

The Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery (RPCNA)

*Official Fall Meeting Minutes
Distr. 10/17/23*

2023 GLG FALL MEETING — Friday October 6, 2023

The GLGP met for its annual fall meeting at 1:00 p.m. on Friday October 6, 2023 at the Sycamore Reformed Presbyterian Church in Kokomo, Indiana.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The moderator called the meeting to order and constituted the court in prayer at 1:00 p.m.

2. ATTENDANCE

The assistant clerk, Nathan Eshelman, called the attendance roll, confirming that a quorum was present.

3. CLERK'S REPORT

Adam Kuehner presented the clerk's report and brought its recommendations before the court.

Recommendation 1¹ was seconded and carried.

Recommendation 2² was seconded and carried.

Recommendation 3³ was seconded and carried.

Recommendation 4⁴ was withdrawn, since it has already been approved by the Ad Interim Commission.

It was moved (by the clerk), seconded, and carried that the court approve the remaining congregational reports from the spring meeting, as written and submitted, without hearing oral reports.

Recommendation 5⁵ was seconded and carried.

Recommendation 6⁶ was seconded and discussed, after which the last four words ("at their next meeting") were stricken as a friendly amendment, and the recommendation carried.

Recommendation 7⁷ was seconded and carried.

Recommendation 8⁸ was seconded and carried.

4. INTRODUCTIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The court entertained formal introductions for first time delegates and special guests.

¹ Rec. 1 (Clerk): That presbytery appoint the following parliamentarians for this meeting: Steve Rhoda, Bryan Dage, Frank Smith (Alt-1), Josh Smith (Alt-2), James Odom (Alt-3), Wade Mann (Alt-4), Aaron Murray (Alt-5). [CARRIED]

² Rec. 2 (Clerk): That presbytery receive the transfer of Rev. Colin Samul's ministerial credentials from the Pacific Coast Presbytery (RPCNA). [CARRIED]

³ Rec. 3 (Clerk): That presbytery dismiss Rev. Craig Scott from the roll of Teaching Elders at his request, per DCG 6.13 (D-33). [CARRIED]

⁴ Rec. 4 (Clerk): That presbytery approve the financial disbursements proposed in GLG 23-30. [CARRIED]

⁵ Rec. 5 (Clerk): That presbytery transfer Reed and Alexandria Staver, along with their baptized daughter Rosie, from the membership roll of presbytery to Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, at their request. [CARRIED]

⁶ Rec. 6 (Clerk): That presbytery grant the RPCL session permission to have Pastor Jonathan Sturm moderate the Session in Pastor Adam Niess' absence ~~at their next meeting~~. [CARRIED]

⁷ Rec. 7 (Clerk): That presbytery adopt the proposed agenda. [CARRIED]

⁸ Rec. 8 (Clerk): That presbytery approve the clerk's report. [CARRIED]

- Adam Niess introduced Pastor Jonathan Sturm, a first time delegate who serves as Associate Pastor at the RPC of Lafayette.
- Adam Kuehner introduced A.J. Troutman, Matt Fernandez, Savannah Lefler, and Michelle Kim, four young adult visitors from the Southfield congregation.
- Shawn Anderson shared the church Wi-Fi internet password with the delegates.
- Nathan Eshelman reminded the court that today is Shawn Anderson's 46th birthday.

5. CANDIDATES & CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE REPORT

Adam Niess presented the report of the Candidates and Credentials Committee.

Recommendation 1⁹ carried, after which Nathan Shaver came forward to share his personal testimony of saving faith in Christ and internal call to the gospel ministry. Mr. Shaver also explained the circumstances surrounding his previous time as a student under care while a member of the Christ Church RP congregation, along with the reasons for his decision to resume this pursuit, this time as a member at the RPC of Lafayette.

The court received Mr. Shaver as a student under care of the presbytery by voice vote.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the report of the Candidates and Credentials Committee.

6. BORG RESOLUTION COMMITTEE REPORT

The clerk noted that although none of the delegates serving on the Borg Resolution Committee (R. Bibby, A. Doerr, S. Hunt) were able to attend the fall meeting, their report indicated a belief that their work was complete and a desire that their committee be dismissed. The clerk also noted that Mr. Bibby, the chairman, had reiterated these things to him in a personal phone call two weeks prior.

It was moved, seconded, discussed, and carried to approve the Borg Resolution Comte Report and dismiss the committee.

7. CYPU BOARD REPORT

Shawn Anderson, chairman of the Ad Interim Commission, informed the court that Steve Rhoda was unable to be present at the meeting to bring the CYPU Board's recommendations before the court. Therefore, Mr. Anderson, having a copy of the board's proposed recommendations in hand, introduced and moved them himself.

It was moved, seconded, discussed, and carried that Aaron Murray become director of CYPU, and transition to the directorship by the end of 2023. During the discussion, Mr. Murray indicated his willingness to fill this role.

It was moved, seconded, and carried that Steve Rhoda serve as a board member through 2026 and that Kevin Duffey remain on the board through 2024.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the report of the CYPU Board.

8. HETHERTON VISITATION COMMITTEE REPORT

David Hanson presented the Hetherton Visitation Committee report and brought its recommendations before the court.

Recommendation 1¹⁰ carried.

Recommendation 2¹¹ carried.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the report, after which Mr. Hanson led the court in a prayer of dissolution, giving thanks for Rev. Morton's ministry, and thereby dissolving the pastoral relationship between Rev. Morton and the Hetherton congregation, effective on the date of his retirement (12/31/23).

9. FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Joel Hart presented the report of the Finance Committee, bringing its recommendations before the court.

⁹ Rec. 1 (C&CC): That Nathan Shaver be given ten minutes to share his testimony and be received as a student under care. [CARRIED]

¹⁰ Rec. 1 (Heth): That with gratitude and appreciation for the lengthy and faithful service of Pastor Raymond Morton, the Great-Lakes Gulf Presbytery receives his notice of retirement and sets the conclusion of December 31, 2023 as the time at which the pastoral relationship between him and the Hetherton Reformed Presbyterian Church will be dissolved. [CARRIED]

¹¹ Rec. 2 (Heth): That Phil Pockras and Wade Mann be appointed provisional elders to Hetherton as requested by the session. [CARRIED]

Recommendation 1¹² carried.

Recommendation 2¹³ carried.

Recommendation 3¹⁴ carried.

Recommendation 4¹⁵ carried.

Recommendation 5¹⁶ carried.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the report of the Finance Committee.

10. AD INTERIM COMMISSION REPORT

Shawn Anderson presented the report of the Ad Interim Commission, after which the court adopted its minutes (7/31/23, 9/4/23) and took up its recommendations.

Recommendation 1¹⁷ was ruled by the moderator to be required by the constitution and, therefore, not necessary to be voted on.

Recommendation 2¹⁸ carried.

Recommendation 3¹⁹ was read in full by Mr. Anderson, after which it was discussed and carried.

¹² Rec. 1 (FinCom): That the total assessment dollars for 2023 be adjusted from \$53,000 to \$48,000. [CARRIED]

¹³ Rec. 2 (FinCom): That Mark Hart be named Presbytery Treasurer, effective January 1, 2024, with thanks to Jim Bishop for his many years of faithful service to our presbytery. [CARRIED]

¹⁴ Rec. 3 (FinCom): That Ross Cerbus be appointed as Presbytery Assistant Treasurer, effective January 1, 2024. [CARRIED]

¹⁵ Rec. 4 (FinCom): That \$50,000 be approved as the total assessment for 2024, in view of the projected budget shown below. [CARRIED]

¹⁶ Rec. 5 (FinCom): That due to congregational needs, Selma be again exempted from the congregational assessment for 2024. [CARRIED]

¹⁷ Rec. 1 (AIC): That the appellant, his advisor, and the members of session be recognized as the parties in the case and not be permitted to participate in deciding the appeal (BoD, II.1.7; II.4.12). [RULED UNNECESSARY]

¹⁸ Rec. 2 (AIC): That if the whole Presbytery hear and decide the appeal, a committee of three men appointed by the moderator be formed at the beginning of the proceedings to write the reasons of the court's decision. The committee will give its report before the end of this meeting. [CARRIED]

¹⁹ Rec. 3 (AIC): That the following suggested preliminary steps be approved and enacted. **(A)** That the clerk ensure that a full record is kept of all the proceedings (BoD, II.4.10, 15). **(B)** That the moderator request everyone in the room to turn off non-essential electronic devices so that there are no unnecessary interruptions and that members of the court may give their full attention to the hearing of the appeal. **(C)** That the moderator lead or appoint at least one member of the court to lead in prayer for the proceedings. **(D)** That any parliamentarians who determine that they have a conflict of interest in the matter be given opportunity to recuse themselves and replaced with pro tem parliamentarians during the hearing of the appeal. **(E)** That the moderator restrict the discussion of the case to the written record (BoD, II.4.15). **(F)** That the moderator, in consultation with a clerk of GLGP, confirm that the appeal is in accord with the Book of Discipline, II.4.10,11,14: **(1)** That the appellant filed with session's clerk a written notice of appeal & a summary statement of the reasons for appeal within thirty days after the accused was informed of the action; **(2)** That the appellant had at least sixty days for preparing the appeal (along with a full statement of the reasons for the appeal & providing all relevant documents) and transmitting the same to the AIC clerk; **(3)** That Presbytery has had thirty days to read and process the appeal; **(4)** That the material records & papers pertaining to the case are present for considering the appeal; **(5)** That the reasons assigned by the appellant in the appeal are the same as those presented to the lower court. **(G)** That the moderator remind the members of the court of the solemn duty in which they are about to engage, and of their responsibilities as judges in the Lord's house, and enjoin them to dismiss from their minds all prejudice or personal considerations, and to concern themselves with the spiritual welfare of the church (cf. BoD, II.3.2). [CARRIED]

Recommendation 4²⁰ was divided, reclassifying sub-point D²¹ as Recommendation 4B, with the remaining portion to be voted on as Recommendation 4A.

Recommendation 4A²² was discussed and carried.

Recommendation 4B²³ was discussed.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to add the phrase “or members of the court” to Rec. 4B.²⁴

The newly amended **Recommendation 4B**²⁵ carried.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the AIC report.

11. MID-AFTERNOON BREAK #1

The court took its first mid-afternoon break at 2:17 p.m. and resumed the meeting at 2:40 p.m.

12. PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

Adam Niess presented a brief update on Selma congregation, and the moderator introduced Rev. Samul to the court.

13. COMPLAINT HEARING (23-27): MANRING v. SOUTHSIDE RPC SESSION

The court took up GLG 23-27, a complaint from Southside RPC communicant member, Ben Manning, against the defendant, the Southside RPC Session. The complainant will represent himself in the case, and the defendant will be represented by one of its ruling elders, Ross Cerbus. Wade Mann led the court in prayer, after which the complaint hearing commenced in accordance with the agenda.

OPENING STATEMENTS

The moderator invited each of the parties to come forward and present a five minute opening statement.

²⁰ Rec. 4 (AIC): That the following procedural steps be approved and enacted (based on Book of Discipline, II.4.14a-g, 15). (A) The clerk shall read the sentence appealed from. (B) The clerk shall read the appeal and reasons assigned by the appellant, which must be the same as those presented to the lower court. (C) The moderator shall remind the court of the grounds for appeal (BoD, II.4.10, E-17). (D) The Presbytery shall waive the reading of the record based on the court having “sufficient opportunity to review the record and papers” (BoD, II.4.14.c, E-17), with the qualification that “Either party may request the reading of specific portions of the record important to the case if the reading of the full record is waived.” (E) The Presbytery grant the parties up to twelve minutes each to present their opening speeches (appellant first, then session), then the appellant up to seven minutes for his closing speech including any rebuttal comments. (F) Members of the court shall be permitted to respectfully ask, by addressing the moderator, clarifying questions of both parties for up to five minutes. (G) Opportunity shall be given for discussion of the case by the members of the court for up to fifteen minutes. [DIVIDED]

²¹ Clerk’s Note: Sub-point D appears as #4 on the listing found in the AIC’s submitted proposal.

²² Rec. 4A (AIC): That the following procedural steps be approved and enacted (based on Book of Discipline, II.4.14a-g, 15). (A) The clerk shall read the sentence appealed from. (B) The clerk shall read the appeal and reasons assigned by the appellant, which must be the same as those presented to the lower court. (C) The moderator shall remind the court of the grounds for appeal (BoD, II.4.10, E-17). (D) [Divided out; See Rec. 4B] (E) The Presbytery grant the parties up to twelve minutes each to present their opening speeches (appellant first, then session), then the appellant up to seven minutes for his closing speech including any rebuttal comments. (F) Members of the court shall be permitted to respectfully ask, by addressing the moderator, clarifying questions of both parties for up to five minutes. (G) Opportunity shall be given for discussion of the case by the members of the court for up to fifteen minutes. [CARRIED]

²³ Rec. 4B (AIC): That Presbytery waive the reading of the record based on the court having “sufficient opportunity to review the record and papers” (BoD, II.4.14.c, E-17), with the qualification that “Either party may request the reading of specific portions of the record important to the case if the reading of the full record is waived.” [AMENDED]

²⁴ Clerk’s Note: This amendment inserts the phrase “or members of the court” into a portion of the motion which is directly quoting the Book of Discipline. To avoid confusion, the court is aware that the BoD does not actually include this additional phrase or provision. The action was merely intended to extend the privileges outlined in BoD II.4.14.c (E-17) to all presbytery delegates and not exclusively to the parties. This extension of privilege is believed to be constitutionally permissible, but not constitutionally required.

²⁵ Rec. 4B (AIC) as Amended: That Presbytery waive the reading of the record based on the court having “sufficient opportunity to review the record and papers” (BoD, II.4.14.c, E-17), with the qualification that “Either party or members of the court may request the reading of specific portions of the record important to the case if the reading of the full record is waived.” [CARRIED]

The complainant, Ben Manring, presented his five minute opening statement.

Defense representative, Ross Cerbus, presented his five minute opening statement.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Delegates were afforded five minutes to ask questions of the parties.

The parties answered questions from the floor, after which it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the time five minutes for additional questions from the floor. Further questions were asked and answered.

DELIBERATION OF THE CASE

Delegates were afforded ten minutes for deliberation by way of a discussion on the floor prior to the vote.

Members of the court discussed the case on the floor, after which it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the time five minute for additional discussion. Further discussion ensued until it was time to vote.

VERDICT: COMPLAINT NOT SUSTAINED (14-15)

A standing vote was taken to decide the complaint (GLG 23-27: Manring v. Southside RPC Session), with 14 delegates voting to sustain the complaint and 15 delegates voting not to sustain the complaint. Therefore the complaint was not sustained.

14. MID-AFTERNOON BREAK #2

The court took its second mid-afternoon break at 3:34 p.m. and resumed the meeting at 3:48 p.m.

15. APPEAL HEARING (23-26): MANRING v. SOUTHSIDE RPC SESSION

The court took up the hearing of GLG 23-26, an appeal submitted by Southside RPC communicant member, Ben Manring, against the defendant, the Southside RPC Session. The complainant will prosecute his case with the assistance of his presbytery-appointed advisor, Nathan Eshelman, who has recused himself from voting on the appeal. The defendant will be represented by Southside RPC ruling elder, Ross Cerbus. Jerry Foltz led the court in prayer, after which the complaint hearing commenced in accordance with the agenda.

PRELIMINARY STEPS

1. The clerk confirmed that a full record of the proceeds would be kept by way of meeting minutes, which the court will have an opportunity to adopt at the close of the meeting.
2. The moderator requested that everyone in the room turn off non-essential electronic devices so that there are no unnecessary interruptions and that members of the court may give their full attention to the hearing of the appeal.
3. At the moderator's request, Jerry Foltz led the court in prayer for the proceedings.
4. Members of the court were reminded of their freedom to recuse themselves from voting on the case or from serving as a parliamentarian in light of any perceived conflicts of interest.
5. The moderator instructed the court to limit the discussion of the case to the written record, and clarified that this includes the oral presentations of the parties, who will be speaking concerning the written record.
6. The moderator, in consultation with the clerk, confirmed that the appeal was submitted in due constitutional order.
7. The moderator reminded the court of its solemn duty and responsibility to exercise judgment in the Lord's house without prejudice or partiality, but rather to seek the spiritual welfare of the church.

READING OF THE APPEAL

Per instruction from the court, the clerk read aloud the introductory summary of the appeal (pp. 1-4).

The appellant requested that the remainder of the appeal (pp. 5-17), along with the appended email for which Mr. Manring was censured (pp. 18-21), be read aloud by the clerk.

The clerk read each of these additional documents aloud to the court, after which the court ruled that this was sufficient.

A delegate asked if the defense contests the facts alleged in the appeal, and the defense affirmed that it does.

OPENING STATEMENTS

The moderator invited each of the parties to come forward and present a twelve minute opening statement.

The appellant, Ben Manring, presented his opening statement.

Defense representative, Ross Cerbus, presented his opening statement.

APPELLANT'S REBUTTAL

Seven minutes was granted to the appellant for a rebuttal speech, at which time the appellant presented his rebuttal.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

The court proceeded to a time for directing questions to the respective parties: five minutes for questions to the defense and five minutes for questions to the appellant.

The defense answered questions from the floor for five minutes, after which it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the time three minutes for additional questions.

After three more minutes, it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the time another three minutes for additional questions.

After the additional three minutes, it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the time to permit the defense to answer a particular question from the floor. This question was then answered.

The appellant proceeded to answer questions from the floor for five minutes, after which it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the time three more minutes for additional questions. Additional questions were asked by the delegates and answered by the appellant.

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

By common consent, the court extended the time for the meeting in order to finish the agenda.

The moderator stipulated that those not participating in the decision to leave the room, including parties and visitors, in keeping with a statement found in the AIC's proposed hearing format document.

It was moved, seconded, and adopted to take up a reconsideration of the previously adopted hearing format, originally proposed by the AIC (Rec. 7, Sect. C),²⁶ so as to permit the parties and visitors to return to the room and be seated on the southeast section of the auditorium.

The reconsideration, having been moved and seconded by delegates previously voting with the majority, was taken up and adopted, after which the parties and visitors took their seats in the southeast section of the auditorium.

DELIBERATION OF THE CASE

The court commenced its deliberations, entering into a fifteen minute discussion of the appeal.

After the allotted fifteen minutes expired, it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the discussion time for five more minutes.

After the five additional minutes expired, it was moved, seconded, and carried to extend the discussion time for five more minutes.

VERDICT: APPEAL NOT SUSTAINED (13-14)

The moderator led the court in prayer, after which a standing vote was taken to decide the appeal (GLG 23-26: Manring v. Southside RPC Session), with 13 delegates voting to sustain the appeal and 14 delegates voting not to sustain the appeal. Therefore the appeal was not sustained.

The moderator informed the appellant of his right to appeal, noting that, due to the late hour, the work of the three-man Verdict Rationale Committee, which has yet to be appointed, will have to wait. He then led the court in prayer.

8. READING OF THE MINUTES

The clerk read the minutes, after which it was moved, seconded, and carried to adopt the minutes as read.

9. PRAYER OF ADJOURNMENT

The moderator adjourned the court in prayer at 7:03 p.m.

²⁶ *Clerk's Note*: In hindsight, it is clear from the AIC's proposed hearing format that the section referenced here was not actually part of the recommendation which was adopted by the court. Rather, it was included under letter "C" in a list of *suggestions* appended to Recommendation 7. These suggestions were never directly voted on (much less adopted) by the court and, therefore, did not need to be reconsidered or overturned.

**Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery in Kokomo, IN
October 6, 2023**

Congregation	Name/Status	Attendance at Roll Call	Complaint Roll	Appeal Roll	Notes:
Atlanta	Frank Smith TE	E	E	E	
Belle Center	Phil Pockras TE	E	E	E	
	Jeff Brotherton RE	X	X	X	
	Bruce Bowers RE	X	X	X	
Bloomington	Rich Holdeman TE	X	X	X	
	Philip McCollum TE	X	X	X	
	Stephen Shipp RE	N	N	N	
	Eric Cosens RE	X	X	X	
Columbus	Joel Hart TE	X	X	X	
	Jeff Jones RE	X	X	X	
	Dave Schisler RE	X	X	X	
Elkhart	Wade Mann TE	X	X	X	

Congregation	Name/Status	Attendance at Roll Call	Complaint Roll	Appeal Roll	Notes:
	Fik Membre RE	X	X	X	
Hetherton	Ray Morton TE	E	E	E	
	Brian Dage RE	X	X	X	
Lafayette	Adam Neiss TE	X	X	X	
	Jonathan Sturm TE	X	X	X	
	Chris Stockwell RE	X	X	X	
Marion	Aaron Murray TE	X	X	X	
	Jason Camery TE	N	N	N	
	Greg Fisher RE	X	X	X	
Orlando	Nathan Eshelman TE	X	X	X	
Second	Jerry Foltz TE	X	X	X	
	Donald Cassell RE	X	X	X	
	Russ Pulliam RE	X	X	X	
Selma	NA				

Congregation	Name/Status	Attendance at Roll Call	Complaint Roll	Appeal Roll	Notes:
Southfield	Adam Kuehner TE	X	X	X	
	Jon Hughes RE	X	X	X	
Southside	David Hanson TE	X	X	X	
	Ian Wise TE	E	E	E	
	Ross Cerbus RE	X	X	X	
	David Klein RE	X	X	X	
SWORP	Dick Knodel TE	E	E	E	
	Steven Work TE	X	X	X	
	Scott Damerow	X	X	X	
Sparta	Ross Fearing TE	E	E	E	
	James Odom RE	X	X	X	
Sycamore	Shawn Anderson TE	X	X	X	
	Bent VanSickle RE	X	X	X	

Congregation	Name/Status	Attendance at Roll Call	Complaint Roll	Appeal Roll	Notes:
Terre Haute	Steve Rhoda TE	E	E	E	
	Josh Reshey RE	X	X	X	
Westminster	Joshua Smith TE	X	X	X	
	Robert Koch RE	E	E	E	
RPTS	David Whitla	E	E	E	
Without Charge	Ray Lanning	X	X	X	
	Colin Samul	X	X	X	

Legend: TE: Teaching elder. RE: Ruling elder. E: Excused. X: Present. N: Not in attendance.

Great Lakes–Gulf Presbytery Ad Interim Commission Minutes
July 31, 2023

The Ad Interim Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met by video conference call.

Those present included Shawn Anderson (moderator, Sycamore RPC-Kokomo, IN), G. Scott Damerow (SW Ohio RPC), Jerry Porter (Southside RPC, Indianapolis, IN) and Alejandro Ramirez (Orlando RPC, Orlando, FL). Aaron Hartzler (RPC of Lafayette, IN) was absent, attending a session meeting.

Shawn Anderson opened the meeting and constituted the court in prayer in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, King and Head of the Church, at 7:06 pm.

Agenda Item 25: *(From GLG Presbytery, June 20, 2023)* Recommendation carried from GLG 23-19, for the AIC to appoint the initial membership of the standing finance committee before fall 2023, so that this committee can be ready for presentations at any fall 2023 presbytery meeting or spring 2024 presbytery meeting. Direct the AIC to

Action Taken: It was moved, seconded, and carried to appoint Ross Cerbus (1 year), Ken Nelson (2 years), and Joel Hart (3 years) to the Finance Committee. The presbytery treasurer and assistant treasurer are ex officio, non-voting members of the committee as well.

Agenda Item 26: *(From GLG Presbytery, June 20, 2023)* That the GLG Presbytery authorize the AIC to assess the number and significance of agenda items and determine the necessity of a fall meeting no later than August 1, 2023.

Action Taken: After some discussion, the only pressing items for the Presbytery to address before the 2024 spring meeting are two appeals. By common consent the AIC will distribute a straw poll to the Presbytery, seeking the court's will to handle the appeals. Mr. Porter recused himself from making decisions or consenting on this matter.

Option A: Mr. Manring's appeal (GLG 23-26) and complaint (GLG 23-27) would be sent to an AIC-appointed judicial commission to hear and decide the matter.

This Judicial Commission would consist of: Ross Fearing (TE *Convener*), Phil Pockras (TE), Jerry Foltz (TE), Jonathan Schaefer (RE), and Greg Fisher (RE). The JC appoints its moderator & clerk. Steven Work (TE), Joshua Smith (TE), and Robert McKissick (RE) will serve as alternates.

Mr. Allison has also provided a notice to appeal, but the appeal has not yet been received. When received, his appeal would be sent to an AIC-appointed judicial commission to hear and decide the matter.

This Judicial Commission would consist of: Adam Niess (TE *Convener*), Aaron Murray (TE), Joel Hart (TE), Jeffrey Brotherton (RE), Brentt VanSickle (RE). The JC appoints its moderator & clerk. Nathan Eshelman (TE), Philip McCollum (TE), and James Odom (RE) will serve as alternates.

Option B: The appeals and complaint would be heard and decided by the whole presbytery at a one-day meeting from 2pm to 8pm. This would require minimal

Great Lakes–Gulf Presbytery Ad Interim Commission Minutes
July 31, 2023

hosting and one meal from the host congregation. Each appeal could be heard and determined within a two-hour block.

The straw poll will be available until Friday, August 4, at noon.

Agenda Item 27: *(From Ben Manring, June 3, 2023)* Mr. Manring sent a notice of appeal to the GLGP.

Action Taken: According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “...*the clerk shall transmit the same, with the necessary records and papers, to the clerk of the higher court.*” The AIC clerk will reach out to Mr. Sturm to make sure all necessary records have been transmitted.

According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “*The higher court, upon receiving notice of the intent to appeal, shall make available an appropriate advisor from among the members of the court for the appellant.*” The AIC has appointed **Stephen Rhoda** to advise Mr. Manning in his appeal.

According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “*At least sixty (60) days shall be given for preparing the appeal and transmitting it to the clerk of the higher court, along with a full statement of reasons for the appeal and all relevant documents.*” The AIC determines that an advisor was appointed by the AIC on July 31, 2023. Therefore, the appellant may have until **September 29, 2023**, to prepare his appeal.

According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “*In order for members of the higher court to have time to read and process the appeal, a period of at least thirty (30) days must elapse between the court's receiving the appeal and the meeting where it is to be adjudicated.*” The appeal has not yet been shared with the court. Once shared, the appeal would have to be heard after at least 30 days.

Agenda Item 28: *(From Gary Allison, July 13, 2023)* Mr. Allison sent a notice of appeal to the GLGP.

Action Taken: According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “...*the clerk shall transmit the same, with the necessary records and papers, to the clerk of the higher court.*” The AIC clerk will reach out to Mr. Hughes to make sure all necessary records have been transmitted.

According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “*The higher court, upon receiving notice of the intent to appeal, shall make available an appropriate advisor from among the members of the court for the appellant.*” The AIC has appointed **Wade Mann** to advise Mr. Allison in his appeal.

According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “*At least sixty (60) days shall be given for preparing the appeal and transmitting it to the clerk of the higher court, along with a full statement of reasons for the appeal and all relevant documents.*” The AIC determines that an advisor was appointed by the AIC on July 31, 2023. Therefore, the appellant may have until **September 29, 2023**, to prepare his appeal.

According to BOD II.4.11 (E-17) “*In order for members of the higher court to have time to read and process the appeal, a period of at least thirty (30) days must elapse between the court's receiving the appeal and the meeting where it is to be adjudicated.*”

Great Lakes–Gulf Presbytery Ad Interim Commission Minutes
July 31, 2023

The appeal has not yet been shared with the court. Once shared, the appeal would have to be heard after at least 30 days.

Shawn Anderson prayed for the Church and adjourned the court in prayer in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, Head and King of the Church at 8:30 pm.

These minutes of July 31, 2023, were read and approved by common consent.



G. Scott Damerow,
Clerk Pro Tem of the Ad Interim Commission



Shawn Anderson,
Moderator of the Ad Interim Commission

Great Lakes–Gulf Presbytery Ad Interim Commission Minutes
September 4, 2023

The Ad Interim Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met by video conference call.

Those present included Shawn Anderson (moderator, Sycamore RPC-Kokomo, IN), G. Scott Damerow (SW Ohio RPC), Aaron Hartzler (clerk, RPC of Lafayette, IN), Jerry Porter (Southside RPC, Indianapolis, IN) and Alejandro Ramirez (Orlando RPC, Orlando, FL).

Shawn Anderson opened the meeting and constituted the court in prayer in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, King and Head of the Church, at 7:10 pm.

Agenda Item 29: Appoint a Clerk Pro Tem for the July 31, 2023, AIC meeting.

Action Taken: It was moved, seconded, and carried to appoint G. Scott Damerow as the AIC Clerk Pro Tem for the July 31, 2023, AIC meeting. Scott will sign the AIC Minutes of July 31, 2023.

Agenda Item 30: Officially designate the time and place for the one-day Fall GLG Presbytery meeting.

Action Taken: By common consent the Fall GLG Presbytery meeting will be held on Friday October 6, 2023, at the Sycamore Reformed Presbyterian Church (300 E. Mulberry St., Kokomo, IN 46901). The business of this meeting is to hear the complaint and appeal of Mr. Ben Manning and complaint of Mr. Gary Allison, pending reception of appeals by September 5, 2023.

The court will also take up the transfer of credentials of Mr. Colin Samul and receive under care as a theological student, Mr. Nathan Shaver. The Hetherton RP Church Committee may also have a report to give. The CYPUB board requests for officers will come before the court for approval.

Agenda Item 31: (*Communication from assistant clerk, Nathan Eshelman*) Request to cover Mr. Colin Samul's travel expenses to Presbytery (October 6, 2023).

Action Taken: By common consent, Mr. Samul's travel expenses will be covered according to the present Presbytery GLG reimbursement policy.

Agenda Item 32: (*From Jake Schwartz and Steve Rhoda, June 29, 2023*) The remaining elders from First RPC (Grand Rapids) session sent a letter to the AIC with requests for Presbytery's approval for the disbursement of remaining funds by the RPCNA Trustees of Synod.

Action Taken: By common consent, the AIC, on behalf of the GLG Presbytery approves the recommendations for the disbursement of the First RPC (Grand Rapids) remaining funds. The AIC will communicate this to the RPCNA Trustees of Synod.

Great Lakes–Gulf Presbytery Ad Interim Commission Minutes
September 4, 2023

Agenda Item 33: *(From GLG Clerk, Adam Kuehner, July 31, 2023)* request to transfer Tara Wykstra, former communicant member in good standing of First RPC of Grand Rapids, from the membership roll of the GLGP to Bethany URC in Wyoming, MI, at her request.

Action Taken: It was moved, seconded, and carried to transfer Tara Wykstra from the membership roll of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery to Bethany URC (5401 Byron Center Ave., Wyoming, MI 49519).

Agenda Item 34: Finalize a procedure to recommend at our Fall October 6 meeting for dealing with appeals.

Action Taken: It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the “AIC Recommendations for a GLG Presbytery Appeals Process on October 6, 2023”. Jerry Porter recused himself from the vote.

Agenda Item 35: Appoint advisors for appellants, Mr. Manring, and Mr. Allison.

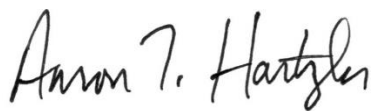
Action Taken: By common consent on August 11, 2023, the following advisors were appointed and contacted along with their respective appellants:

Mr. Gary Allison – Mr. Ross Fearing

Mr. Ben Manring – Mr. Nathan Eshelman

These minutes of September 4, 2023, were read and approved by common consent.

Aaron Hartzler prayed for the Church and adjourned the court in prayer in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, Head and King of the Church at 8:30 pm.



Aaron Hartzler,
Clerk of the Ad Interim Commission



Shawn Anderson,
Moderator of the Ad Interim Commission

AIC Recommendations for a GLG Presbytery Appeals Process on October 6, 2023

The following is provided to suggest and point out the steps of an appeals process drawn from our *Book of Discipline*. The AIC is not seeking to overstep its remit, but to help bear the court's burden. Therefore, any or none of the following recommended procedural steps may be used by the court.

Reminders for the Court (see *Book of Discipline*, II.4)

- An appeal may be made (and thus sustained) on the following grounds: “*irregularity in the proceedings; injustice or undue severity in the censure imposed; manifest prejudice or unfairness to the party on trial; admission of improper testimony or refusal to hear testimony that is important; or undue haste in reaching a decision before all the testimony has been heard*” (4.10).
- “*An appeal shall be prosecuted by the appellant in person, unless, for reasons satisfactory to the court, he cannot be present. In this case, he may request a member of the court to act as his counsel, or request the court to appoint one of its members. If an appellant fails to prosecute his appeal at the next meeting of the higher court, or at such time as the court may designate, the decision of the lower court shall stand. He may, however, appear at a later meeting, due notice having been given to the court from which he appealed, & present proof that his failure to appear was due to unavoidable circumstances. If the court is satisfied, it may proceed at once to hear the appeal, or appoint a later date for the hearing.*” (4.13)
- “*The decision of the higher court must be based solely on the records of the lower court*” (4.15).
- Presbytery may decide the appeal in the following ways (see 4.15): “*The higher court may confirm. or reverse. in whole or in part, the decision of the lower court. If the appeal is sustained, the judgment of the lower court is reversed. If an appeal is not sustained, the judgment of the lower court is affirmed. If the lower court has not followed the prescribed order in the conduct of the case, the higher court may, at its discretion, return the whole case to the lower for a new trial. If the decision of the lower court appears unjust & unwarranted, the higher court may itself try the case.*”

Recommendation #1: That the appellant, his advisor, and the members of session be recognized as the parties in the case and not be permitted to participate in deciding the appeal (BoD, II.1.7; II.4.12).

Recommendation #2: That if the whole Presbytery hear and decide the appeal, a committee of three men appointed by the moderator be formed at the beginning of the proceedings to write the reasons of the court's decision. The committee will give its report before the end of this meeting.

Rationale: *The Book of Discipline, II.4.15 says: “A full record shall be kept of all the proceedings with the reasons for each decision.” Recording the reasons for each decision from the floor of Presbytery is not practical.*

Recommendation #3: that the following suggested preliminary steps be approved and enacted.

1. That the clerk ensure that a full record is kept of all the proceedings (BoD, II.4.10, 15).
2. That the moderator request everyone in the room to turn off non-essential electronic devices so that there are no unnecessary interruptions and that members of the court may give their full attention to the hearing of the appeal.
3. That the moderator lead or appoint at least one member of the court to lead in prayer for the proceedings.
4. That any parliamentarians who determine that they have a conflict of interest in the matter be given opportunity to recuse themselves and replaced with *pro tem* parliamentarians during the hearing of the appeal.
5. That the moderator restrict the discussion of the case to the written record (BoD, II.4.15).
6. That the moderator, in consultation with a clerk of GLGP, confirm that the appeal is in accord with the *Book of Discipline*, II.4.10,11,14:
 - a. That the appellant filed with session's clerk a written notice of appeal & a summary statement of the reasons for appeal within thirty days after the accused was informed of the action;
 - b. That the appellant had at least sixty days for preparing the appeal (along with a full statement of the reasons for the appeal & providing all relevant documents) and transmitting the same to the AIC clerk;
 - c. That Presbytery has had thirty days to read and process the appeal;
 - d. That the material records & papers pertaining to the case are present for considering the appeal;
 - e. That the reasons assigned by the appellant in the appeal are the same as those presented to the lower court.
7. That the moderator remind the members of the court of the solemn duty in which they are about to engage, and of their responsibilities as judges in the Lord's house, and enjoin them to dismiss from their minds all prejudice or personal considerations, and to concern themselves with the spiritual welfare of the church (cf. BoD, II.3.2).

Recommendation #4: that the following procedural steps be approved and enacted (based on *Book of Discipline*, II.4.14a-g, 15).

1. The clerk shall read the sentence appealed from.
2. The clerk shall read the appeal and reasons assigned by the appellant, which must be the same as those presented to the lower court.
3. The moderator shall remind the court of the grounds for appeal (BoD, II.4.10, E-17).

4. The Presbytery shall waive the reading of the record based on the court having “sufficient opportunity to review the record and papers” (BoD, II.4.14.c, E-17), with the qualification that “Either party may request the reading of specific portions of the record important to the case if the reading of the full record is waived.”
5. The Presbytery grant the parties up to twelve minutes each to present their opening speeches (appellant first, then session), then the appellant up to seven minutes for his closing speech including any rebuttal comments.
6. Members of the court shall be permitted to respectfully ask, by addressing the moderator, clarifying questions of both parties for up to five minutes.
7. Opportunity shall be given for discussion of the case by the members of the court for up to fifteen minutes.

Suggested prior to general discussion of the case:

- a. That if either party objects, no member of the court who has not been present during the whole appeal shall be allowed to vote in the final decision.
 - b. That the moderator remind the court who is not permitted to participate in deciding the appeal.
 - c. That the moderator ask those who are not participating in deciding the appeal to withdraw from the room, while the court deliberates.
 - d. That the court begin its deliberation with prayer for Divine guidance in weighing the evidence and in reaching a just decision.
8. When the deliberation is finished, a vote shall be taken on sustaining or not sustaining the appeal, each specification of error being voted on separately.

Suggested:

- a. That the moderator remind the court that its decision must be based solely on the records of the lower court.
- b. That the moderator again remind the court of the grounds for appeal (BoD, II.4.10, E-17).
- c. That the clerk of Presbytery read each specification of error and ask: *“Shall this specification of error be sustained?”* A standing vote should be taken on each specification of error separately and with no further discussion. The clerks shall count the votes and the moderator announce the decision. A record of the aye’s and nay’s should be recorded. A simple majority vote is required to sustain a specification of error.
 - (1) If none of the specifications of the appeal is sustained, then the appeal is not sustained, and the court has upheld the decision of the lower court.

- (2) If at least one of the specifications of the appeal is sustained, the moderator will call for a fifteen-minute recess to give time for motions to be carefully formulated and written down.
- (3) After the fifteen-minute recess, the moderator will entertain a motion on whether:
 - i.) the lower court has not followed the prescribed order in the conduct of the case. The court may, at its discretion, return the whole case to the lower for a new trial.
 - ii.) the decision of the lower court appears unjust and unwarranted. The higher court may determine to have the Presbytery try the case itself.
- (4) If the case is not retried, the moderator shall entertain a motion that will either:
 - i.) not sustain the appeal.
 - ii.) reverse in whole or in part the decision of the lower court.
- d. When the court has reached its decision, the parties are to be recalled and the result announced.
- e. That the clerk of Presbytery, or its Commission, notify the parties, in writing, of its decision.
- f. That Presbytery conclude the hearing of the appeal with prayer.

The Clerk's Report

2023 Fall Mtg — Kokomo, IN
Oct 6, 2023 @ Sycamore RPC

Dear Fathers & Brethren,

As you know, our fall meeting this year is limited to one five-hour meeting, with little time to spare. The relevant communications, noted below, have been posted to the presbytery website along with all other documents for this meeting.

1. 23-26: Appeal to GLGP — *Manring v. Southside Session* (Notice + Appeal)
2. 23-27: Complaint to GLGP — *Manring v. Southside Session* (Complaint + Pert. Docs)
3. 23-29: Letter from B. Dage requesting Hetherton Visitation Committee (reporting at this mtg.)
4. 23-30: Letter from J. Schwartz + S. Rhoda re: FRPC-GR funds
5. 23-31: Request from C. Scott to dismiss his credentials + Letter from FCC-USA
6. 23-32: C. Samul's credentials for transfer, sent from Pacific Coast Presbytery (RPCNA)
7. 23-33: RPCL Petition: permission to appoint J. Sturm moderator in A. Niess' absence at next session mtg.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That presbytery appoint the following parliamentarians for this meeting: Steve Rhoda, Bryan Dage, Frank Smith (Alt-1), Josh Smith (Alt-2), James Odom (Alt-3), Wade Mann (Alt-4), Aaron Murray (Alt-5).
2. That presbytery receive the transfer of Rev. Colin Samul's ministerial credentials from the Pacific Coast Presbytery (RPCNA).
3. That presbytery dismiss Rev. Craig Scott from the roll of Teaching Elders at his request, per DCG 6.13 (D-33).¹
4. That presbytery approve the financial disbursements proposed in GLG 23-30.²
5. That presbytery transfer Reed and Alexandria Staver, along with their baptized daughter Rosie, from the membership roll of presbytery to Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, at their request.³
6. That presbytery grant the RPCL session permission to have Pastor Sturm moderate the Session in Pastor Niess' absence at their next meeting.
7. That presbytery adopt the proposed agenda.
8. That presbytery approve the clerk's report.

Respectfully Submitted,
Adam Kuehner, Clerk

¹ DCG 6.12 (D-33): "The presbytery... may... dismiss teaching elders who desire to withdraw from this denomination."

² Note: This recommendation does not reflect the clerk's personal perspective on the proposal, but simply a desire to put the matter before the court for expeditious deliberation, to be voted up or down.

³ This request was forwarded to the clerk by Dr. Smith, chairman of the Membership Committee.

The Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery (RPCNA)

*Proposed Fall Mtg Agenda
Drafted 9/19/23*

CLERK

Adam Kuehner
ak@streetsermon.org

ASST. CLERK

Nathan Eshelman
n.p.eshelman@gmail.com

2023 GLG FALL MEETING

Time: Fri Oct 6, 2023 from 1:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Place: Sycamore Reformed Presbyterian Church
300 E. Mulberry St. Kokomo, Indiana 46901

1. **CALL TO ORDER & PRAYER OF CONSTITUTION** (Hughes) +5 mins [1:05]
2. **ATTENDANCE: ROLL CALL** (Eshelman) +5 mins [1:10]
3. **CLERK'S REPORT** (Kuehner) +15 mins [1:25]
 - A. Oral Report
 - B. Recommendations ('second' required)
 1. That presbytery appoint the following parliamentarians for this meeting: Steve Rhoda, Bryan Dage, Frank Smith (Alt-1), Josh Smith (Alt-2), James Odom (Alt-3), Wade Mann (Alt-4), Aaron Murray (Alt-5).
 2. That presbytery receive the transfer of Rev. Colin Samul's ministerial credentials from the Pacific Coast Presbytery (RPCNA).
 3. That presbytery dismiss Rev. Craig Scott from the roll of Teaching Elders at his request, per DCG 6.13 (D-33).¹
 4. That presbytery approve the financial disbursements proposed in GLG 23-30.²
 5. That presbytery transfer Reed and Alexandria Staver, along with their baptized daughter Rosie, from the membership roll of presbytery to Reformation OPC in Grand Rapids, at their request.
 6. That presbytery grant the RPCL session permission to have Pastor Jonathan Sturm moderate the Session in Pastor Adam Niess' absence at their next meeting.
 7. That presbytery adopt the proposed agenda.
 8. That presbytery approve the clerk's report.
4. **FORMAL INTRODUCTIONS** (First-Time Delegates, Fraternal Delegates, Special Guests) +5 mins [1:30]
5. **CANDIDATES & CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE REPORT** (Niess) +20 mins [1:50]
 - A. Oral Update & Recommendations 2.5 mins
 - B. Care Status Interview — Nathan Shaver (Testimony, Q&A, Voice Vote) 15 mins
 - C. Approve Report 2.5 mins [1:50]
6. **BORG RESOLUTION COMMITTEE REPORT** (N/A) +5 mins [1:55]
 - A. Oral Report (N/A)
 - B. Recommendation: That the Borg Resolution Committee be dismissed.
 - C. Approve Report

¹ DCG 6.12 (D-33): "The presbytery... may... dismiss teaching elders who desire to withdraw from this denomination."

² Note: This recommendation does not reflect the clerk's perspective on the proposal, but simply the desire to put the matter before the court for deliberation.

7. CYPY BOARD REPORT (Planalp) +10 mins [2:05]
 - A. Oral Report
 - B. Recommendation(s)
8. HETHERTON VISITATION COMMITTEE REPORT (Hanson) +10 mins [2:15]
9. FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (TBD) +15 mins [2:30]
10. AD INTERIM COMMISSION REPORT (Anderson) +20 mins [2:50]
 - A. Approve Minutes (7/31, 9/4) 5 mins [2:35]
 - B. Recommendations 15 mins [2:50]
 1. **That the appellant, his advisor, and the members of session be recognized as the parties in the case and not be permitted to participate in deciding the appeal (BOD, II.1.7; II.4.12).**
 2. **That if the whole Presbytery hear and decide the appeal, a committee of three men appointed by the moderator be formed at the beginning of the proceedings to write the reasons of the court's decision. The committee will give its report before the end of this meeting.**
 - Rationale: *The Book of Discipline, II.4.15 says: "A full record shall be kept of all the proceedings with the reasons for each decision." Recording the reasons for each decision from the floor of Presbytery is not practical.*
 3. **That the following suggested preliminary steps be approved and enacted.**
 - a) *That the clerk ensure that a full record is kept of all the proceedings (BOD, II.4.10, 15).*
 - b) *That the moderator request everyone in the room to turn off non-essential electronic devices so that there are no unnecessary interruptions and that members of the court may give their full attention to the hearing of the appeal.*
 - c) *That the moderator lead or appoint at least one member of the court to lead in prayer for the proceedings.*
 - d) *That any parliamentarians who determine that they have a conflict of interest in the matter be given opportunity to recuse themselves and replaced with pro tem parliamentarians during the hearing of the appeal.*
 - e) *That the moderator restrict the discussion of the case to the written record (BOD, II.4.15).*
 - f) *That the moderator, in consultation with a clerk of GLGP, confirm that the appeal is in accord with the Book of Discipline, II.4.10,11,14):*
 - (1) *That the appellant filed with session's clerk a written notice of appeal & a summary statement of the reasons for the appeal within thirty days after the accused was informed of the action;*
 - (2) *That the appellant had at least sixty days for preparing the appeal (along with a full statement of the reasons for the appeal & providing all relevant documents) and transmitting the same to the AIC clerk;*
 - (3) *That Presbytery has had thirty days to read and process the appeal;*
 - (4) *That the material records & papers pertaining to the case are present for considering the appeal;*
 - (5) *That the reasons assigned by the appellant in the appeal are the same as those presented to the lower court.*
 - g) *That the moderator remind the members of the court of the solemn duty in which they are about to engage, and of their responsibilities as judges in the Lord's house, and enjoin them to dismiss from their minds all prejudice or personal considerations, and to concern themselves with the spiritual welfare of the church (cf. BOD, II.3.2).*
 4. **That the following procedural steps be approved and enacted (based on Book of Discipline, II.4.14a-g, [E-]15).**
 - a) *The clerk shall read the sentence appealed from.*
 - b) *The clerk shall read the appeal and reasons assigned by the appellant, which must be the same as those presented to the lower court.*

- c) *The moderator shall remind the court of the grounds for appeal (BoD, II.4.10, E-17).*
- d) *The Presbytery shall waive the reading of the record based on the court having “sufficient opportunity to review the records and papers” (BoD, II.4.14.c, E-17), with the qualification that “Either party may request the reading of specific portions of the record important to the case if the reading of the full record is waived.”*
- e) *The Presbytery grant the parties up to twelve minutes each to present their opening speeches (appellant first, then session), then the appellant up to seven minutes for his closing speech including any rebuttal comments.*
- f) *Members of the court shall be permitted to respectfully ask, by addressing the moderator, clarifying questions of both parties for up to five minutes.*
- g) *Opportunity shall be given for discussion of the case by the members of the court for up to fifteen minutes.*
Suggested prior to general discussion of the case:
 - (1) *That if either party objects, no member of the court who has not been present during the whole appeal shall be allowed to vote in the final decision.*
 - (2) *That the moderator remind the court who is not permitted to participate in deciding the appeal.*
 - (3) *That the moderator ask those who are not participating in deciding the appeal to withdraw from the room, while the court deliberates.*
 - (4) *That the court begin its deliberation with prayer for Divine guidance in weighing the evidence and in reaching a just decision.*
- h) *When the deliberation is finished, a vote shall be taken on sustaining or not sustaining the appeal, each specification of error being voted on separately. Suggested:*
 - (1) *That the moderator remind the court that its decision must be based solely on the records of the lower court.*
 - (2) *That the moderator again remind the court of the grounds for the appeal (BOD, II.4.10, E-17).*
 - (3) *That the clerk of Presbytery read each specification of error and ask: “Shall this specification of error be sustained?” A standing vote should be taken on each specification of error separately and with no further discussion. The clerks shall count the votes and the moderator announce the decision. A record of the aye’s and nay’s should be recorded. A simple majority vote is required to sustain a specification of error.*
 - (a) *If none of the specifications of the appeal is sustained, then the appeal is not sustained, and the court has upheld the decision of the lower court.*
 - (b) *If at least one of the specifications of the appeal is sustained, the moderator will call for a fifteen-minute recess to give time for motions to be carefully formulated and written down.*
 - (c) *After the fifteen-minute recess, the moderator will entertain a motion on whether:*
 - i) *the lower court has not followed the prescribed order in the conduct of the case. The court may, at its discretion, return the whole case to the lower for a new trial.*
 - ii) *the decision of the lower court appears unjust and unwarranted. The higher court may determine to have the Presbytery to try the case itself.*
 - (d) *If the case is not retried, the moderator shall entertain a motion that will either:*
 - i) *not sustain the appeal.*
 - ii) *reverse in whole or in part the decision of the lower court.*
 - (4) *When the court has reached its decision, the parties are to be recalled and the result announced.*
 - (5) *That the clerk of Presbytery, or its Commission, notify the parties, in writing, of its decision.*
 - (6) *That Presbytery conclude the hearing of the appeal with prayer.*

- 12. MANRING COMPLAINT (23-27) HEARING +30 mins [3:35]**
- A. Complainant 5 mins [3:10]
 - B. Defendant 5 mins [3:15]
 - C. Floor Questions 5 mins [3:20]
 - D. Floor Discussion 10 mins [3:30]
 - E. Standing Vote to Sustain or Not Sustain 5 mins [3:35]
- 13. AFTERNOON BREAK #2 +15 mins [3:50]**
- 14. MANRING APPEAL (23-26) HEARING +100 mins [5:30]**
- A. Preliminary Steps (Moderator, Clerk) 5 mins [3:55]
 - A. Ensure full record of proceedings (Clerk)
 - B. Turn off non-essential electronics (Moderator)
 - C. Appoint delegate to pray for proceedings (Moderator)
 - D. Allow parliamentarians to self-recuse (Moderator)
 - E. Restrict discussion to written record (Moderator)
 - F. Confirm that appeal is in order (Moderator, Clerk)
 - B. Procedural Steps (Clerk, Moderator) 5 mins [4:00]
 - 1. Reading of the Appealed Sentence (Clerk)
 - 2. Reading of the Appeal & Its Reasons (Clerk)
 - 3. Reminder of Proper Grounds for Appeal (Moderator)
 - 4. Waive reading of the record if distributed in advance (Moderator)
 - C. Hearing of the Case (Parties: Appellant & Session) 45 mins [4:45]
 - A. Appellant's Opening Speech (12 mins)
 - B. Session's Opening Speech (12 mins)
 - C. Appellant's Rebuttal Speech (7 mins)
 - D. Questions for the Session (5 mins)
 - E. Questions for the Appellant (5 mins)
 - D. Judicial Deliberation 25 mins [5:10]
 - A. Withdrawal of those not deciding the case (5 mins)
 - B. Prayer for the deliberations (5 mins)
 - C. Floor discussion of the case (15 mins)
 - E. Judicial Verdict 20 mins [5:30]
 - A. Reminder of proper basis/grounds for appeal (Moderator)
 - B. Prayer for discernment (Moderator)
 - C. Standing Vote to Sustain or Not Sustain
 - D. Excuse Verdict Rationale Committee (If Applicable)
 - E. Bring parties (etc) back into the room
 - F. Pronouncement of the Verdict (Moderator)
 - G. Prayer for the parties, etc. (Moderator)
- 15. AFTERNOON BREAK #3 +10 mins [5:40]**
- 16. VERDICT RATIONALE COMMITTEE (Chairman) +10 mins [5:50]**
- 17. READING OF THE MINUTES (Clerk) +5 mins [5:55]**
- 18. PRAYER OF ADJOURNMENT (Appointed by Moderator) +5 mins [6:00]**

Borg Communication Committee

We were appointed as a three-man committee, to contact Rev. Kyle Borg, the Winchester RPC session, and the Midwest Presbytery, respectively, on behalf of the GLGP to articulate our Presbytery's concerns and ask that steps be taken in love to effectively persuade Rev. Borg to publicly repent and receive the freely and eagerly offered forgiveness of the GLGP and the IRPC session for his sin against these ecclesiastical bodies (not merely against the GLGP clerk) in admittedly publishing sensitive, password-protected GLGP judicial records — submitted by the IRPC session to the GLGP in connection with Rev. Borg's own complaint against them — on the website, Peace, Purity, Progress, against the express instructions of the GLGP clerk.

Prior to our actual appointment Rev. Borg confessed his sin and was granted forgiveness by the Presbytery. Even though forgiveness was granted, we did meet with Rev. Borg and the Ad Interim Commission of the Midwest Presbytery. We did not meet with the Winchester Session, since the Midwest Presbytery had asked that we work through them. Since that time the Midwest Presbytery established their own three-man committee to formally address this situation with Rev. Borg and the Winchester session. The chairman of their committee believes the matter has been dealt with appropriately.

In GLG communication 23-25 the Midwest Presbytery asked for all direct communication with Rev. Kyle Borg cease and that parties communicate through the Midwest Presbytery if they have any specific concerns. We were given the further charter at the GLG Synod Presbytery meeting to investigate the issues that necessitated this communication. In discussing the communication with the Rev. Andrew Barnes, clerk of the Midwest Presbytery, the major reason the Midwest Presbytery sent this communication was to protect Rev. Borg from harassing communication that had been written to him from individual elders and members within the GLG Presbytery. He confirmed this communication was not sent in response to actions taken by the GLG presbytery as a whole or by the Borg Communication Committee.

We believe the work of our committee is complete and would respectfully ask that our committee be dismissed.

Yours in Christ,

Robert Bibby, Chairman

Adam Doerr

Scott Hunt

Report of the Hetherton RPC Visitation Committee

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery, Fall 2023 Meeting

September 30, 2023

This committee, made up of Bob Bibby, Joshua Smith, and David Hanson, was appointed in May to visit the Hetherton Congregation to provide counsel and encouragement. While an onsite visit is still planned, our work thus far has been focused on helping Pastor Ray Morton and the leadership of the congregation sort through issues related to the timing of Pastor Morton's retirement along with plans for congregational life following his retirement. The recommendations at the end of this report are aimed at smoothly accomplishing that transition.

On September 17, Pastor Morton announced to the congregation his retirement, effective December 31, 2023 at the close of the day. In accordance with the Directory for Church Government (II.E.5.b), Pastor Morton has waited two weeks to inform the presbytery and requests that this report serve as the notice of his retirement.

Pastor Morton's retirement is a remarkable event as it marks a major transition point in a ministry spanning five decades and including service on 3 continents (Africa, Europe, & North America) and 4 countries (Canada, Ethiopia, Scotland, & United States). Pastor Morton has faithfully labored in multiple congregations and community ministries.

Currently, the plan for the remainder of 2023 is that Pastor Morton and Elder Bryan Dage will share the preaching duties. Pastor Morton will continue moderating the session with RE Dage serving as clerk. These next months will give the session some time to evaluate additional steps to take in the new year after the retirement. Currently though the plan is for Ray and Susan to continue active participation in the congregation and living in the manse. These retirement arrangements will also allow Ray to continue his illustrious hockey career.

The Hetherton Visitation Committee desires to be continued through the spring meeting of presbytery in order to accomplish an onsite visit which will hopefully include a congregational event recognizing Pastor Morton's retirement.

With gratitude to God for His help and for Pastor Morton's faithful service,
Bob Bibby, Joshua Smith, and David Hanson

Motions:

- 1) That with gratitude and appreciation for the lengthy and faithful service of Pastor Raymond Morton, the Great-Lakes Gulf Presbytery receives his notice of retirement and sets the conclusion of December 31, 2023 as the time at which the pastoral relationship between him and the Hetherton Reformed Presbyterian Church will be dissolved.
- 2) That Phil Pockras and Wade Mann be appointed provisional elders to Hetherton as requested by the session.

Fathers and brothers,

Presented below is a projected calculation of the budget for 2024, put together with the primary goal of calculating the congregational assessment for 2024.

Our presbytery's standard process is to calculate and approve the budget for the year during the spring meeting. However, the assessment (based on the total budget) for the year is calculated and divided up between congregations before the spring meeting, usually in fall of the previous year. This creates an awkward set of steps, where we, in effect, calculate a total budget number before we have a budget!

To work through this issue, the finance committee has worked line-by-line through the budget, working toward projected 2024 numbers for all line items. We use these numbers to calculate our projected assessment.

Between now and the spring, churches or committees could request changes to the budget. These could be approved in an update to the budget formally finalized in March 2024. With our recommended assessment, we expect to be able to absorb some changes to the budget in the spring 2024 meeting. We will continue to evaluate how best to manage this process going forward.

Explanations for various anticipated changes in the budget are presented below. Note that after discussion with the CYP board and treasurer, we aligned that, going forward, we should simply fund all CYP-related expenses from one account. These will be managed by the CYP board and reported back to presbytery yearly.

Recommendations:

1. That the total assessment dollars for 2023 be adjusted from \$53,000 to \$48,000.

Rationale: In fall 2022, we approved a \$48K assessment. This was split up between the congregations. In spring 2023, the new budget calculated a \$53K assessment, which would have required a new set of assessment (of \$5K total) distributed to the churches. Instead of adding that assessment, we decided to wait in the year to see if expenses might allow us to keep \$48K as the assessment. Based on YTD actuals (largely tied to a lower than planned cost of the spring presbytery meeting), we are now confident we can return to the original calculation of \$48,000.

2. That Mark Hart be named Presbytery Treasurer, effective January 1, 2024, with thanks to Jim Bishop for his many years of faithful service to our presbytery.

3. That Ross Cerbus be appointed as Presbytery Assistant Treasurer, effective January 1, 2024.

Rationale: Mark Hart previously served as assistant treasurer. This role is largely to have a second person available to sign checks. We think it simplest to have a member of the finance committee also in this role. We don't expect any other responsibilities for the assistant treasurer.

4. That \$50,000 be approved as the total assessment for 2024, in view of the projected budget shown below.

5. That due to congregational needs, Selma be again exempted from the congregational assessment for 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Ross Cerbus, Joel Hart (chairman), Ken Nelson

2024 Proposed Budget - Fall 2023 Presbytery Meeting

		22-Mar	22-Mar	Proposed Fall	Explanation of Major Changes
	2022	2022	2023	2024	
	Actual	Budget	Budget	Budget	
<u>INCOME</u>					
101 - General Fund	\$42,002	\$42,000	\$53,000	\$50,000	Assessment projects to cover yearly expenses, allow for some minor increases at spring meeting, and maintain a working balance in the range of \$15K.
102 - Special Assessment		\$18,000			
TOTAL INCOME	\$54,004	\$60,000	\$53,000	\$50,000	
<u>EXPENSES</u>					
201 - Annual Spring Meeting	\$4,626	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$7,500	\$ more in line with recent actuals
203 - Annual Fall Meeting	\$4,762		\$5,500	\$4,000	\$ more in line with recent actuals
Subtotal Presbytery Mtgs	\$13,968	\$16,000	\$15,500	\$11,500	
261 - Clerk Honorarium	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,150	5% raise given
262 - Ass't Clerk Honorarium	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$525	5% raise given
265 - Officer's Expenses	\$224	\$100	\$250	\$250	
266 - Youth Secretary Honorarium	\$0	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$0	Money all to be paid into CYPUP fund now (540)
Subtotal Officer's Expenses	\$3,724	\$5,100	\$5,250	\$3,925	
271 - Ad Interim Commission		\$500	\$0		
272 - Candidates & Credentials	\$159		\$0	\$150	
273 - Southern Ch Ext Committee		\$250	\$250	\$500	Budget combined between both ext committees
274 - Northern Ch Ext Committee		\$250	\$250		
275 - Youth Secretary Expenses		\$250	\$250		Money all to be paid into CYPUP fund now (540)
276 - Internet Maintenance	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	
Subtotal Cmtte's & Comms	\$659	\$1,750	\$1,250	\$1,150	
300 - Congregational Visitations		\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	
400 - New Works					
408 - Atlanta Mission Church	\$974	\$4,000	\$8,000	\$4,000	
Subtotal New Works	\$974	\$4,000	\$8,000	\$4,000	
500 - Seminary Student Aid	\$11,400	\$12,600	\$8,000	\$15,000	Increase due to more students and increased monthly payment to students
520 - Covfamiko	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	

		22-Mar	22-Mar	Proposed Fall 2023	Explanation of Major Changes
	<u>2022</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	
	Actual	Budget	Budget	Budget	
540 - Youth Work (CYPU)		\$2,000	\$3,000	\$3,500	Increase due to lines 275 and 266 being combined into this line item.
550 - College Age Ministry	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,500	Rising costs of CORPS conference.
560 - Fraternal Delegates		\$100	\$100	\$100	
Subtotal Other Ministries	\$14,400	\$17,700	\$14,100	\$22,100	
800 - Special Cmttee/Comm		\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	
809 - Selma Support Fund		\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,500	
811 - Atlanta Commission		\$2,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	Decrease in line w/ recent commission spend
Subtotal Special Cmtte's & Comm's		\$4,750	\$4,000	\$3,500	
901 - Other	\$100	\$250	\$250	\$250	
902 - Synod - Retired Pastor's Exp		\$500	\$500	\$500	
915 - Legal Fees	\$8,546	\$10,000		\$0	
Subtotal Miscellaneous	\$8,646	\$10,750	\$750	\$750	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$54,946	\$61,750	\$50,550	\$48,425	
ANNUAL NET	-\$942	-\$1,750	\$2,450	\$1,575	
Balance Jan 1	\$7,516	\$7,516	\$6,574		
Balance Dec 31	\$6,574	\$5,766	\$9,024		

Notice of Appeal

To Steve Sturm, Clerk of Session, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis (hereinafter SSRPC).

And now, this 3rd day of June, 2023, comes Ben Manning, appellant, member of SSRPC, Indianapolis, Indiana, and gives notice of intention to appeal to the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery from the judgment of the session of SSRPC respecting a censure of rebuke administered by said session to the appellant on May 9, 2023.

Summary

On April 7, 2023, the appellant (from now on referred to in the first person) sent a letter to certain members of the congregation of SSRPC informing them of the presence of public documents available on the website [PeacePurityPrograss.com](https://www.peacepurityprograss.com) that had a bearing on our upcoming elder election. One of the candidates for office in the congregational election had signed a complaint, a public document, demonstrating his opposition to the removal of Jared Olivetti, former pastor of the Immanuel RPC, West Lafayette, Indiana from office by the Synod Judicial Commission in March 2022.

Our congregation had been kept almost completely in the dark by our session regarding activity in the larger church respecting the Immanuel RPC child sex abuse scandal. It was therefore necessary to describe the relevant public facts of the case, and to explain that the Synod viewed the complaint signed by the elder candidate as singularly unsound, voting it down by a margin of 120 to 13. My letter is attached as an appendix to this Notice of Appeal. It is significant that subsequent session action against me does not claim that I misrepresented or distorted the facts that I described.

I grant that writing a letter of this sort is an unusual measure, but given the continuous objection of leading members of our session to the removal of Mr. Olivetti from office, it was evident that our congregation would not learn of the elder candidate's position from the session. Without the information, our vote was liable to add another advocate for this anomalous position to the officer corps of the church.

Furthermore, although it is not given much attention in modern discussions of Presbyterian government, the local congregation plays a direct administrative role in the government of the church when it comes to the election of their officers, and they must be allowed to modestly, fairly and factually discuss the merits of candidates set before them as potential officers. In particular, Scripture admonishes the congregation itself to evaluate a candidate's wisdom (Dt 1:13; Ac 6:3). I only purported to question the wisdom of the candidate under consideration, and only within the narrow scope of his support for the complaint against Synod. I explicitly disavowed that I was charging him with sin, and I commended his character and general wisdom in generous terms.

On April 25 I received a letter of summons to attend the next session meeting (May 9), being told only that the session wished to meet with me regarding my letter. Upon my asking, the session refused to specify what their objection was, and they refused my request to meet more informally, outside of a court setting, with one or two of the elders individually. I nonetheless attended the session meeting where I was immediately served with a letter of rebuke. There was no discussion, and the letter itself only contained a generalized list of sins that I had allegedly committed, with no explanation of how my action in writing the letter constituted a violation of the law. The sins listed were violations of the Ninth Commandment, suggesting that I had either slandered or maliciously gossiped about the elder candidate—the charges were too vague to determine which of these things I was being accused of. The letter also claimed that I had shown disrespect for the courts of the church by sharing this public information. The session, they claimed, is the only organ through which information of the type I shared is to come to members of the congregation. In other words, the session will share and filter whatever information they feel it necessary for the congregation to have in its voting for officers. Some public documents, in effect, are to be kept hidden from ordinary members.

I was given 10 minutes to respond to the rebuke if I wished, but in fact, I had been given no opportunity to defend myself ahead of time, nor was there any attempt by the session to convince me that I had actually broken the law of God, except for the listing of sins contained in the letter of rebuke. I regard the manner in which this rebuke was delivered to be completely outside the bounds of biblical process for dealing with sin or alleged sin in the church. However, I am not claiming procedure as grounds for this appeal. I do not wish the charges against me to

be dismissed solely on procedural grounds; rather they should be dismissed on the demerits of the charges, and the session's failure to respect the role of the congregation in conducting a fair election for those whom to whom the people voting are pledged to submit in the Lord. I am addressing the procedural issue in a separate complaint.

I mention the procedural matter here only to demonstrate that the session has no biblical case to present, and therefore rather than attempting to demonstrate how I sinned, or to reason with me, they have instead answered reason with force and silent rigidity. They did not interact with my letter; and even though I later gave them an opportunity to avoid my appealing the matter to the higher courts of the church if they would listen to my defense after the fact, they did not interact with anything I said on that occasion, nor would they answer any of my questions.

I will present the substance of that defense when the full appeal has been prepared. For now, suffice it to say that in my forthcoming appeal I will answer the three charges presented in the rebuke, *viz.*, 1) that I violated the Ninth Commandment, 2) that I disrupted the peace of the church (as if that were always a sin), and 3) that I circumvented our form of government. Furthermore, I will present evidence to show that the session is demonstrating partiality and hypocrisy in their conduct as it relates to this case.

Lastly, I wish to alert the presbytery that the SSRPC session made this rebuke public on May 23 by emailing a notice of it to each communicant member and asking them to pray for my repentance. They did this despite my telling them I would be appealing their censure. In the Book of Discipline, Section II, Ch. 4, Section 12, it says that a notice of appeal is intended "to restrain the lower court from administering the censures of admonition or rebuke until the case has been determined by the higher court." I am appealing within the time limit specified by the Book of Discipline, but these men have refused to be restrained by this clear statement in the Book of Discipline and have gone forward with public action against me. I believe the Ad Interim Commission should instruct the session of SSRPC to publicly withdraw their announcement of this rebuke, citing for our congregation this section of the RPCNA Constitution.

Appendix:

Letter of Ben Manning to Certain Members of SSRPC

7 April 2023

Dear friends,

I am writing to bring to your attention an issue of importance in our church. I realize this is a long email, and I apologize for its length ahead of time. Nonetheless, I hope you will take the time to read it because of the importance of the subject. I have tried to make it simpler to read by head-lining sections in bold type.

The scandal in West Lafayette and the failure of our presbytery to deal with it

As many of you are aware, for the past couple of years our presbytery has been enmeshed in a serious and—within our presbytery, at least—irresolvable conflict with respect to a serial, predatory child abuse case in the Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church congregation in West Lafayette, involving at least 15 victims and over 100 documented incidents. The perpetrator of the crimes is identified in redacted public church documents as the son of the pastor who was serving at the time [*Report of the Immanuel Judicial Commission*, pp. 6, 13]. The young man was convicted in juvenile court and essentially incarcerated for committing what would have been multiple felonies if he had been an adult.

You may also be aware that upon the failure of our presbytery to adequately address the problem (the Presbytery was basically divided into two parties that differed radically in how to deal with it), our Synod, the national governing body of our church, finally had to step in and resolve the matter by removing the Immanuel RPC elders and the pastor from office. This was because, among other things, they failed to adequately protect the children of the congregation for 9 to 15 months after learning of the abuse (some of the West Lafayette elders learned of the abuse later than others). The pastor was offered mediation in order to avoid a church discipline trial, but he was not cooperative. A trial was then called, he was summoned twice, but he refused to appear in court.

The Synod's judicial commission conducting the trial determined unanimously that the pastor ought no longer to be a minister in the church of Jesus Christ (*i.e.*, not just in the RPCNA). The Presbytery's own investigatory commission had come to the same conclusion a year earlier, and another church in West Lafayette outside of the RPCNA (a church that was involved in counseling the Immanuel session and at least one victim of the abuse) concluded, "The father of the abuser should resign his position at the church, along with any other church leaders who had knowledge of these facts." The magnitude of the pastor's sin in this affair is indicated in that the commission of Synod convicted him of breaking eight of the Ten Commandments, and in

failing to manage his household well (a requirement for church office as specified in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and Titus 1:6).

A summary of church action, along with the public documents, may be found at the web site link below. A minister from elsewhere in our denomination has seen the necessity of collecting this information, summarizing it, and making it available to the church at large. It is otherwise difficult to understand the enormity of the scandal and the extremely poor way in which our presbytery handled it:

<https://peacepurityprogress.com/summary/>

How does this tragic history relate to our upcoming elder election? It is important for church members voting in this election to be aware that one of the candidates on the ballot has signed a public complaint objecting to both the trial of the West Lafayette pastor and the verdict of the Synod Commission in finding him guilty. The signatures of the complainants are found on p. 341 of the Synod Minutes for 2022, here

[2022 Minutes of Synod, pp. 339, ff.](#)

To give you an idea of how unsound the vast majority of elders in our denomination view this complaint, it was rejected by Synod on a vote of 120 to 13.

To be fair to our elder candidate, there were many signatures on this complaint from ordinary members of the churches, mostly from the West Lafayette, Second RP and Southside congregations. Our own senior pastor and a retired minister who is now a member of our church both felt so strongly that Synod was wrong to reject this complaint and overturn their discipline, that they asked that their names be recorded in public protest against the Synod vote. Similar complaints emanating from our presbytery were rejected by Synod majorities of 109 to 14, 117 to 9, 114 to 6, and 125 to 1, often with the same protesters voicing their strong dissent at the conclusion of the votes.

Whatever you want to think about these votes and the protests against them, it should at least be clear to you that this vocal minority from our presbytery—a group of men that for the past couple of years has been instrumental in preventing any disciplinary action that would remove the West Lafayette session or its pastor from office—is an anomaly within our denomination.

I am sorry that I have felt compelled to bring this matter to your attention. The elder candidate in question is someone I both like and admire, and one whom I had even considered nominating for elder myself. After speaking to him personally about the presence of his signature on this document, he nonetheless affirms that he continues to stand by what is written. If there is a question about the legitimacy of my sharing this with you, the fact is, this is all public information, and I am sharing it with you in a manner that is consistent with the nature of the events described and documents cited. My comments are necessarily colored by my own perspective, but they nonetheless coincide with the majority view of the Synod. However, I am

sending this information early enough for you to ask the elder candidate himself about these matters if you think it will help you better understand the issues at stake.

Why is this a large enough concern that I deemed it necessary to write to you? Let me first be clear that this is not an accusation of sin against this good man. It instead concerns 1) his judgment and 2) his adherence to the Presbyterian form of government contained in our constitutional documents.

The question of good judgment may be gauged both by the overwhelming response of Synod to the complaint that our elder candidate signed, and the facts surrounding the case in general. There is no question that the West Lafayette pastor needed to be removed from office, and it should have happened long before it finally did. One of the main reasons that it took so long was because of protests and complaints—very similar in substance to the one we are talking about—that prevented the Presbytery from taking swift and essential action. According to the Synod Judicial Committee oral report to the 2022 Synod, “Five courts of this denomination have been involved over the past 26 months and this Synod will be the sixth. We must come to resolution of the matter and not delay the ecclesiastical judicial process any longer.” If the complaint under consideration had been successful in reversing Synod’s discipline, this unfit man would still be pastor of the West Lafayette congregation today.

As it stands, the work of our entire church has been side-tracked (8,000 to 10,000 man hours at the Synod level alone) and our presbytery and the Synod beset with expensive lawsuits (perhaps this is news to you). And all of this over a matter that has several plain and simple answers in Scripture, any one of which disqualifies a man like the former pastor of the West Lafayette church from being a church officer (“One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence,” 1 Tim 3:4; “A man... having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination,” Tit 1:6; “Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside,” 1 Tim 3:7; “You shall not bear false witness,” Ex 20:16).

Regarding fidelity to the Presbyterian form of government, it needs to be understood that in addition to protesting the conviction of the West Lafayette pastor, the complaint we are discussing also requested that the Synod judiciary action be voided in favor of “an independent, professional, and unbiased investigation.” As good as that might sound on first hearing, it is not the way biblical Presbyterian government works. It is certainly true that professionals may be consulted by presbyterial investigators—as many of them were by both the Synod investigators and the earlier Presbytery investigatory commission. These commissions of the church even included several professionals experienced in child welfare (attorneys, professional counselors, a Department of Child Services employee, a police officer) who were also elders. But the investigation is to be carried out by elders in the church, not by “independent” professional agencies.

A lack of confidence in the efficacy of Presbyterian government to deal with this situation has been part-and-parcel of the objections to disciplining the West Lafayette session and the church’s pastor throughout these proceedings. Here are some examples:

- I was present at the 2021 Synod when one minister in a floor speech explicitly claimed that Presbyterianism was incapable of dealing with such matters and that what was needed was a few men to gather around the offenders and just work it out informally—no discipline.
- One of the more troubling and unreasonable objections that has been advanced is that there is secret information that can't be revealed, but which exonerates the men involved from many of the charges against them. This principle, of course, overthrows any attempt to exercise church discipline and hence to govern the church at all.
- Again, the wider church has been led to believe that the West Lafayette issue is just too complicated for anyone to understand, and so it can't be adjudicated. Let me quote from the oral report of the Synod Judicial Commission to the 2022 Synod: "Another recurring question I must address is the narrative that thinks this is 'too complex a situation for our denomination.' . . . When the truth became known, and when the evidence was organized and presented, it wasn't as complex a case as hyped. That evidence and the accompanying testimony was clear and convincing."

Given the supermajority votes in favor of the Synod Judicial Commission's actions, the oral report of the Commission to the 2022 meeting of Synod is a good short summary of how the church leadership outside of our own presbytery views this matter, and I commend it to you if you want to understand the matter further:


[Oral Report SJC to Synod \(wordpress.com\)](#)

I have taken the trouble to write to you because, even though these documents and the complaint we have been discussing are matters of public record, I doubted whether most of you knew about them and realized the scope of what you were voting on. You will be voting, in part, on questions of the nature of church government, the nature of church office, and how we are to interpret the scriptural qualifications for it. As a Presbyterian, you are voting on the impact our local church election has on the wider church. As it turns out, that impact can be far-reaching and may involve grave consequences.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Manring
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Edinburgh, IN 46124
(C) 812-344-7160
(H) 812-703-1240
Ben@ManringFamily.net

From: Ben@ManringFamily.Net 
Subject: Notice of Appeal
Date: June 3, 2023 at 1:33 PM
To: Steve Sturm stevesturm@pobox.com
Cc: David Hanson DavidRPTS@Hotmail.com



Steve Sturm, Clerk of Session,

This is a notice of an appeal of the church censure that the SSRPC session enacted against me last month, and which you announced to our congregation in violation of the Book of Discipline II.4.12, despite my giving you prior notice that I would be appealing your decision.

You will also be receiving from me, within the next few days, a Complaint against the session that deals with the unbiblical procedure followed by the SSRPC session in convicting me in absentia of the sins you allege that I committed, and your collective refusal to discuss any of this matter with me prior to enacting this rebuke.



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2023-06-03
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Appeal

To Adam Kuehner, Clerk of Presbytery, Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (hereinafter GLGP).

And now, this 8th day of July 2023, comes Ben Manring, appellant, member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis, Indiana (hereinafter SSRPC), and appeals from the judgment of the session of SSRPC respecting a censure of rebuke administered by said session to the appellant on May 9, 2023. Notice of this appeal was previously filed with the session of SSRPC on June 3, 2023.

Background and Summary

On April 7, 2023, the appellant (from now on referred to in the first person) sent a letter to certain members of the congregation of SSRPC informing them of the presence of public documents available on the website [PeacePurityProgress.com](https://www.peacepurityprogress.com) that had a bearing on our upcoming elder election. One of the candidates for office in the congregational election had signed a complaint, a public document, demonstrating his opposition to the removal of Jared Olivetti, former pastor of the Immanuel RPC, West Lafayette, Indiana from office by the Synod Judicial Commission in March 2022. I wrote to a number of adult members of the church whom I supposed might find the information beneficial as they considered whom to vote for to inform them of this fact. See Appendix A for a copy of the letter.

Our congregation had been kept almost completely in the dark by our session regarding activity in the larger church respecting the Immanuel RPC child sex abuse scandal. It was therefore necessary to describe the relevant public facts of the case, and to explain that the Synod viewed the complaint signed by the elder candidate as singularly unsound, voting it down by a margin of 120 to 13. It is significant that subsequent session action against me does not claim that I misrepresented or distorted the facts that I described in the letter.

On April 25 I received a letter of summons to attend the next session meeting (May 9), being told only that the session wished to meet with me regarding my letter. Upon my asking,

the session refused to specify what their objection was, and they refused my request to meet more informally, outside of a court setting, with one or two of the elders individually. I nonetheless attended the session meeting where I was immediately served with a letter of rebuke, a copy of which is attached as Appendix B. There was no discussion, and the letter of rebuke itself only contained a generalized list of sins that I had allegedly committed, with no explanation of how my action in writing the letter constituted a violation of the law, except to say that they thought the letter was uncharitable and disruptive to the peace of the church. The reader may consult the letter itself in Appendix A to judge of the justice of the charge.

The sins listed in the letter of rebuke were violations of the Ninth Commandment, suggesting that I had either slandered or maliciously gossiped about the elder candidate. The charges were too vague to determine which of these things I was being accused of. A subsequent email that the session sent to our congregation, making the rebuke public, stated only that the session deemed my letter to have been "uncharitable" and "divisive." Again, they did not claim that what I said was untruthful.

The charge of disruptiveness in the letter of rebuke claimed that I had shown "disrespect for the courts of the church," specifically the session, by taking it upon myself to share public information that had bearing on our election. The session, they claimed, is the only organ through which information of the type I shared is to come to members of the congregation. In other words, the session will share and filter whatever information they think necessary for the congregation to have in its voting for officers. Some public documents, in effect, are to be kept hidden from ordinary members of the church, even though they may have direct bearing on an officer election.

I was given 10 minutes to respond to the rebuke if I wished, but in fact, the session had earlier held an informal trial against me without my knowledge, convicting me *in absentia*, and I had been given no opportunity to speak on my own behalf before the rebuke was administered. Not only had they not attempted to speak to me about the alleged sin I was charged with, but they had refused my requests to speak to them to understand what their objection was. I informed the session that I would be appealing their censure, but if they wished to hear me out, I would forbear filing the appeal immediately. They agreed to hear my answer by giving me 45

minutes the following week, at which time I presented to them the substance of the defense presented in the following sections of this appeal.

The session made no reply to anything I said that evening, nor would they answer any of the questions I asked them. This is in keeping with their earlier demurring to interact with the contents of my original letter. The only response I received was a note from the Clerk a week later telling me that the session would be making their rebuke public to the communicant members of the church. They publicized the rebuke in spite of my informing them that I would be appealing their censure. This is a plain violation of our church Constitution, BOD Sec. II, Ch. 4, sec. 12: "The notice of appeal shall serve to restrain the lower court from administering the censures of admonition or rebuke until the case has been determined by the higher court."

The process and manner in which this rebuke was delivered, and the harshness of the censure, is completely outside the bounds of biblical process for dealing with sin or alleged sin in the church. It seems plain to me that these men, who clearly know better than this, have acted in this unprincipled and unbiblical manner simply to try and coerce me and my family to leave the church. However, I am not claiming procedure as grounds for this appeal. I do not wish the charges against me to be dismissed solely on procedural grounds; rather they should be dismissed on the demerits of the charges, and the session's failure to respect the role of the congregation in conducting a fair election for officers to whom the people voting are pledged to submit in the Lord. The procedural issue is being addressed in a separate complaint which I hope the Presbytery will take very seriously.

I mention the procedural matter here only to demonstrate that the session has no biblical case to present, and therefore rather than attempting to demonstrate how I sinned, or to reason with me, they have instead answered reason with force and silence. They refused to speak to me before censuring me, they did not specifically explain how my letter was sinful, and they did not interact with the defense I offered after the fact, asking me no questions, making no statements, and refusing to answer any of my own questions.

In this appeal I will

- A. Present three *res ipsa loquitur* arguments against the session's rebuke.
 - 1. It is not sinful to call attention to public advocacy.
 - 2. It is not sinful to answer a public position paper.
 - 3. The session is censoring public information.

- B. I will then answer in detail the three charges presented in the rebuke, *viz.*,
 - 1. That I violated the Ninth Commandment.
 - 2. That I disrupted the peace of the church.
 - 3. That I circumvented our form of government.

- C. Furthermore, I will present evidence to show that the session is demonstrating partiality and hypocrisy in their conduct as it relates to this case.

Refutation via *Res Ipsa Loquitur* (“the thing speaks for itself”)

Part of the difficulty in answering the charges laid against me by the SSRPC session is that they are absurd enough that to write against them as if they were legitimate lends them a credibility that they do not deserve. I therefore begin by presenting three *res ipsa loquitur* arguments that demonstrate the basis of this rebuke to be self-evidently false.

1. It is not sinful to call attention to public advocacy.

When a man takes a public position on an issue, nailing his colors to the mast, as it were, and he signs his name to a public document that he says he believes, we always assume he is proud of what he is doing by so signing, and that he wants others to know of his affirmation of the position advocated in the document. Is that not, after all, the purpose of such a document, namely, to publicize the position taken by its signatories, and to show whomever is interested the names of its many supporters?

How is it then that I am charged with slander or malicious gossip for drawing attention to a signature on such a document, as if the signature on the document were scandalous? It might be one thing if the man whose signature is on this document regretted having ever signed the document. Perhaps he later came to see that his action in signing the document was sinful or unwise. In that instance it might be uncharitable to bring the matter up, but these are not the circumstances that hold in this case. The man whose signature is at the center of this controversy says he stands by his signature and that he continues to hold the position advocated in the document.

If the signature is public and is honorable, my drawing attention to the signature is not dishonorable, nor should the signatory be offended by my pointing it out to others. He has entered the arena of public ideas, he has declared his allegiance, and the mere demonstration of his having done so cannot be the basis of a suit of libel against the demonstrator.

2. It is not sinful to answer a public position paper.

When someone publishes a thesis or an argument or a position statement in a public forum, he must expect that not everyone will agree with him. If everyone did agree with him

already, what would be the purpose of publishing such a statement? No, the publishing of position statements or protests or complaints renders the side that publishes them open to public criticism. That is all a part of public discourse. If the criticism is fair and does not misrepresent the position of the original advocate, it is not sinful for someone who disagrees to explain his disagreement to the public. Do these principles of public discourse really need to be explained? Plainly and simply, a public advocate in a system that is not corrupt is not granted immunity from notice or from fair criticism, regardless of who his friends are.

3. The session is censoring public information.

In their letter of rebuke, the SSRPC session writes, "Session has given the instruction we deem appropriate and necessary for the elder election and left it as a matter of private judgement for communicant members to vote for qualified men. Our Presbyterian system of government provides a process for appealing decisions of a court. You have circumvented this process."

The expression "private judgment" is derived from the name of the Protestant doctrine of the "right of private judgment," which means that Protestants believe all men are given the right to read and interpret Scripture for themselves rather than relying on the mediation of an authority figure such as a priest or a church to interpret it authoritatively for them. The session perverts this expression and uses it to signify exactly the opposite of its orthodox intention. They mean to say that the session has the right to keep the congregation in private ignorance of anything the session has not authorized them to know, even when that information is contained in the public documents of our denominational courts.

My appeal puts before you these questions: Does a session have the right to keep as a secret the public documents of the church, and to discipline lay people who point out that these documents exist? Is the session the sole filter for "appropriate and necessary" information for lay people to have regarding officer candidates? Are lay people allowed to consider candidates' public church actions in their voting, or is this none of their business?

An affirmative answer to the first two questions, or a negative answer to the third, is simply tyranny. There is no such authority conferred on the elders by the Bible.

Overview of the Charges

The letter of rebuke lists two charges, but as I read it there are really three. I am charged 1st) with slander or malicious gossip against Nick Ritenour—from the imprecision of the accusation, it's impossible to tell which, 2nd) the session says I have disrupted the peace and harmony of the church, and 3rd) the session claims that I have despised and circumvented the government of the church.

First Charge: alleged Ninth Commandment violations

The first of these charges, that I slandered Nick Ritenour or gossiped maliciously about him, I categorically deny. I will be spending most of my time answering this charge, but I will make some few comments on the other two charges before I address this question.

Second Charge: disruption of the peace and harmony of the church

To the second charge—that I have disrupted the peace of the church—I reply that I was fully aware that the letter I wrote to the congregation would cause discomfort to some of the members and officers of our church. I am sorry that it had to be done. I do not agree, however, that it was sinful. In fact, I restored a modicum of peace to two groups of people in the church that our session seems to have forgotten about entirely. One of these groups contains people who have experienced child sexual abuse, and the other includes people who are more disturbed at being kept in the dark about what is going on in the church than the session apparently realizes.

Again, the session does not appreciate the disruptiveness of the behavior of those that signed and supported complaints attempting to maintain Jared Olivetti in office.

Disrupting the peace of the church is not, in and of itself, a sin. If it were, we would have to criminalize John the Baptist, all of the apostles and prophets, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself. These men all disrupted the peace of the church or the civil society to one extent or another. The question is not whether they did so, but why they did so.

The RP Book of Discipline, Section I, ch. 1, sec. 6, says “Not everything displeasing to an individual is ground for formal disciplinary process. Offenses which require discipline are of three kinds: heresy; . . . disregard for or violation of the moral law; and contempt for the courts

of the church." What I wrote was clearly displeasing to some people. Was it sinful? I say it was not.

I wonder whether the session has considered how opposition to imposing substantive church discipline against Jared Olivetti has made the victims of child sexual abuse in our churches feel? I imagine that the people who agreed with my letter either remained silent or came to me to express their support. Those who agreed with the session either remained silent, or they went to the session to express their disapproval. We each are somewhat shielded from the reactions on opposite sides. I was not expecting it, but several people who had experienced sexual abuse as children, or were close to those who had, profusely thanked me for writing the letter, some with tears in their eyes.

If someone thinks this West Lafayette episode and the part that our session played in it has nearly run its course, I think he couldn't be more wrong. These children from the West Lafayette congregation, some of whom have experienced horrendous acts of defilement at the hands of the abuser, are going to grow up. If they come to realize the delay in their deliverance that occurred because of early inaction by the presbytery, and they see these complaints against our church commissions that demonstrate the mindset that induced the slackness of action that was in evidence during 2020, the offense these victims will feel against the men behind these complaints will be overwhelming in comparison to any offense I may have caused to a few adults simply by drawing attention to public statements that they made in the courts of our denomination.

It is not the short-term peace of the church that we are trying to preserve, but the eternal peace of those who belong to it. The short-sighted goal of temporary peace is not in line with the true peace of the church of Jesus Christ, and our session has had the wrong set of voices guiding it. Scripture admonishes us to "Open your mouth for the dumb" (Prov 31:18), among whom are these victims of child sexual abuse. It's not the loud voices of men like Jared Olivetti that should have captured our attention and excited our strong defense.

Third Charge: circumvention of church government

The third charge I also deny, but I want to say up front that, in charging me with this sin of circumventing our form of government, the session is greatly mistaken in its notion of the limits of its authority in controlling the information that flows between the members of the

church. This is particularly true for information that concerns the election of their officers. Our session is, in effect, advancing a form of church government that, while it is not novel, it is certainly not Presbyterian.

When our family first came to Southside RPC some six years ago, David Hanson commended a booklet on Presbyterian government to me. It's called *The Five Points of Presbyterianism* and was written by Thomas Witherspoon, a 19th century American Southern Presbyterian minister and seminary professor. The first of the five points is that "Church power is vested not in officers of any grade or rank, but in the whole corporate body of believers. . . . ours is a government in which Christ rules through the voice of his people, his whole redeemed people, and not through any privileged class, any spiritual nobility, or aristocracy of grace." Witherspoon's statement, if taken out of context, is liable to be interpreted as supporting congregationalism, but he goes on to clarify that the rule of the people, though vested in the people, is not ordinarily administered by the people, but by representatives, whom the Bible calls elders or overseers. However, while ordinary members do not administer the day-to-day rule of the church, they do directly administer it when they select their rulers through voting, and this voting function of the laity is every bit as much a God-ordained part of Presbyterian church government, and it is just as important, as whatever the elders think they are doing as officers of the church. It is a part and privilege of their exercise of the office of believer.

It should be plain that, when a man puts himself forward for office in the church, his life, especially his public life—and especially his public life as he speaks to issues that concern the government of the church—are going to come under additional scrutiny. If he is so forward as to sign complaints and make public protests, he should not be upset with anyone who calls attention to his publicly stated positions. A man can't have it both ways. If he wants to complain and protest in the courts of the church, he has to stand the light of public review and be willing to defend himself if he thinks it's to his benefit. Officers ought not to start imposing censures and cutting people off from fellowship who simply point out what they said in the public courts of the church!

What the session's action in rebuking me says is that they want us to exercise our God-ordained and substantive role in the government of the church without the benefit of understanding who it is that we're voting for. They will spoon feed us the information they think we need, in essence controlling who we vote for. They do not want us discussing among

ourselves the qualifications of the men who stand for election. They seem to think they have the right to censor and approve the communication on this subject that flows between members of the church, and we have to have our information filtered through them.

Such an idea is nowhere sanctioned in Scripture. The electing function—including an evaluation of the candidates—belongs to God’s people: From Deut 1:9,13, “At that time I [Moses] said to you, ‘I am not able to bear you by myself. . . . Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.” From Acts 6:3, “Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.” The people of God themselves are charged to evaluate those whom they elect. It is part and parcel of the electing process. In both of the verses I just cited, the congregation is explicitly commanded to evaluate the candidate’s wisdom, which is exactly what my letter to certain members of the congregation purported to do.

Douglas Bannerman of the Free Church of Scotland, son of James Bannerman, writing on the people’s part in church government says, “A living and practical interest is fostered and taken for granted on the part of each believer in the common affairs and common welfare of the Christian society, both in its local and catholic form. Means are used to inform the minds of all the brethren with respect to all matters of importance with respect to which any step has to be taken. Their concurrence is carefully noted,” (*The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, 528).

Unless our speech is sinful, it is not within the authority of the church courts to regulate it. We have the right and duty to ask ourselves and one another, “Is this the kind of man we believe ought to be leading our church?” And we have the right to answer the question by our votes. In suppressing and chilling our discussion and voting—which is what this action of our session does—they are far exceeding their authority and are not respecting the role that God has given to members of the church in the free selection of their officers. Theirs is a form of prelacy, not presbytery.

Detailed Answer to the First Charge: The Ninth Commandment

I have explained that the session’s letter of rebuke does not attempt to convince me that I committed the sins with which the session charges me. Instead of explaining how I actually violated the law, they simply stacked up a pile of scripture quotations and catechism answers on

the general subject of Christians loving one another and our duty to protect the good name of our neighbor. They emphasized a few of the clauses by changing the font color or putting them in bold type face. Indeed, that's not an argument, and it's not suited to convince anyone of anything. Simply compiling a general list like this is not all that much different from the tone-deaf statements of Job's friends who harp on a list of general truths that they think demonstrate what a great sinner Job probably was. Job's response is applicable here: "Yea, Who knoweth not such things as these?" (Job 12:3). Yes, we are supposed to protect one another's reputations. Yes, we are supposed to love one another as Christians. Does this mean that sharing information unflattering to someone's character or judgment is always slanderous or unloving? No, it does not.

There are a couple of ways one may understand the catechism statements as they address the "good name" of our neighbor. This expression, "good name," means one of two things: 1) It might be taken as a synonym for our neighbor's reputation in general, and the catechism expects us to understand that there are exceptions to the statements about his reputation that are based on other considerations about the person. This is entirely possible. As detailed as the Catechisms are, they do not contain complete descriptions of the matters they address.

Or, 2) the Catechism may be using the expression "good name" to refer to only the part of the publicly known character qualities of the man that are, in fact, good. In this case, it is slander, for example, to misrepresent the parts of his character that are commendable, but it is not slander or malicious gossip to speak of his character qualities or actions that are not commendable when what is said is true and there is good reason for bringing it to light.

For the purposes of our discussion, it doesn't matter which of these interpretations we adopt. If a distinction of the type I am describing is not, in fact, necessary and integral to a correct understanding of the biblical definition of slander or gossip, we would have to say that John the Baptist was slandering the Sadducees and Pharisees when he called them a generation of vipers (Mt 3:7). Did that not bring their names into disrepute? What about the writer of 1 Kings recording that Elijah called Ahab the real troubler of Israel (1 Kin 18:18)? Elijah probably said that in front of Obadiah. The author of 1 Kings told all the rest of us about it. Did Jesus slander the moneychangers by publicly calling them a den of thieves (Mk 11:17)? Did Luke have John Mark's reputation chiefly in mind when he described his deserting Paul and Barnabus in

Perga of Pamphylia (Ac 13:13)? How about Paul reprimanding Peter in Antioch and reporting it to the whole church in the region around Galatia (Gal 2:11)? Was that malicious gossip?

As a matter of fact, our session has been working about as hard as it can to damage my reputation. I don't think it's for any good purpose, nor is it based on sound reasoning, but they must think they are somehow allowed to do this.

There are many good reasons that someone's reputation might be publicly called into question, or the error of their teaching exposed, or the nature of their public advocacy described unfavorably to other people. In the present case, there are good reasons for demonstrating to people who have a legitimate interest in knowing, the mistaken nature and dangerous tendency of what a candidate for church office is publicly advocating in the courts of our church.

Since the session has not taken the trouble of going into the details of how these verses and confessional statements apply, they have left the statements purely in the general, and therefore what they say invokes a logical fallacy. Here is the syllogism:

Major Premise: To criticize someone publicly unjustly harms his reputation.

Minor Premise: Ben criticized Nick in public.

Therefore: Ben is guilty of unjustly harming Nick's reputation.

Only the minor premise is true. The major premise is false. That does not prove that the conclusion is necessarily false, but the session has not by any means demonstrated the truth of its conclusion. They bear the burden of proof if I am to be convicted of committing sin, and since they have not proven what they need to, I should be acquitted of this charge on this basis alone.

The Conclusion is False

Be that as it may, the conclusion they have come to is actually false. I am going to demonstrate this by asking some questions.

Questions:

1. Suppose a committee of the church were to invite Rutledge Etheridge to candidate at our church as a pastor. Mr. Etheridge is a minister in good standing in our denomination. He is a skillful preacher. Would I be guilty of malice or slander for telling people that Rut Etheridge

has marched with Black Lives Matter, and that he promotes aspects of BLM in articles posted publicly on the denominationally oriented blog site, *Gentle Reformation*?

Let's disentangle the question of slander or gossip from the size of the audience to whom it is communicated. We'll come back to the question of the size of the audience later.

2. How large an audience is required when speaking slanderous words for it to be considered slander? Can you slander someone when speaking to only one person? Yes you can. So the essence of slander or gossip is not dependent on how many hearers there are. We'll proceed along that line for a while.
3. Let's go back to Mr. Etheridge. Suppose a man in the congregation and I were discussing the hypothetical election. Would I be committing sin if I told this man what I had learned about Mr. Etheridge's advocacy of Black Lives Matter? Would you say that I slandered Mr. Etheridge or maliciously gossiped about him, and take action against me, tantamount to casting me out of the church?
4. What if one of the women of the church were recommending that a woman's book study read and discuss Faith Martin's book, *Call Me Blessed: The Emerging Christian Woman*? Mrs. Martin is a woman in our denomination whom I do not believe was ever disciplined for writing this book. Would I be guilty of unjustly harming Faith Martin's reputation if I discouraged my daughters from attending this proposed book study because the book attacks the biblical principle of male headship and authority in the family and the church? I think you can hardly say that I am committing a sin by doing so. If you want to go on record as defending such a position, let us all know. Let's be honest about this. Is this where you are?
5. Let's continue. What if the church, a year or two ago, had invited Rosaria Butterfield to speak to the women of our church. Suppose I told my adult daughters that they should be wary of Mrs. Butterfield's doctrine of hospitality because at that time, and in her book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, she said that exercising hospitality requires us to use the preferred pronouns of so-called transgendered people. Would I be maliciously gossiping about Mrs. Butterfield by discouraging my daughters, or anyone else, from receiving such teaching? Perhaps you are aware that Mrs. Butterfield, within the past year, has confessed that her statements on transgender pronouns in that book were sinful. But recall, we're talking about a hypothetical situation occurring before her confession. Are you going to claim that I would have been mistreating Mrs. Butterfield by making known her public advocacy of the use of transgender pronouns?
6. Now, what if I told only my wife that Mrs. Butterfield was still a lesbian? Would that be slander? Yes it certainly would be slander, even though I told only one person and it was someone as close to me as my wife.

7. Why? What's the difference this time? In the one case the information is true, she did teach and promote the use of transgender pronouns, and in the second case the information is false. She is no longer a lesbian.
8. Let's suppose I said to a friend of mine that the last time I heard Rosaria Butterfield speak in public she emitted a loud burp after the fourth word she said. Let's suppose it's true, that she did do this. If I were only trying to embarrass her, this would be a mild form of malicious gossip. But suppose the friend were the sound technician at our church and I was trying to get him to enable the burp filter on the microphone when it came time for her to speak. Would that be malicious? No. Just the opposite.

I hope we can all agree: For communication to be considered slander or malicious gossip it either has to contain false information that reflects negatively on someone, or it may be true information that is not shared for a good purpose or reason. I don't have the right to share such information, and I submit to you, by the same token, the session does not have the right to share such information either.

That being the case, if my accurately reporting the facts and context of Nick Ritenour's support for the complaint against the Synod Judicial Commission constitutes an unjust harm to his reputation, it follows that the session also commits the same sin if it shares that same information with the same person or group of people, even if it's just an individual seeking advice on how to vote. This necessary conclusion, I think you will have to agree, is absurd.

I know the session will want to say they think I don't have the authority to share publicly available information bearing on an election, whereas they are the sole guardians of such information. But here they veer off course. We're not discussing the source of this information, but whether the information is slanderous or malicious in and of itself. If it is, they don't have any more right to share it than I do. Indeed, when an authority figure does share slanderous information, his authority—far from giving him the right to commit slander—is an aggravation of the slander because it adds the perception of legitimacy to the slander. The issue of authority does not come into the definition of slander proper except insofar as it might aggravate it. Matters of authority come under the Fifth Commandment, not the Ninth Commandment. We are here trying to determine the nature of slander or gossip itself, and the legitimacy of the content of information. It's not a question at this point of who has the right to share the information.

I said I would come back to the question of the size of the audience to whom an alleged slander is spoken. I have alluded to aggravation of sin just now. The number of people with

whom slanderous information is shared only has bearing on aggravation of the sin of slander—the larger the audience, the greater the aggravation. If the information is not slander or gossip, it cannot be aggravated, and therefore the number of people with whom it is shared is irrelevant.

I contend that my statements about Mr. Ritenour did not unjustly harm his reputation. My report accurately explained what he advocated—not merely what he did, but what he advocated—in a public court of our church. I did so for the purpose of guarding the purity and long-term peace of our church. The session obviously disputes my right to be publicly concerned with the purity and long-term peace of the church, but they can't say that my purpose in bringing this matter to the attention of our brethren was simply to shame our brother Nick.

Far from it. I avoided even using his name, or anybody's name—even Jared Olivetti's—in my letter. I thought that if some readers did not want to take the trouble to go to the public records I cited, they weren't concerned enough to take the matter seriously and didn't have any reason to know who I was talking about. I explicitly commended Mr. Ritenour as a kind and gracious man with wisdom in many areas, a man I nearly nominated as elder myself, calling him a good man, and making it clear that I was not accusing him of sin. My criticism was very narrowly focused, and I showed the consistency of this criticism with the sentiments of the vast majority of the Synod. I was deeply sorry that it was necessary to write what I did, knowing that it would likely make Mr. Ritenour and others whose names appeared with his on the complaint feel bad. I spoke to Mr. Ritenour before I sent the letter to ascertain whether his views were still the same, I sent the letter in plenty of time for him to respond to it, and I sent him a separate email inviting him to respond if he wished to do so, offering him my mailing list, and telling him how sorry I was that I felt it necessary to write the original letter.

I wish to state here clearly that the session's insinuation, in the letter of rebuke they gave me, that I have called Mr. Ritenour's service as a deacon into question, or his character as a fellow believer into question, is absolutely false and baseless. There is nothing I said about his general character that was not commendatory. These men on the session should be ashamed of the sloppy way they have accused me of sin in this regard simply because they wanted to use a particular Bible verse to support their case.

We should pause to ask why my bringing this public action to the attention of people in our church would make those associated with it so sorry. I myself filed a complaint with the Synod in the fairly recent past. If someone wants to point out to people in our church that I filed the complaint, and even explain why they disagree with me, I wouldn't have the least problem with it as long as they portrayed what I did and the content of my complaint accurately. It wouldn't cross my mind to charge such a person with slander, even less to try to get him ejected from the church. If Mr. Ritenour's complaint were good and noble, why are we so upset that it has been brought out into the light of day? Why does this harm his reputation? Maybe there is something wrong with the complaint. Maybe that's where we should be looking for a problem.

Prejudice, Partiality, and Hypocrisy

Before I close, I have some further questions that demonstrate the partiality and hypocrisy of the session in bringing these charges against me. Our Book of Discipline, Section II, ch. 4, sec. 10 states that grounds of appeal include "manifest prejudice or unfairness to the party on trial." From the Synod records it can be shown that the session has unfairly targeted me for prosecution, while other members of our congregation are allowed not only to discuss but to write public documents critical of the conduct of members of our church courts.

As described above under the third charge, the session disputes the right of the people of the congregation to discuss matters of larger church controversy among themselves.

9. An officer election, as I pointed out earlier, is the only direct administration of church government that the Bible commits to ordinary members of the church. If ordinary members can't even talk to one another about church issues as they bear on an officer election, how is it that they are allowed to bring up church matters in conversation with one another when it comes to the behavior of the church courts, where the elders are the only direct administrators? In other words, if it's inappropriate for lay members to discuss a church officer election, is it not even more inappropriate for them to discuss matters that come before the courts of the church in general?
10. If we're not supposed to be discussing such matters, how is it that people like Megan Hanson, Rafa and Sarah Perez, and Nick and Esther Ritenour (all coincidentally members of the family of David Hanson) know about the details of this Presbytery and Synod issue—enough so that they feel confident in signing a complaint about it? They have obviously been discussing it among themselves and with others, have they not? Why is it acceptable for these lay people to discuss these church matters, but not for me?

11. *More importantly*, how did they learn in the first place about the issue that concerned them? They're not members of the session or the presbytery, or delegates to Synod. Obviously, somebody informed them of these Synod matters—and, it's apparent that this person shared with them more than what was public information. Why is this person who provided their information allowed to discuss Synod matters, public and private, with the laity whereas I am forbidden to discuss even purely public issues?
12. As an example of non-public information shared by the informant, Mr. Ritenour told me how disturbed he was at what he claims is the extreme bias of a certain member of the Synod Judicial Commission, and he named him specifically. Is that a slanderous reflection on this man's character that Mr. Ritenour shared with me? Where did the information that informed his opinion come from?

The presbytery is aware, I know, that this accusation of bias on the part of the church courts and its commissioners is not an isolated thing. Some of the members of our session have made these claims against every church court or commission that has investigated the West Lafayette church issue: Faith Church in West Lafayette, the GLG Presbyterial Judicial Commission, the Synod Judicial Commission. Every one of them is somehow biased, and these men have been writing and signing documents saying so, they have been telling the people of our congregation that these commissions are biased, they have even been naming members of these commissions individually as such, and they have been telling people of our congregation that the Synod Judicial Commission exceeded its mandate and acted improperly.

13. How are these grave accusations against the courts of our church to be justified? "Contempt for the courts of the church" is one of the three categories of sin explicitly identified in the Book of Discipline.
14. Tell me, why are members of our session allowed harshly and continuously to criticize our church courts and denigrate the character of its members, while I stand rebuked simply for saying that I agree with our Synod that the people who signed this complaint showed bad judgment and demonstrate a lack of understanding of Presbyterian government?

For this I am tried *in absentia* and censured more severely than some of you thought the West Lafayette elders deserved for negligence that led to the sexual abuse of little children. All I can say is, the Lord look on it. The Lord bear witness.

Appendix A:

Letter of Ben Manning to Certain Members of SSRPC

7 April 2023

Dear friends,

I am writing to bring to your attention an issue of importance in our church. I realize this is a long email, and I apologize for its length ahead of time. Nonetheless, I hope you will take the time to read it because of the importance of the subject. I have tried to make it simpler to read by head-lining sections in bold type.

The scandal in West Lafayette and the failure of our presbytery to deal with it

As many of you are aware, for the past couple of years our presbytery has been enmeshed in a serious and—within our presbytery, at least—irresolvable conflict with respect to a serial, predatory child abuse case in the Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church congregation in West Lafayette, involving at least 15 victims and over 100 documented incidents. The perpetrator of the crimes is identified in redacted public church documents as the son of the pastor who was serving at the time [*Report of the Immanuel Judicial Commission*, pp. 6, 13]. The young man was convicted in juvenile court and essentially incarcerated for committing what would have been multiple felonies if he had been an adult.

You may also be aware that upon the failure of our presbytery to adequately address the problem (the Presbytery was basically divided into two parties that differed radically in how to deal with it), our Synod, the national governing body of our church, finally had to step in and resolve the matter by removing the Immanuel RPC elders and the pastor from office. This was because, among other things, they failed to adequately protect the children of the congregation for 9 to 15 months after learning of the abuse (some of the West Lafayette elders learned of the abuse later than others). The pastor was offered mediation in order to avoid a church discipline trial, but he was not cooperative. A trial was then called, he was summoned twice, but he refused to appear in court.

The Synod's judicial commission conducting the trial determined unanimously that the pastor ought no longer to be a minister in the church of Jesus Christ (*i.e.*, not just in the RPCNA). The Presbytery's own investigatory commission had come to the same conclusion a year earlier, and another church in West Lafayette outside of the RPCNA (a church that was involved in counseling the Immanuel session and at least one victim of the abuse) concluded, "The father of the abuser should resign his position at the church, along with any other church leaders who had knowledge of these facts." The magnitude of the pastor's sin in this affair is indicated in that the commission of Synod convicted him of breaking eight of the Ten Commandments, and in

failing to manage his household well (a requirement for church office as specified in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and Titus 1:6).

A summary of church action, along with the public documents, may be found at the web site link below. A minister from elsewhere in our denomination has seen the necessity of collecting this information, summarizing it, and making it available to the church at large. It is otherwise difficult to understand the enormity of the scandal and the extremely poor way in which our presbytery handled it:

<https://peacepurityprogress.com/summary/>

How does this tragic history relate to our upcoming elder election? It is important for church members voting in this election to be aware that one of the candidates on the ballot has signed a public complaint objecting to both the trial of the West Lafayette pastor and the verdict of the Synod Commission in finding him guilty. The signatures of the complainants are found on p. 341 of the Synod Minutes for 2022, here

[2022 Minutes of Synod, pp. 339, ff.](#)

To give you an idea of how unsound the vast majority of elders in our denomination view this complaint, it was rejected by Synod on a vote of 120 to 13.

To be fair to our elder candidate, there were many signatures on this complaint from ordinary members of the churches, mostly from the West Lafayette, Second RP and Southside congregations. Our own senior pastor and a retired minister who is now a member of our church both felt so strongly that Synod was wrong to reject this complaint and overturn their discipline, that they asked that their names be recorded in public protest against the Synod vote. Similar complaints emanating from our presbytery were rejected by Synod majorities of 109 to 14, 117 to 9, 114 to 6, and 125 to 1, often with the same protesters voicing their strong dissent at the conclusion of the votes.

Whatever you want to think about these votes and the protests against them, it should at least be clear to you that this vocal minority from our presbytery—a group of men that for the past couple of years has been instrumental in preventing any disciplinary action that would remove the West Lafayette session or its pastor from office—is an anomaly within our denomination.

I am sorry that I have felt compelled to bring this matter to your attention. The elder candidate in question is someone I both like and admire, and one whom I had even considered nominating for elder myself. After speaking to him personally about the presence of his signature on this document, he nonetheless affirms that he continues to stand by what is written. If there is a question about the legitimacy of my sharing this with you, the fact is, this is all public information, and I am sharing it with you in a manner that is consistent with the nature of the events described and documents cited. My comments are necessarily colored by my own perspective, but they nonetheless coincide with the majority view of the Synod. However, I am

sending this information early enough for you to ask the elder candidate himself about these matters if you think it will help you better understand the issues at stake.

Why is this a large enough concern that I deemed it necessary to write to you? Let me first be clear that this is not an accusation of sin against this good man. It instead concerns 1) his judgment and 2) his adherence to the Presbyterian form of government contained in our constitutional documents.

The question of good judgment may be gauged both by the overwhelming response of Synod to the complaint that our elder candidate signed, and the facts surrounding the case in general. There is no question that the West Lafayette pastor needed to be removed from office, and it should have happened long before it finally did. One of the main reasons that it took so long was because of protests and complaints—very similar in substance to the one we are talking about—that prevented the Presbytery from taking swift and essential action. According to the Synod Judicial Committee oral report to the 2022 Synod, “Five courts of this denomination have been involved over the past 26 months and this Synod will be the sixth. We must come to resolution of the matter and not delay the ecclesiastical judicial process any longer.” If the complaint under consideration had been successful in reversing Synod’s discipline, this unfit man would still be pastor of the West Lafayette congregation today.

As it stands, the work of our entire church has been side-tracked (8,000 to 10,000 man hours at the Synod level alone) and our presbytery and the Synod beset with expensive lawsuits (perhaps this is news to you). And all of this over a matter that has several plain and simple answers in Scripture, any one of which disqualifies a man like the former pastor of the West Lafayette church from being a church officer (“One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence,” 1 Tim 3:4; “A man... having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination,” Tit 1:6; “Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside,” 1 Tim 3:7; “You shall not bear false witness,” Ex 20:16).

Regarding fidelity to the Presbyterian form of government, it needs to be understood that in addition to protesting the conviction of the West Lafayette pastor, the complaint we are discussing also requested that the Synod judiciary action be voided in favor of “an independent, professional, and unbiased investigation.” As good as that might sound on first hearing, it is not the way biblical Presbyterian government works. It is certainly true that professionals may be consulted by presbyterial investigators—as many of them were by both the Synod investigators and the earlier Presbytery investigatory commission. These commissions of the church even included several professionals experienced in child welfare (attorneys, professional counselors, a Department of Child Services employee, a police officer) who were also elders. But the investigation is to be carried out by elders in the church, not by “independent” professional agencies.

A lack of confidence in the efficacy of Presbyterian government to deal with this situation has been part-and-parcel of the objections to disciplining the West Lafayette session and the church’s pastor throughout these proceedings. Here are some examples:

- I was present at the 2021 Synod when one minister in a floor speech explicitly claimed that Presbyterianism was incapable of dealing with such matters and that what was needed was a few men to gather around the offenders and just work it out informally—no discipline.
- One of the more troubling and unreasonable objections that has been advanced is that there is secret information that can't be revealed, but which exonerates the men involved from many of the charges against them. This principle, of course, overthrows any attempt to exercise church discipline and hence to govern the church at all.
- Again, the wider church has been led to believe that the West Lafayette issue is just too complicated for anyone to understand, and so it can't be adjudicated. Let me quote from the oral report of the Synod Judicial Commission to the 2022 Synod: "Another recurring question I must address is the narrative that thinks this is 'too complex a situation for our denomination.' . . . When the truth became known, and when the evidence was organized and presented, it wasn't as complex a case as hyped. That evidence and the accompanying testimony was clear and convincing."

Given the supermajority votes in favor of the Synod Judicial Commission's actions, the oral report of the Commission to the 2022 meeting of Synod is a good short summary of how the church leadership outside of our own presbytery views this matter, and I commend it to you if you want to understand the matter further:

[Oral Report SJC to Synod \(wordpress.com\)](#)

I have taken the trouble to write to you because, even though these documents and the complaint we have been discussing are matters of public record, I doubted whether most of you knew about them and realized the scope of what you were voting on. You will be voting, in part, on questions of the nature of church government, the nature of church office, and how we are to interpret the scriptural qualifications for it. As a Presbyterian, you are voting on the impact our local church election has on the wider church. As it turns out, that impact can be far-reaching and may involve grave consequences.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Manring
10285 S Auburn Hills Dr
Edinburgh, IN 46124
(C) 812-344-7160
(H) 812-703-1240
Ben@ManringFamily.net

Appendix B



Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis

May 9, 2023

Mr. Ben Manring
10285 S Auburn Hills Drive
Edinburgh, Indiana. 46124

Dear Ben,

We, the Southside Session, are formally writing to you to address your email with the subject line “West Lafayette church issue as related to our elder election” that was distributed to many in the congregation on April 7, 2023.

Our Lord and his apostles give commands in scripture to the church describing how we are to treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. A survey of numerous New Testament texts that include the words “one another” yield a wealth of wisdom. We are commanded to *love* one another, to pursue *unity* and *peace* with one another, and to demonstrate an attitude of *humility* and *deference* to one another. For example:

*This is My commandment, that you love **one another**, just as I have loved you.* John 15:12

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to **one another** with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to **one another**; ... Be of the same mind toward **one another**. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.* Romans 12:9-10, 16

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with **one another** in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Ephesians 4:1-3

Our Catechisms’ exposition of God’s law makes it clear that the duties required, and the sins forbidden demand that we give careful attention when dealing with “the good name of our neighbor.”

LC Q. 144. *What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, **the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor**, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in **their good name**; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

LC Q. 145. *What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all **prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors**, as well as our own, **especially in public judicature**; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and **holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice**; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; **unnecessary discovering of infirmities**; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any; endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

At our April 11, 2023, session meeting, the elders judged your email to be an uncharitable communication about brothers and sisters in Christ and disruptive to the peace and harmony of the church.

Uncharitable communication — In the email, you publicly brought into question the fitness of a man to serve as an elder, one who is a member in good standing and presently serving well as a deacon. *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.* (1Timothy 3:13). If elected by the congregation, he will in due time be examined by Session before proceeding to serve.

Disruptive to the peace and harmony of the church — In the email, you have shown disrespect for the courts of the church by taking it upon yourself to instruct the congregation directly how they should vote in the elder election. Session has given the instruction we deem appropriate and necessary for the elder election and left it as a matter of private judgement for communicant members to vote for qualified men. Our Presbyterian system of government provides a process for appealing decisions of a court. You have circumvented this process.

We as your elders and brothers in Christ judge that your April 7, 2023, email is worthy of censure. *Therefore, this Court of Christ's Church sadly and solemnly rebukes you for your sin. You are commanded to give evidence of sincere repentance, and to be more watchful, studying to know and do the will of God.*

We are praying that you will receive our rebuke with godly humility and follow with godly actions of repentance and reconciliation.

Yours in the Chief Shepherd,
The Session of Southside Indianapolis Reformed Presbyterian Church

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis
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Indianapolis, Indiana 46217-4037 office@ssrpc.org
(317) 787-1211 www.ssrpc.org
Senior Pastor David W. Hanson ~ Associate Pastor Ian E. Wise

Appendix C

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Steve Sturm** <stevesturm@pobox.com>

Date: Tue, May 23, 2023 at 10:03 AM

Subject: Communication from Session

To: Elizabeth Manring <elizabeth.manring@gmail.com>

Dear Congregation,

On April 7, many of you received an email from Ben Manring, with the heading, 'West Lafayette church issue as related to our church election.' It is the judgment of your Session of Elders that this was an uncharitable and divisive communication, disruptive to the peace of the Church. In keeping with the public nature of the offense, we are notifying you that Session has issued our brother Ben a rebuke.

As the Book of Discipline says, the goal of a rebuke is to 'call for repentance and reformation of life.' Please be in ongoing and earnest prayer for this situation.

Southside Session

Complaint

To Steve Sturm, Clerk of Session, and David Hanson, Session Moderator, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis (hereinafter SSRPC) of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

And now, this 7th day of June, 2023, comes Ben Manning, member of SSRPC, and complains against the action of the session of SSRPC in connection with a censure of rebuke administered by said session to the complainant on May 9, 2023, and in support of said complaint sets forth the following summary and reasons.

Summary

On April 7, 2023, the complainant (from now on referred to in the first person) sent a letter to certain members of the congregation of SSRPC informing them of the presence of public documents available on the website PeacePurityProgress.com that had a bearing on our upcoming elder election. One of the candidates for office in the congregational election had signed a complaint, a public document, demonstrating his opposition to the removal of Jared Olivetti, former pastor of the Immanuel RPC, West Lafayette, Indiana from office by the Synod Judicial Commission in March 2022. It is not irrelevant, given subsequent events, to point out that the elder candidate at the center of this controversy happens to be our senior pastor's brother-in-law. My letter was intended to render this public information accessible to certain of the voting members of the congregation in order to allow them to make an informed decision in the upcoming election.

The session of SSRPC took strong exception to my writing this letter and administered a formal rebuke to me a month later, without ever speaking to me about it or informing me of their charges ahead of time. It is significant that the session did not charge me with having misrepresented or distorted the facts that I reported. They claim that my letter was uncharitable, that it disturbed the peace of the church, and that I circumvented the alleged authority of the session to control the specific information that the congregation may be apprised of respecting an election. They afterwards (May 23) made this rebuke public, despite my having told them

previously in writing (Apr 29) and twice orally (May 9 and 16) that I would be appealing their sentence, which according to our Book of Discipline should have stopped further action on their part.

A separate notice of appeal on the substantive matters of the session's rebuke has been submitted to the session and the presbytery clerk. A full appeal will be submitted within the timeframe specified by BOD Sec. II, Ch. 4, sec. 11. Those interested in the details of the case may find them in that forthcoming documentation; the original letter I wrote to certain members of the congregation is itself already contained as an Appendix in the notice of appeal.

This present complaint is directed toward the gross procedural violations of the session's action, while the appeal is directed toward the unsubstantiable accusations of sin and issues of church government implicated in the session's rebuke. These separate issues are being divided to prevent mere matters of procedure from obscuring important questions of doctrine and practice that have been undermined by the session's charges. Therefore, I am not asking that the charges against me be dismissed based on the procedural matters discussed below. Rather, I am hoping that the presbytery will admonish the men who have been responsible for the unbiblical and unloving manner in which the session has proceeded against me and will take measures to ensure that these men will be submissive in the future to the procedures laid out in the Book of Discipline, and the Biblical precepts upon which they are based, for dealing with sin or alleged sin in the church. I am aware that by dividing these issues and insisting that I be heard on the doctrinal questions I am reducing the likelihood that the charges against me will be dismissed. I trust in the Lord that he will make good to me what he has promised, and I affirm that however this turns out, he is my confidence and hope.

Infractions

1. The session made no attempt to discuss its concerns with me before they imposed a severe, formal ecclesiastical censure against me.
2. The censure itself was harsh.

3. After summoning me to a stated session meeting, the session completely ignored three emails and then a formal motion that I submitted on May 5, requesting either 1) an informal meeting with one or two of the elders in advance, or 2) that the session would at least specify what their complaint or charges against me were.
4. Without warning, the session surprised me with a rebuke delivered in the midst of a full session meeting with 9 elders, and me by myself with no counsel.
5. The charges listed in the rebuke are framed in such general terms that it is impossible to understand in what way my words are to be construed as a violation of God's law.
6. The session allotted only 10 minutes for me to reply.
7. A week after administering the rebuke, the session agreed to listen to a 40-minute rebuttal of their charges as a potential means of avoiding an appeal by me to the higher courts of the church. They did not reply at all to my defense, and refused to answer questions I asked them during the presentation. Their only response was, one week after this, to inform the congregation, by an email to all communicant members, that I had been rebuked and that the congregation was to pray for my repentance and the reformation of my life (as if there were some ongoing sin in my life that needed correction).
8. Even though the session was informed, both in writing and orally, that I would be filing an appeal, they proceeded to make the censure public, a violation of BOD Sec. II, Ch. 4, sec. 12.
9. The public rebuke was delivered by email to all communicant members, including people who have long since left the church, except for my wife and myself, who did not receive a copy of it. We were only able to see the public form of the rebuke because our children shared it with us.
10. I have apparently been permanently removed from the general church news email list—from the time at which the session's rebuke was made public (May 23) I have received no general weekly church emails—this is a testimony to the pettiness of the retaliation that characterizes this session's dealing with me.

Evidence and Discussion

I will now present evidence substantiating the above list of infractions.

1. It is a simple fact that the session made no attempt to discuss with me their charges before administering this rebuke, putting me on trial without my knowledge and convicting me *in absentia*. If a church court believes a member of the church to be guilty of sin, the Book of Discipline requires the court to “contact that member in love and with care, and shall investigate the allegations,” (BOD Sec. I, Ch. 3, sec. 2). The object, as is evident from this statement is first to determine whether actual sin has occurred, and secondly, assuming it has, to gain the sinner’s repentance: “If the sinner confesses and repents, there must be forgiveness and reconciliation,” (BOD Sec. I, Ch. 3, sec. 3). Obviously, none of this can occur if the court refuses to engage the accused in conversation or to consider an answer that he might have to offer in his own defense. This is a basic standard of Christian behavior, even when individual Christians deal with other individuals regarding matters of sin. For a session that includes men who have been elders for 20, 30 and even 40 years to ignore such fundamental principles of equity and grace is inexcusable.
2. The censure itself was harsh. Some of the men on this session had previously recommended only a censure of *Admonition* for a group of elders who were guilty of gross negligence over the course of at least 15 months that led to the sexual abuse of numerous children. I, on the other hand, wrote one letter, which I believe any impartial reader would have difficulty showing contains error or ill-will, and I am deemed worthy of the harsher censure of *Rebuke*. A *Rebuke* is intended to address persistent sin. Form 28 for *Rebuke* in the RPCNA Constitution says, “You _____, *by your continued neglect* of your Christian duty and by the sin of _____, have brought reproach on yourself, and *have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to mock and curse* [emphases mine].” Is that really what I did in writing a letter to let people know about relevant public information bearing on our election?
3. The session’s summons and refusal to describe their charges or the purpose of the meeting made me suspect that they were going to try something of the sort described under item 1. I therefore made an explicit request by email, first to Pastor Hanson, then to all the session, that a couple of them either meet with me informally first, or that the court at least specify what their charges against me were. They refused to do this. I then submitted a formal motion to the court with this same request. They ignored my motion completely, not

even acknowledging that they received it. The documentation of this sequence of communications is found in Appendix A.

We can say that this is unprofessional behavior, which it certainly is. The civil courts operate in a much more orderly fashion. Here is the description of a Civil Summons from a law dictionary: "A civil summons accompanies a complaint in a civil lawsuit or family law matter.... The summons specifies the court in which the action is filed, and information about answering the lawsuit. The complaint provides comprehensive information about the lawsuit itself." In other words, you are not summoned into a criminal or even a civil court without the charges against you being specified and opportunity being given you for a defense.

Beyond considerations of professionalism, though, it is patently unbiblical to refuse the request of a brother you are accusing of sin to meet with him. The biblical pattern is to reduce the escalation of disciplinary matters to the lowest level possible (Mt 18:15-17). In contrast, the session, refusing all overture to reduce the escalation, escalated the matter immediately and imposed the highest degree of censure that they thought they could possibly get away with, even making the matter public.

4. Upon my arrival at the session meeting on May 9, there was no attempt to discuss anything with me. I sat down. The moderator read a letter of rebuke and handed it to me. It seemed to be intended to take me by surprise. The nine elders sat silently and just looked at me. I managed to keep my temper, but this kind of action without warning is simply provoking and mean-spirited. Ephesians 6:2 says, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath."
5. The rebuke from the session itself is contained in Appendix B. This rebuke is essentially a listing of sins connected with the Ninth Commandment and a statement of the general obligation for Christians to love one another. There is no explanation of how my words constituted a violation of the law and, in particular, it is not possible to distinguish whether their accusations of my violation of the Ninth Commandment involve a charge of slander or of malicious gossip. I assume that it is not slander because I'm sure they would have specified misrepresentation of the truth if they thought they could demonstrate it. However, my point is, the rebuke itself does not contain an argument intended to persuade me that I broke the law. It is not an attempt to gain my repentance, which I am convinced has not been any part of their object in this entire matter.

6. After a minute's reflection during the session meeting at which the rebuke was delivered, described under item 4, I asked if I might be granted an opportunity to reply. They said I could have 10 minutes. I said that I did not regard that as a genuine opportunity to reply to their charges and that I would be appealing to the presbytery. They said they had no time to talk to me further that evening but, in order to avoid a potential appeal, they agreed to reassemble the following week to give me an opportunity to defend myself and ask them to reconsider.
7. I did come back and presented a 40-minute defense the next week. However, none of them interacted with anything I said, and they declined to answer several questions that I asked during the presentation. The substance of this defense will appear in my appeal, but again, my point is that this group of men made no attempt to discuss with me their charges, to refute my answer, or to persuade me that I had sinned. You might think they would say something like, "Mr. Manring, we hear what you are saying, but here is why you are wrong." Instead, a week later they simply sent me a note saying they would be publishing notice of the rebuke publicly. This is nothing less than an answering of reason with force and it is entirely out of accord with biblical church process. See the email from Steve Sturm in Appendix C.
8. The session's making this rebuke public is a violation of BOD Sec. II, Ch. 4, sec. 12, "The notice of appeal shall serve to restrain the lower court from administering the censures of admonition or rebuke until the case has been determined by the higher court." Both during my defense on May 16, and at the session meeting on May 9, I told the session that I would be appealing their decision to a higher court. I had also expressed the same intention to appeal by email in writing on April 29 (see my email of April 29 in Appendix A), prospectively considering that they might try such a thing as to administer a formal admonition without speaking to me or hearing me. The BOD gives me 30 days to file a notice of appeal, and all of this together should have restrained their action. This illegal measure is only further testimony that these men are not seeking my repentance, but are simply retaliating against my challenge of their iron control on the information our church may receive regarding an officer election.
- 9, 10. Lastly, my name has been removed from the email distribution list of the church following the session's notification that the rebuke would be made public. They didn't send

me or my wife a copy of the public announcement, but it went to people who have not been attending our services for months and possibly years. I had to get a copy from my children who were kept on the list. See the copy in Appendix D. Since the public announcement of the rebuke I have not received any email from the church as I had up until that time. This is improper, petty and unnecessary.

Requested Remediation

Matthew Henry, commenting on Isaiah 66:5, writes, "It is no new thing for church censures to be misapplied, and for her artillery, which was intended for her defense, to be turned against her best friends." I can at least say that I aspire to be one of the church's friends, despite the ill-founded view that my own elders have taken of me simply for writing a letter that tended to thwart their desires for the outcome of a church election. These men have abused me publicly and have refused to deal with me according to any semblance of justice. The boldness of their neglect and lack of care for proper order demonstrates that they have little fear for the consequences of their misdeeds being brought under review of the higher church courts. It makes me wonder what has happened to other individuals who have become the subjects of their ire but who have, instead, just left the church in discouragement. I believe they thought I would do the same thing and would just leave the church. This is not the pattern that is followed by sound ministers of the Christ who laid down his life for the sheep; rather it is akin to the behavior of the ungodly Diotrephes who would cast the very brethren out of the church (3 Jn 10).

My belief is that the men on this session require stern admonition, significant remedial education for how to conduct church discipline, and must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the presbytery that their repentance is genuine. I also request that they apologize to me and my wife individually and in person for the way they have treated me, and for the stress they have inflicted on us as a family. We have been made to feel most unwelcome in this local body of Christ. Something should also be said of the valuable time they have wasted of mine, of their own, and of the officers in the wider church who now must adjudicate this matter. I also request that the presbytery patiently hear my forthcoming appeal on the substantive matters of sound church polity and equity that have been called into question in the session's spurious charges.

Appendix A

Evidence demonstrating the SSRPC session's refusal to meet with me or specify what the charges against me were prior to delivering their censure of rebuke

From: David Hanson <davidrpts@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 2:18 PM
To: Ben@ManringFamily.Net; Steve Sturm <stevesturm@pobox.com>
Subject: Meeting with the session

Ben,

The session would like to meet with you regarding your recent e-mail to many in the congregation concerning the elder election. Our regular May session meeting is on the 9th, but if you are still coming up to Indianapolis on Saturdays to protest at the clinic, we might be able to meet up then or on a different weeknight if we can make it work.

Anyway, if you would let us know 2 dates in the next couple of weeks that would work well for you, we can check with the elders and get something set up. Otherwise, we can just include a time with you on the 5/9 agenda.

In Christ,
DWH

From: Ben@ManringFamily.Net <Ben@ManringFamily.Net>
Sent: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 8:32 PM
To: 'David Hanson' <davidrpts@hotmail.com>; 'Steve Sturm' <stevesturm@pobox.com>
Subject: RE: Meeting with the session

Dear David,

I'm happy to talk to you about my letter, but since I don't expect that you are asking me to come in to receive a commendation for writing it, I'd like to know what it is that you object to before I join a meeting on the subject with all of you. I've been straightforward with you, CC'ing the session on what I wrote. I shared only public information, but if you think I misrepresented you in some way inconsistent with what you or Nick did in public, please let me know what that is so that I might understand ahead of time what you want to discuss.

Yours sincerely,

Ben

Ben Manring
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Edinburgh, IN 46124
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(H) 812-703-1240
Ben@ManringFamily.net

From: David Hanson <davidrpts@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 26, 2023 3:08 PM
To: Ben@ManringFamily.Net; 'Steve Sturm' <stevesturm@pobox.com>
Subject: Re: Meeting with the session

Hi Ben,

The session believes that we have things to say to you that are important to say in person and not via e-mail. We are not expecting you to respond within the initial meeting itself, so you don't need to prepare anything ahead of time. In many regards, the optimum time for us would be at our regular session meeting of 5/9, but we were trying to save you a trip if we could all make it work.

In Christ, DWH

From: Ben@ManringFamily.Net <Ben@ManringFamily.Net>
Sent: Wednesday, April 26, 2023 8:43 PM
To: 'David Hanson' <davidrpts@hotmail.com>; 'Steve Sturm' <stevesturm@pobox.com>
Cc: session@ssrpc.org <session@ssrpc.org>
Subject: RE: Meeting with the session

David,

I don't mean to be disrespectful, but you are summoning me to a court of the church. You have every right to do that, but if you are going to proceed with this degree of formality, I should be apprised of the charges or complaints or whatever it is that you want to lay against me. If you think I have erred in a way that warrants less than a court summons, the scriptural method is to come to me, either by yourself or with someone else—and I'm willing to meet you somewhere more convenient for you on those

terms—but to call me to appear in court on such general grounds has the appearance of an act of intimidation. I wish you would reconsider.

Sincerely,



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Ben@ManringFamily.net

From: David Hanson <davidrpts@hotmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 28, 2023 1:15 PM
To: Ben@ManringFamily.Net; 'Steve Sturm' <stevesturm@pobox.com>
Subject: Re: Meeting with the session

Hi Ben,

To reiterate, the session asked me to set up a time for you to meet with the session. I don't have the authority to modify that request on my own. We would like for you to meet with us @ 7:30 p.m. on May 9 @ the church unless that doesn't work for you.

In Christ,

David

From: Ben@ManringFamily.Net <Ben@ManringFamily.Net>
Sent: Saturday, April 29, 2023 5:07 PM
To: 'David Hanson' <davidrpts@hotmail.com>; 'Steve Sturm' <stevesturm@pobox.com>
Cc: 'session@ssrpc.org' <session@ssrpc.org>
Subject: RE: Meeting with the session

David,

I'm obviously not asking you to modify the decision on your own. You saw that I CC'ed the session on my request. There has been no session meeting since I sent my letter to a number of members of the congregation, yet you had some sort of meeting to discuss my letter, so it is plain that you have the ability to meet briefly and discuss such matters

as the request I made in my last email. To claim that you don't have any authority to deal with my simple request prior to a session meeting that is more than 10 days away seems disingenuous.

Please discuss this among yourselves. I regard your request for a meeting of the kind you suggest, namely in church court, refusing to tell me what you want to talk about, as unjust and ungracious. I have offered to meet you privately, or with a companion from the session if you wish. If you insist on forcing me to appear in church court on these unreasonable terms, I will do so, but it will be done under protest and may form part of an appeal to the higher courts of our church.

As you seem so intent on meeting with me without telling me what your objection is, it seems to me that you have probably made some decision in my absence and simply wish to inform me what it is. If you intend to admonish me or rebuke me, I hope you will give the idea careful consideration. Supposing you are unable to convince me that I have sinned, I will certainly appeal such a sentence. [Highlighting is not in the original email, but is inserted here to demonstrate that I communicated my intention in writing to appeal their sentence]. Since there is no presbytery meeting between now and the next meeting of synod, this will drag on for more than a year, and is certainly not something I want to have to be involved in myself or to involve you in.

I recall that the commission tasked by our presbytery to implement the steps of repentance imposed by the West Lafayette Presbytery Judicial Commission, a commission that was made up partially of members of our session and congregation, thought that an admonition was a sufficient sentence for a group of elders who, among other things, negligently allowed children in their congregation to continue being sexually abused for a year or more. Are you prepared to place me in the same category for performing what I regarded as a duty to inform members of our congregation that Nick Ritenour signed a public complaint on a subject of relevance to the safety of the church? These matters seem quite unequal.



Ben Manring
10285 S Auburn Hills Dr
Edinburgh, IN 46124

From: Ben@ManringFamily.Net <Ben@ManringFamily.Net>

Sent: Friday, May 5, 2023 7:42 PM

To: David Hanson (DavidRPTS@Hotmail.com) <DavidRPTS@Hotmail.com>; Steve Sturm (stevesturm@pobox.com) <stevesturm@pobox.com>

Cc: Mark Hart (mhart200@gmail.com) <mhart200@gmail.com>; John Cavanaugh (jcavanau@gmail.com) <jcavanau@gmail.com>; John Hanson (johnnhanson@att.net) <johnnhanson@att.net>; Ross Cerbus (ross@thecerbuses.com) <ross@thecerbuses.com>; David Kleyn (kleyn.david@sbcglobal.net) <kleyn.david@sbcglobal.net>; Don Prichard (pdon@sbcglobal.net) <pdon@sbcglobal.net>; Ian Wise (iwisercp@gmail.com) <iwisercp@gmail.com>; Jerry Porter (jerry.l.porter@sbcglobal.net) <jerry.l.porter@sbcglobal.net>

Subject: Motion for clarification

Since the session seems unwilling to answer the questions I have posed regarding the summons I received by email from Pastor Hanson on April 25, I now enter a formal motion requesting an answer. My questions, having been CC'ed to the session, should have been regarded as informal motions to begin with, but since you as a session are refusing courteously to consider or even to acknowledge my requests, I am obliged to put this more formally:

Motion that Session clarify their summons:

I formally ask the session to clarify the terms of their summons and answer the questions I have been asking them:

- 1) Are one or two of you willing to meet with me privately to explain what your complaint against me is?
- 2) If you are refusing to meet with me privately, will you state the reason for summoning me to court on May 9, and if I am being charged with some sin, will you explain the specific sin I am called to answer for? (I will add that as I have been asking this question since the 25th of last month, it's rather late for the session to proceed in this manner. Furthermore, it appears to me that this is not even a lawful procedure according to the Book of Discipline).
- 3) If you refuse to meet with me privately, and you refuse to specify why I am being called into court, do you still require me to appear on Tuesday, May 9? With your lack of communication, I am unclear on even this much.

Respectfully,

Ben Manring
10285 S Auburn Hills Dr
Edinburgh, IN 46124

Appendix B



Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis

May 9, 2023

Mr. Ben Manring
10285 S Auburn Hills Drive
Edinburgh, Indiana. 46124

Dear Ben,

We, the Southside Session, are formally writing to you to address your email with the subject line “West Lafayette church issue as related to our elder election” that was distributed to many in the congregation on April 7, 2023.

Our Lord and his apostles give commands in scripture to the church describing how we are to treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. A survey of numerous New Testament texts that include the words “one another” yield a wealth of wisdom. We are commanded to *love* one another, to pursue *unity* and *peace* with one another, and to demonstrate an attitude of *humility* and *deference* to one another. For example:

*This is My commandment, that you love **one another**, just as I have loved you.* John 15:12

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to **one another** with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to **one another**; ... Be of the same mind toward **one another**. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.* Romans 12:9-10, 16

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with **one another** in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Ephesians 4:1-3

Our Catechisms’ exposition of God’s law makes it clear that the duties required, and the sins forbidden demand that we give careful attention when dealing with “the good name of our neighbor.”

LC Q. 144. *What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of

our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; [studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.](#)

LC Q. 145. *What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, [all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors](#), as well as our own, [especially in public judicature](#); giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth,

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Senior Pastor David W. Hanson ~ Associate Pastor Ian E. Wise

undue silence in a just cause, and [holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice](#); speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; [unnecessary discovering of infirmities](#); raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any; endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

At our April 11, 2023, session meeting, the elders judged your email to be an uncharitable communication about brothers and sisters in Christ and disruptive to the peace and harmony of the church.

Uncharitable communication — In the email, you publicly brought into question the fitness of a man to serve as an elder, one who is a member in good standing and presently serving well as a deacon. *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.* (1 Timothy 3:13). If elected by the congregation, he will in due time be examined by Session before proceeding to serve.

Disruptive to the peace and harmony of the church — In the email, you have shown disrespect for the courts of the church by taking it upon yourself to instruct the congregation directly how they should vote in the elder election. Session has given the instruction we deem appropriate and necessary for the elder election and left it as a matter of private judgement for communicant members to vote for qualified men. Our Presbyterian system of government provides a process for appealing decisions of a court. You have circumvented this process.

We as your elders and brothers in Christ judge that your April 7, 2023, email is worthy of censure. *Therefore, this Court of Christ's Church sadly and solemnly rebukes you for your sin. You are commanded to give evidence of sincere repentance, and to be more watchful, studying to know and do the will of God.*

We are praying that you will receive our rebuke with godly humility and follow with godly actions of repentance and reconciliation.

Yours in the Chief Shepherd,
The Session of Southside Indianapolis Reformed Presbyterian Church

Appendix C

From: Steve Sturm <stevesturm@pobox.com>

Sent: Monday, May 22, 2023 10:41 AM

To: Ben Manring <ben@manringfamily.net>

Subject: update

Dear Ben,

We want to inform you that we intend to ‘make the people under [Session’s] oversight publicly aware of the fact and reason for the rebuke.’ (Book of Discipline, I.4.1.b) We will do this via an email addressed to communicant members.

Yours in Christ,

Southside Session

Appendix D

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Steve Sturm** <stevesturm@pobox.com>

Date: Tue, May 23, 2023 at 10:03 AM

Subject: Communication from Session

To: Elizabeth Manring <elizabeth.manring@gmail.com>

Dear Congregation,

On April 7, many of you received an email from Ben Manring, with the heading, 'West Lafayette church issue as related to our church election.' It is the judgment of your Session of Elders that this was an uncharitable and divisive communication, disruptive to the peace of the Church. In keeping with the public nature of the offense, we are notifying you that Session has issued our brother Ben a rebuke.

As the Book of Discipline says, the goal of a rebuke is to 'call for repentance and reformation of life.' Please be in ongoing and earnest prayer for this situation.

Southside Session

From: Ben@ManringFamily.Net 

Subject: Complaint submission

Date: June 7, 2023 at 8:06 PM

To: Steve Sturm stevesturm@pobox.com, David Hanson DavidRPTS@Hotmail.com

Cc: Adam Keuhner ak@streetsermon.org



This is the complaint I have mentioned to you previously that would be submitted to address the unbiblical manner in which the session of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southside Indianapolis has proceeded against me in connection with their rebuke of May 9, 2023. A few days ago I also submitted an appeal of that sentence. This submission does not replace the appeal, but rather deals with the matters of procedure associated with the case.



Ben Manring
10285 S Auburn Hills Dr
Edinburgh, IN 46124
(C) 812-344-7160
(H) 812-703-1240
Ben@ManringFamily.net

2023-06-07

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