

## Verdict Rationale Committee Report (11.9.23)

To the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery *Ad Interim* Commission:

The Verdict Rationale Committee for the defeated Manring Appeal, in accordance with its remit, recommends that the AIC adopt the following statement on behalf of the GLGP as a summary of the reasons for the court's verdict of not sustaining the Manring Appeal at its annual fall meeting on 10/6/23.

The appellant, Mr. Ben Manring, was rebuked by the Southside RPC Session for uncharitable and divisive speech in an email sent to approximately 60% of the communicant membership of the Southside congregation prior to an elder election.

Mr. Manring was not disciplined merely for sharing public information about an elder candidate. His email suggested that, in signing a 2021 synod complaint, the current chairman of the SSRPC deacon board does not adhere to Presbyterianism and is therefore disqualified from the eldership. This would amount to a deposable offense for a deacon, based on Ordination Query 5. Mr. Manring's email also draws attention to the fact that SSRPC's senior pastor registered his dissent when the synod complaint was defeated. This clearly implies that the senior pastor no longer adheres to Presbyterianism and is unfit for the eldership. Once again, this would be a deposable offense.

Rather than respectfully filing charges against these existing church officers, or seeking counsel from his session or presbytery, Mr. Manring made his case before the court of public opinion with sweeping and censorious judgments, some of which had no direct bearing on the elder election itself. This is neither the way of charity, nor the way of peace and order, as demonstrated by the session's various citations from Scripture and the Larger Catechism.

The SSRPC session has been scrutinized for not granting Mr. Manring's request for an informal meeting prior to receiving his censure, and for the level of censure. According to the session, their actions in this case occurred within the broader shepherding context of their prior interactions with Mr. Manring during his nearly six years as a member of the congregation.

During the hearing, Mr. Manring's presentation seemed to confirm the session's outlook. In his speeches, he accused the session of "manipulation," "retaliation," "suppressing information," "gerrymandering" the election, and other sharply worded speculations for which no adequate evidence was provided. At one point, without provocation, Mr. Manring disrupted the hearing by shouting at the defense counsel, by name, from the pews. This outburst continued until he nearly had to be removed from the courtroom. Such behavior served to reinforce, rather than to refute, the session's rationale for its actions in this case, and may help to explain why the appeal was defeated.

In conclusion, our presbytery's decision ultimately reflects the fact that Mr. Manring, when given the opportunity to present his appeal, failed to prove his case against the SSRPC session to the satisfaction of a majority of the court.

Respectfully submitted,

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