

Fathers, Brethren, and now Sons,

In late 2019, numerous hidden acts of sexual sin by a single minor member of Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church began to be progressively discovered and considered by that member's authorities.

Of these acts, 4 were against individual minors whose families remained in the Immanuel Congregation, 4 were against individual minors whose families left the Immanuel Congregation as a result of the acts, and 7 were against individuals whose families were outside the Immanuel Congregation. One of the latter families has recently filed a lawsuit against the sinning member, his family, the IRPC Congregation, and the RPCNA.

By the middle of 2020 (some action regarding this was taken at a special meeting regarding the writings of then Christ Church Pastor Michael LeFebvre), the member's body of ecclesiastical authorities, that is, the IRPC Session (Jared Olivetti, moderator, David Carr, Keith Magill, Ben Larson, Nate Pfeiffer, and Zachary Blackwood) were aware of much detail of the sin, and realized that the extent of the problem was great enough to require the support of Presbytery to rightly resolve the matter.

During this entire process, the IRPC Session made several bad (i.e., enough to be accused and convicted of sin) decisions, primarily stemming from the moderator's remaining, and promoting direction, despite a severe personal conflict of interest, as well as his delay while attempting to personally and privately resolve the sin issues (no assertion is made here that there was delay in reporting sexual abuse to civil authorities quickly after discovered in April 2020) as more instances continued to progressively be revealed, rather than the timely involvement of the rest of the IRPC Session, and other help as needed.

As a result of these decisions, IRPC Session came into conflict with the original Presbytery committee sent to assist them.

As a result of this conflict, Presbytery appointed another group of Presbyters, confusingly calling it the Immanuel Judicial Commission, but with a committee's remit, that is, to investigate and recommend (rather than the usual practice of giving a "judicial commission" a remit of adjudicating a matter). I believe (apparently along with the Immanuel Congregation, a minority of other Presbyters, and several men who have left eldership as a result of this matter) that the evidence supports my conclusion that despite the delay, conflict of interest, and resulting undue influence of the moderator, the intent of these men was to rightly perform their duty without partiality or favor to any of their congregation.

The individuals most severely harmed by the actions of the sinning member are:

- the 15 (7 outside of RPCNA jurisdiction, but who nonetheless should of course be treated with great love and attempted restoration going forward) individuals against whom the sins were committed,
- their families (including two elders on the IRPC Session),
- the family of the sinning member (including the Pastor, perhaps the greatest of that family),
- and corporately, the whole Immanuel Congregation.

All of these individuals and families were severely harmed, and but for some of their failures in addressing the sin in a proper manner, innocent victims of the sin.

While the original Immanuel Judicial Commission openly claimed to be operating under partiality toward "victims," ("victim-centered approach, IJC Report, Page 2) they excluded from their definition most of the victims above, some of the most harmed, including the parents, grandparents and families of physical victims within the Session, the family of the sinning member, and the Immanuel Congregation itself, labeling as "victims" only the few (4, and included their immediate family members) who sought the

imposition of harsh penalties against the Session for sinfully mishandling the matter. Select persons of the extended group of victims were included, while others were severely restricted in their observation and participation (notably, elders raising their own significant, legitimate motives and actions – mitigating circumstances, or even to fellow Presbyters who would advocate on their behalf, were severely chided on the floor for doing so)

In addition to this unjust (centering consideration on the harm of only a very few of the most harmed victims), partiality toward a subjectively applied definition of victims, the “Judicial Commission,” exceeded its remit to investigate and report (while claiming not to exceed it – “these are only recommendations”), by making the procedure and wording of the recommendations in such a way as to (without attributing any bad intent to the IJC, which I don't believe they had) unduly influence Presbytery to the IJC's desired verdict for the IRPC Session.

That is, defining “repentance” outside of its recommendation in a parliamentary proceeding practically forced the unheard of penalty of self-suspension of all elders, prior to a trial (though they were each given, with inadequate time to prepare, 7 minutes to “address the report” of IJC, which time they all used to confess their sins, and in a case or two to also introduce – with fierce objection from the floor – some of the mitigating factors that led to their sins).

While confessions often should not include mitigating factors, which can be viewed as excuses, the procedural status of being ordered to resign without a trial in the upcoming recommendations, required a defense, since the usual expectation following confession of sin would be sentencing, at which point such considerations are appropriate.

This unusual and extraordinary procedure may have been due in part to the diverse remit, investigating the previous child abuse while at the same time judging the elders going forward, which likely caused confusion and conflation in the minds of Presbyters as to the difference between separate disciplinary matters of the minor child abuse and the mismanagement of the administration of discipline afterward.

I suggest that after these men's confessions, justice under the law and order of the RPCNA required public acceptance of the confession of sin, having presented the offenses and won our brothers, followed by either a) immediate sanctions by that Court (up to reprimand), or b) a trial for the purpose of sentencing for a higher sanction (e.g., suspension, deposition), where presumably aggravating and mitigating factors would have been heard and considered. The unusual procedural direction of the IJC prevented this from occurring.

After much wrangling (I will happily take much of the blame for that) on the floor of Presbytery, objecting to this procedure, some good shepherding by the Moderator of Presbytery, local elders under accusation, provisional elders, AIC, and the shepherding committee, things were moving in a direction to hear the Immanuel Congregation's pleas for help. However, the beginnings of a full trial as if the sin had not been confessed, and several complaints to Synod from both sides of the issue caused Synod to take original jurisdiction over the matter.

Synod took “original jurisdiction” (a civil legal term) after the defendants had already confessed to their offenses. After these men's confessions, justice under the law and order of the RPCNA still required public acceptance of the confession of sin, having presented the offenses and won our brothers, followed by only assessment of sanctions.

Rather than only sanctioning the admitted sinners of IRPC Session, a lengthy, extensive, and expensive to Christ's Kingdom, re-discovery and consideration of facts, from the underlying original matter of a sinning IRPC member ensued. We had won our brother(s), and the only just action remaining on the part of the Court was sentencing.

Beginning at the Presbytery meeting in which the IJC report was presented, the members of the Immanuel Congregation who had been excluded from the list of victims considered in the IJC's definition, begged for mercy (rather than demanded, as one source has accused them) through the minority Presbyters, wrote their own communications, and tried to express their need and desire for healing as victims to forgive, fully restore, and keep their own Session (along with much needed experience, knowledge, and love of and for the congregation).

Rather than hearing the cries for mercy of the innocent victims of Immanuel Congregation in the original matter, the higher courts prioritized stiff sanctions higher than those harmed by the Session's sins in the first place.

After nearly 3 years of pleading, losing all hope (wrong) that they could ever be allowed to restore their leaders and fully heal, the Immanuel Congregation and its new Session took matters into its own hands and attempted to leave the RPCNA outside the provisions of the Constitution.

Others in the dissenting minority who opposed our injustice through the Presbyterian system left the pastorate, their charge as elders, and the denomination itself.

They should have remained even in suffering, but like some of the families who were unable to reconcile with the initial sin, the mishandling Session, and the congregation, the congregation itself also gave-up on the Biblical and Presbyterian system.

One member of IRPC was caught in sin and has been treated (ironically, by the accused Session, and harmed Congregation, and not a few peers) with mercy and restoration. The remaining Immanuel Congregation, like a child to a parent, has taught us a valuable example of mercy and forgiveness. Some of the victims of the sin were caught in the sin of mishandling the manner. We cast the stones they deserved at them.

The corporate body of primary victims begged for (not demanded) mercy, repeatedly, and through a few voices in the minority of Presbytery and Synod, and this once strong congregation has given up on us in despair. Perhaps they, like Paul, remain alive beneath the stones. Let us repent of our lack of mercy, show mercy, and save the friends, mentors, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters of the Immanuel Congregation from death.

The Magill and Larson Family in particular, victims in every conceivable way, have behaved with great honor to Christ in this matter, and nonetheless had their own reputations incorrectly tarnished as a result of our actions. We should ask their forgiveness.

We should now take these men at their word of confession, as is our usual practice, and allow the Holy Spirit to convict them and restore as He directs. Some of them probably won't come back due to grief over the sin. Some over time may continue reconciliation efforts with those lost with results to the great glory and honor of God. The continued harm to the Pastor and his family as a result of the sin will most certainly continually drive him to his knees in private and public humiliation before the LORD and the culture.

Finally, with respect to the new IRPC Session, not under any discipline itself at the time, only one reference in Constitution suggests the possibility of denying membership privileges as a sanction, and even the SJC felt they had to provide explanation for using it. They unequivocally imply that Jared Olivetti is a believer by repeatedly so referring to him (i.e., "brother"). SJC has been at all times aware that:

- Jared Olivetti is a member of Immanuel RPC.
- Jared Olivetti is obligated by his vow of church membership to observe appointed sacraments.
- DCG 1.2 (D-2) indicates that in a regularly organized congregation it belongs to the session alone

- to admit to membership, of which communicant membership is a part.
- It is the duty from God and the Constitution of Sessions to admit members to the table. The Session (alone) is to fence the table under specific objective criteria, then leave the examination to the observers of the sacrament.
  - The Constitution and God clearly give only the observer of communion the authority of self-examination of his or her own heart as to partaking in the sacrament.
  - By ordering a Session not to do so, particularly upon their more intimate knowledge of whether a member is capable of their own duty of self-examination, Synod creates a conflict between the Session's known duty to permit believing members to observe the appointed sacraments, and a higher court's direction not to do so. Unless under excommunication, barring a member from the table is not according to the law and order of the Church, nor of God's law. This should be removed from the list of sanctions in the Constitution, to eliminate such confusion and conflict in the future.

This is the conflict. Surely all of you men, whom I know and love, with tears, can see that we have some sin in this matter. While the Immanuel Congregation has no voice with which to take its offense before its brother in person, I am certain that it has an offense against us for the above.

I beg you, let us make peace with our fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and friends at Immanuel. Let us not lose this congregation because they were innocent victims of sin. Everyone on both sides says it is impossible, but it is not. Will they not return if we accept their confessions and confess and repent ourselves? Will they not take us at our word and forgive and return, knowing they've won their brother? Will more stiff penalties for confessed sin advance the Crown and Covenant of Christ, while the body is rent?

Men, let us stand down. Let us give these injured and hurting believers shelter and mercy, not what they deserve. Let us not lose a brace of kinsmen. I want my kids to grow up in fellowship alongside them.

Recommendation 1: Complaints against Immanuel Session for serving communion to Jared Olivetti be referred to Synod 2023, with a recommendation of special mercy toward the Immanuel Congregation for their harm from the original sin and handling of the matter, that the sanctions against their former Session now be lifted, all related Synod committees and commissions be dismissed, and the matter be returned to Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery.

Recommendation 2: A 5 man-study committee be formed to propose amendment to the Constitution to remove denial of membership privileges as a possible sanction, absent excommunication, and to suggest other changes to better distinguish between procedures for trial of actual charges, and sentencing for confessed charges.

Recommendation 3: Receive this communication and forward to Synod 2023, asking their mercy as well.

For Christ's Crown & Covenant,

James M. Odom, Clerk of Session  
Sparta Reformed Presbyterian Church