

Dear Fathers and Brethren,

The RPCNA Covenant of Communicant Membership (CCM) is arguably one of our most valuable assets as a denomination. Nevertheless, its occasional tendency to include multiple interrogative sentences within the same query serves to detract from its overall force and clarity (1 Cor. 14:40). Consider the grammatical structure of CCM Query 3:

Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God: profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service: Do you promise that you will endeavor to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?

CCM Query 3 contains two interrogatives separated by a colon. From an oral standpoint, there *are* really two question marks in this query, since we would all tend to *hear* the colon as a question mark.

Likewise, CCM Query 4 features three distinct interrogatives, each punctuated with a question mark.

Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*? Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the authority and discipline of the church?

Notice that the *second* of these interrogatives features *two distinct questions embedded within itself*, separated by the conjunction “and”.¹ Orally, therefore, the respondent would seem to be responding to three (or even four) distinct questions within this single query.

Ordination Query 8 also features multiple interrogatives within the same query.

That you may perform faithfully all the duties of the office to which you have been called, do you engage to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you promise, in His strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity and progress of the church—[Deacons, Elders, Ministers]?

This issue *could* be resolved by increasing the number of queries in accordance with the total number of interrogative sentences. However, such a method would likely prove to be *overkill* in seeking to radically restructure two of the most foundational elements of our constitution merely for the sake of increased grammatical simplicity.

A more reasonable approach would seek to consolidate each of the ‘multi-interrogative’ queries into a single question which could be more easily discerned by the respondent as a unified whole. This *consolidative* approach has already been put to good use in several of our existing queries (Cf. CCM 5-6; QFO 3, 5-6). Below are four revisions proposed for adoption by the synod,² which would serve to improve the force and clarity of our existing queries without any change to their meaning or enumeration.³

¹ Ordination Query 9 is structured similarly.

² Recommendation to Synod (As Noted Below): That Synod revise the existing RPCNA Covenant of Communicant Membership and Queries for Ordination in accordance with the changes proposed in this paper.

³ If the grammarians among us know of better ways to consolidate these queries, or of a more appropriate manner of utilizing commas, colons, and semi-colons, I welcome their input.

EXISTING QUERY	PROPOSED REVISION	REVISED QUERY
<p><u>CCM Query 3</u> — Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God: profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service: Do you promise that you will endeavor to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?</p>	<p><u>CCM Query 3</u> — Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God:[] profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service: Do you promise that you will endeavor [, endeavoring] to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?</p>	<p><u>CCM Query 3</u> — Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God; profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service, endeavoring to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?</p>
<p><u>CCM Query 4</u> — Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the <i>Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America</i>? Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the authority and discipline of the church?</p>	<p><u>CCM Query 4</u> — Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the <i>Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America</i>? Do you recognize [, recognizing] your responsibility to work with others in the church[,] and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In [, and promising, in] case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the authority and discipline of the church?</p>	<p><u>CCM Query 4</u> — Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the <i>Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America</i>; recognizing your responsibility to work with others in the church, to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord; and promising, in case you should need correction in doctrine or life, to respect the authority and discipline of the church?</p>
<p><u>Ordination Query 8</u> — That you may perform faithfully all the duties of the office to which you have been called, do you engage to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you promise, in His strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity and progress of the church—</p>	<p><u>Ordination Query 8</u> — That you may perform faithfully all the duties of the office to which you have been called, do you engage to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you promise, [promising] in His strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity and progress of the church—</p>	<p><u>Ordination Query 8</u> — That you may perform faithfully all the duties of the office to which you have been called, do you engage to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, promising in His strength, to live a holy and exemplary life, to study and promote the purity, peace, unity and progress of the church—</p>
<p><u>Ordination Query 9</u> — Do you promise subjection in the Lord to the courts of this church, and engage to follow no divisive courses from the doctrine and order which the church has solemnly recognized and adopted; and do you promise to submit to all the brotherly counsel which your brethren may tender you in the Lord?</p>	<p><u>Ordination Query 9</u> — Do you promise subjection in the Lord to the courts of this church, and engage to follow no divisive courses from the doctrine and order which the church has solemnly recognized and adopted; and do you promise [promising] to submit to all the brotherly counsel which your brethren may tender you in the Lord?</p>	<p><u>Ordination Query 9</u> — Do you promise subjection in the Lord to the courts of this church, and engage to follow no divisive courses from the doctrine and order which the church has solemnly recognized and adopted; promising to submit to all the brotherly counsel which your brethren may tender you in the Lord?</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO SESSION: *That the Southfield RPC Session transmit this paper to Presbytery with endorsement.*

TO PRESBYTERY: *That the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery transmit this paper to Synod with endorsement.*

TO SYNOD: *That Synod revise the existing RPCNA Covenant of Communicant Membership and Queries for Ordination in accordance with the changes proposed in this paper.*

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Kuehner
Southfield, MI

Dear Fathers and Brethren of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery,

By God's grace, our presbytery is the 2nd-largest in the RPCNA with net increases over the past decade in attendance, membership, giving, and number of congregations. With blessing, however, comes responsibility (Lk. 12:48). Consider the following observations regarding the GLGP's present regional configuration and ecclesiastical workload.

1. We currently have 21 congregations (plus one mission church) in eight states, covering a distance of over 1100 miles from Dan (Hetherton) to Beersheba (Orlando), giving us the feel of a *national synod* more so than a *regional presbytery*.
2. Due to reasonable logistical factors, a vast majority of our presbytery meetings occur within the same state (Indiana).
3. In recent years, even before COVID, our agenda has been overloaded quite regularly with legitimate business items (both procedural and controversial), forcing us to cancel oral reports from congregations and committees on multiple occasions and frequently adding logistical anxiety to an already stressful docket.
4. With roughly a half dozen men-under-care at any given time, our C&CC is often required to schedule more exams than our already-teeming schedule can handle, thereby forcing us to split into commissions and creating an environment where valuable floor feedback is sparse because everyone knows we are pressed for time.
5. We are presently too busy to maintain an optimal frequency of congregational visitation, as evidenced by the fact that Southfield was last visited in 2011, the year prior to my installation, more than ten years ago.
6. Nearly-unavoidable regional tendencies¹ (e.g. similar ministry philosophy, leadership style, *modus operandi*) have inadvertently developed over the years into ecclesiastical cliques (and, if you will, *anti-cliques*), which, although dormant at times, are easily awakened by controversy, thereby exacerbating conflicts and, once again, overwhelming the presbytery with lengthy deliberations followed by yet lengthier judicial aftermath.
7. Growing tensions have placed an unfair and unpleasant burden of scrutiny upon our Ad Interim Commission as a *de facto* Supreme Court between meetings, rather than as an *apolitical* mechanism for parliamentary efficiency.
8. The judicial overflow from our present "Hetherton to Beersheba" structure has finally begun to spill over into the RPCNA Synod, and could threaten to overwhelm synod's docket on a consistent basis if this trend continues.
9. At present, there is no indication that *any* of our three existing regions² are adequately equipped to become distinct presbyteries at this time, making it unwise to entertain thoughts of a hasty realignment.

By way of analogy, when a local congregation experiences notable growth in Sabbath worship attendance, there is always the danger that *efficiency* (economy of scale) could serve to undermine *intimacy* (deep personal relationships). For this reason, many of our congregations facilitate midweek regional small group meetings where *subsets* of the congregation enjoy meaningful prayer, study, fellowship, and personal "sharing" that would be unsustainable on a church-wide scale (Acts 2:46). Such regional groups are not designed for the purpose of planting new churches, though that sometimes happens. Primarily, they function as an ecclesiastical bridge between the individual household and the broader congregation. What if we applied this same principle to our *presbytery's* vast field of ministry?

One possible solution to our current growing pains would be to form three regional commissions, each with an identical bare-bones remit.³ After a year or more, the presbytery might (or might not) expand the remit gradually, so as to include other types of business. Down the road, the possibility, but never the necessity, would always exist for us to explore the formation of new presbyteries. In the meantime, this arrangement could help to ease our present workload and serve as a bridge between the valuable *efficiency* of centralization and the equally valuable *intimacy* of decentralization. **Of course, this is just an idea, and it might not be a very good one.** That is why I am requesting a 5-man committee to look into these matters *more thoroughly* and to present *its* findings next spring.

Recommendation: *That presbytery form a five-man committee appointed by the moderator to examine the presbytery's existing regional configuration and ecclesiastical workload, solicit and gather feedback from members of the court, and report back to the Spring 2023 meeting with any recommendation(s).*

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Kuehner
Southfield, MI

¹ When churches are "daughtered", it is only natural that there will be a family resemblance.

² GREAT LAKES (N. Of 400 S.): Belle Center, Elkhart, Grand Rapids, Hetherton, Marion, Southfield, Sycamore, Westminster. CENTRAL INDIANA (S. of 400 S.): Bloomington, Christ Church, Columbus, Immanuel, Lafayette, 2RP, Southside, Terre Haute. SOUTHERN: Atlanta, Durham, Orlando, Selma, Southwest Ohio, Sparta.

³ E.g. congregational reports, session/TGB reports, along with a summary report to our spring meeting with commission minutes.

Dear Fathers and Brethren of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery,

For many years, our presbytery's *Ad Interim Commission* consisted of one local session, plus an additional elder from another congregation. Last spring, the court instructed "the nominating committee in the future [to] consider nominating men from all different sessions for the Ad Interim Commission."¹ In part, this change was a response to a rather unlikely series of recent events. In 2019, the CCRP session happened to be serving on the AIC during the outset of the LeFebvre controversy. Then, in similar fashion, the IRPC session happened to be serving on the AIC when controversy arose there (2020).²

Following the IRPC elders' resignation from the AIC in 2020, Greg Fisher (IN), was joined by four newly-appointed AIC members from four different states: Kent Butterfield (NC), Jon Hughes (MI), Phil Pockras (OH), and Steve Rhoda (IN). By contrast, in the spring of 2021, the court appointed five AIC members from two different states: Richard Blankenship (IN), John Cavanaugh (IN), Andy DeRosa (IN), Philip McCollum (IN), and our presbytery moderator, Frank Smith (GA).³

We have much to be thankful for as a presbytery. Nevertheless, we must never shy away from opportunities to improve our methods of ecclesiastical deliberation and oversight. Last year's decision to reconsider our previous AIC appointment paradigm made a lot of sense, and appears to have worked fairly well thus far.

All the same, it is at least somewhat conspicuous that, in a presbytery with delegates serving in *eight* different states, four of the five men chosen "from all different sessions" would reside in the *same* state, with two serving in the same city. Without a doubt, we all desire to be more effective in cultivating geographic diversity and inclusiveness within our presbytery (John 4:20-21). Here is one proposed mechanism for doing so:

RECOMMENDATION: 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.

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Kuehner
Southfield, MI

¹ GLG Minutes (3/4/21): By common consent, Rec. 1 was modified as follows: "That the nominating committee in the future consider nominating men from all different sessions for the Ad Interim Commission", after which the modified recommendation was adopted.

² The onset of the pandemic, along with everyone's increased familiarity with Zoom, probably played a part as well.

³ It is important to note that no objections were raised at last year's spring meeting regarding the geographic makeup of the AIC; nor does this paper intend to convey anything but the utmost respect and appreciation for the diligent effort and unassailable integrity of each AIC member, along with the nominating committee members who recommended their names to the court. As clerk, I have had the privilege of working closely with these men over the past year and can testify to their upright character and genuine desire to serve the Lord.