

Fathers & brothers,

Although we recognize the sincere, sacrificial labors of our brother elders as they have sought to navigate a complex and troubling situation, we feel compelled to request the following:

1. That Presbytery appeal to Synod to critically review the work of the Synod Judicial Commission with respect to Immanuel RPC and to give fresh consideration to how to do justly, love mercy, to walk humbly, as we seek to shepherd well those entrusted to our care, including our fellow shepherds.

Countless hours have been spent seeking a God-honoring resolution of the abuse that occurred in the Immanuel RPC congregation. Sadly, a resolution has not proved forthcoming. Given the horror at what occurred, there was a general sense that a strong response was needed. However, efforts thus far now appear deeply flawed in ways that invite doubts about the integrity of the process. The GLG Presbytery desired Synod's help. Now, we ask Presbytery to once again appeal to Synod, this time to critically review the SJC's work.

While it is generally agreed that the SJC has been faced with a complicated matter, several broad concerns about their work have emerged. We long for peace in our presbytery and fear that these concerns will sow doubt in the integrity of the investigation and thus doubt in the trial, and so sow discord and division:

- The SJC appears not to have appreciated the magnitude of concern about the Presbytery Judicial Commission (PJC). Instead, the SJC appears to have used the PJC's work as the starting point for its own—even though the PJC's handling of the investigation was the reason for the flood of complaints that led Synod to intervene.
- The SJC's choice of investigators casts doubt on the integrity of the process by including one with the strong appearance of bias. Kyle Borg was in communication with the PJC, volunteered himself for the SJC at Synod, took part in Synod's investigation, and now is serving as a prosecutor after recommending (as an investigator) that prosecution was needed. Meanwhile, three months before Synod, he authored [a piece on *Gentle Reformation*](#) describing past abuse he suffered and declaring: "I'm so tired of hearing one story after another of the failures of leadership to respond to sexual abuse in the church. I'm also angry." The process thus has failed to remain above reproach.
- A significant number of IRPC members, as well as those appointed as provisional elders, attest to real reconciliation and renewed confidence in their former leadership. Yet this on-the-ground reality seems to have weighed little in the SJC's proceedings. Instead, the SJC, following the PJC's recommendation, reached the extraordinary decision to deprive a hurting but spiritually thriving flock of each and every one of its shepherds.
- To outward appearance, the proceedings thus far have downplayed both the spirit and the letter of the Book of Discipline. The animating spirit of the Book of Discipline is a desire for repentance and reconciliation. The former elders of IRPC have pursued repentance and reconciliation. The elders' lapses in judgment, doubtless clearer in retrospect, have met with confession and repentance and credible steps toward reconciliation. Yet now we are at a point where, after many months, numerous witnesses, and much testimony, we

are going to try select, former elders for failing to see their way more quickly, in the moment, without the benefit of hindsight.

- At points, the proceedings thus far appear to have downplayed the demands of Scripture and instead substituted non-Scriptural standards in their place. The SJC preserved the PJC's non-Scriptural equation of repentance with resignation. It remains unclear whether Matthew 18 has been followed. Meanwhile, the SJC seems not to have broken free of the victim-centered approach pursued by the PJC. With its decision to suspend the remaining IRPC elders from ministry, the SJC also appears to have preserved the PJC's conflation of the sins of the abuser with the sins of the session.
- Despite the intensity of the SJC investigations, the proceedings thus far appear strangely selective. Some at IRPC have expressed concern that the SJC's investigation was not exhaustive, reportedly omitting key witnesses. Pastoral care appears to have been selective: From the communications and processes that we have been able to observe, relatively little presbytery-level concern has been shown for pastoring the abuser or the abused or IRPC as a church or IRPC's elders. Rather, there has been a curious fixation on removing from office those who responded, successfully it seems, to the abuse—those who, with the benefit of hindsight, found mistakes and sins, and who repented and made public confession. The selectivity is seen, too, in the individuals selected for trial. Those elders who resigned earlier are not up for trial. Those who resigned later are to be tried. Meanwhile, the counselor and seminary professor upon whose advice the session relied, and who counseled individuals on both sides of the abuse, has neither confessed nor repented, nor has received discipline – despite the fact that the PJC found serious failings in his conduct.

2. That the elders of our Presbytery join together in repentance for the spirit with which we have conducted the work of the church.

Love is the heart of the law. Without love, we have nothing. Love rejoices in the truth, but also suffers long and is kind—bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.

Yet the spirit animating our presbytery's approach in recent years has too often displayed little of the gospel of grace and the heart of the pastor. The pastor ought to be spiritual, and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Rather than focus on gently and patiently seeking to bring about repentance and reconciliation, however, we have allowed our focus to be consumed by accusations and trials. The spirit of the world is active among us. We are quick to judge. We see a corresponding breakdown of trust. We see open references among presbyters to "sides" and "parties." We see the weaponization of procedure. We see a preference for the standards of the world (e.g., the victim-centered approach) to the high calling of God (e.g., Matthew 18, I Corinthians 6:1). We see little faith in the power of God to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation and little concern for sheep deprived of shepherds. Instead, we have ruined men's reputations and then declared them disqualified from office because their reputations are ruined.

We may disagree on this or that detail. But surely we can agree that something is not right—that there is a spirit of mistrust, accusation, and division in our midst that is not of God.

Thus, we ask Presbytery to declare a day of fasting for its presbyters in order to engage in self-examination, repentance, and prayer that God, in His mercy, might make us fertile soil for the fruit of the Spirit.

3. That Presbytery exhort the sessions of the various churches in our presbytery to pursue Christian reconciliation by Christian means.

Scripture requires Christians to meet together about points of conflict, to preserve one another's reputations to the extent possible, and to settle disputes within the courts of the church. The way of Christian reconciliation does not lie through the popular press or the civil courts, and it is the responsibility of sessions to counsel and, if necessary, to call to repentance, those who disobey God's Word in these ways.

To that end, we urge Presbytery to exhort our sessions to attend to this difficult, delicate duty.

4. That Presbytery seek to encourage Immanuel RPC.

Our Lord commands us to “weep with those who weep,” remembering that “if one member suffers, all suffer together.” Our brothers and sisters at Immanuel RPC are part of our body, bound to us by common vows. And it has become clear that many at IRPC are hurting. They are grieving over the sin that has occurred in their midst. They are also grieving because they feel isolated, even attacked, by brothers and sisters in Christ within the denomination. But the truth is that we are members of the same body. Under the circumstances, it seems good, then, to communicate our love and unity by joining together in worship, an activity that is a sign and seal of our oneness in Christ Jesus.

And so, we urge the presbytery to formally call sessions, first, to exhort their members to seek an opportunity to worship with IRPC in coming weeks and, second, to encourage local sessions to organize joint communion services.

Session, Bloomington Reformed Presbyterian Church (Wes Archer, Eric Cosens, CJ Davis, Ken de Jong, Rich Holdeman, Philip McCollum, Stephen Shipp)