of the prior investigative work of the Presbytery Judicial Commission (PJC), which had generated the original complaints to synod.
2. A series of specific allegations about one of the prosecutors – Pastor Kyle Borg – resulting in “a strong appearance of bias.”
3. The allegation that the SJC ignored the present degree of confidence IRPC has in their elders, while deciding to “deprive a hurting but spiritually thriving flock of ... its shepherds.”
4. The allegation that the SJC has failed to act according to “the spirit and the letter of the Book of Discipline.”
5. The allegation that SJC has pursued the PJC's “non-Scriptural standards” in its proceedings, viz. a “victim-centered approach” which “conflate[s] the sins of the abuser with the sins of the session.”
6. The allegation that the SJC has been selective in its choice of who to prosecute, to the detriment of IRPC and to the preference of parties to which it alludes.

We acknowledge that these are serious allegations, implicating specific persons by name or allusion, questioning motives and accusing a synodical commission of alleged procedural failures. Nevertheless, they are presented to the court with a tenor of conjecture: “there was a general sense that ... efforts thus far now appear ... it is generally agreed ... the SJC appears not to have ... appears to have downplayed ... seems not to have ... also appears to have (etc.)” Your committee believes that without more concrete evidence, not all members of the court will find such perceptions to be equally well-founded.

We further note that with the exception of its few brief formal updates, the SJC's extensive work on presbytery's behalf has taken place with an appropriate degree of discretion, given the nature of the case, and presbytery still remains largely ignorant of the details of the investigation, awaiting the SJC rulings after the due prosecution of its mandate. Your committee therefore advises it would also be unwise to compel the court to act upon such allegations until the rulings are complete.

We respect and acknowledge the Bloomington session's privilege to challenge the actions of a synodical judicial commission with which it strongly disagrees. However, the Book of Discipline reminds us that such a complaint should *in principle* be made *following* the SJC's ruling and actions. This precedent is outlined in DCG 6.15: "A complaint is a written statement made to a higher court by one or more persons aggrieved by *an action* of a lower court." The SJC's actions are subject to the review of the court that appointed it, functioning as a court of the whole, which may decide to support or rescind those actions upon appeal.

Scripture counsels us with the wisdom principle not to answer a matter before we hear it. We therefore encourage the Bloomington session to "possess their souls in patience" (Luke 21:19) until the SJC has completed its assigned task, and in meantime continue to bear their grievances to the Lord. We welcome their recommendation's exhortation to always consider "how to do justly, walk humbly, as we seek to shepherd well those entrusted to our care, including our fellow shepherds." Nevertheless, for these reasons we recommend:

Recommendation 1: That Presbytery NOT appeal to Synod to critically review the work of the SJC with respect to Immanuel RPC.

The paper's second recommendation asks, "*That the elders of our Presbytery join together in repentance for the spirit with which we have conducted the work of the church.*"

While we concur that our work in presbytery has in recent years been frequently marred by a spirit that falls far short of the demands of love cited from 1 Corinthians 13, we are not persuaded that all members of the court can concur that all alike should be deemed guilty of all the examples of sin listed in the communication. In a well-intended effort to aid us in presbytery-wide repentance, we are offered an enumeration of sins, including a "focus consumed by accusations and trials," the "weaponization of procedure," "little concern for sheep deprived of shepherds," and "a preference for the standards of the world (e.g., the victim-centered approach) to the high calling of God (e.g. Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 6:1) ... we have ruined men's reputations..." We are concerned that such a list may well inadvertently be read as accusations rather than confessions.

Nevertheless, we concur with the authors that we each have plenty of sins for which to grieve, and so without unduly burdening consciences by applying a corporate guilt unilaterally to individual elders, we recommend:

Recommendation 2: That the moderator appoint a day of fasting to be held during the month of March, for the elders of our Presbytery to engage in self-examination and prayer for the healing of our divisions through Christian reconciliation, and to repent of the sins that have pre-empted them.

The paper's third recommendation is, "*That Presbytery exhort the sessions of the various churches in our presbytery to pursue Christian reconciliation by Christian means.*"

Once again, as it stands, your committee appreciates the spirit of the recommendation. We are confident that every one of us seeks to pursue Christian reconciliation by Christian means. However, we are conscious that there are likely differences of opinion about some of the specific "means" of Christian reconciliation proposed. Once again, we are concerned that a well-intentioned list may inadvertently be read by others as accusations rather than exhortations. It is precisely because this is a "*delicate* duty," that we advise against a formal exhortation that would bind sessions to "counsel and call to repentance" those who do not share the Bloomington

session's earnest convictions about the specific means of Christian reconciliation. Instead, we have included the burden of Bloomington's concern for Christian reconciliation as one of the subjects for prayer and fasting in Recommendation 2, calling each elder to self-examination and repentance for personal sins that may have pre-empted our divisions.

The paper's *final* recommendation exhorts "*That Presbytery seek to encourage Immanuel RPC.*" We believe it is right and proper for presbyteries to find ways and means to encourage congregations that are hurting. Nevertheless, Bloomington asks presbytery to direct all its congregations to formally implement the specific *means* of encouragement, which might inadvertently bind sensitive consciences, and thus may be unintentionally divisive (and indeed, prove impractical for more distant congregations). The practical thrust of their recommendation is as follows: "*we urge the presbytery to formally call sessions, first, to exhort their members to seek an opportunity to worship with IRPC in coming weeks and, second, to encourage local sessions to organize joint communion services.*"

Our Lord addresses the matter of estranged brothers and sisters worshipping together before they have been reconciled. Matt.5:23-24, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." We agree with the authors that Jesus *wants* us to worship together with those with whom we have been formerly estranged; however, worship is the *fruit* of reconciliation achieved by other means, not the *means* of reconciliation itself. While we recognize that the Bloomington session have significant misgivings about the SJC's work, it nonetheless remains the current means of Christian repentance and reconciliation that our synod is pursuing to resolve the IRPC crisis, though in addition to this formal process, we can expect an ongoing need for many private efforts to restore broken relationships in the months to come.

We believe that individuals in our congregations may attend public worship at IRPC with a clear conscience, and in so doing "seek to encourage IRPC." But until the process of church discipline is complete, and a verdict rendered for the healing of divisions and reconciliation of estranged brethren, we advise against unduly burdening the consciences of offended parties by compelling sessions to "formally...exhort their members to seek an opportunity to worship with IRPC, and second, to encourage [them] to organize joint communion services."

It is our earnest prayer that the present judicial process will prove indeed to be God's appointed means of grace for brothers and sisters to be reconciled, whereupon a more formal exhortation for joyful joint worship services and communion services may be anticipated.

Recommendation 3: That sessions acknowledge the liberty of their members to join IRPC for public worship and encouragement, but not compel them to do so.

Recommendation 4: That moderator appoint a delegate to lead the presbytery in prayer for the Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Respectfully submitted,

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