

Communication #22-06 GLG Riepe Complaint vs. SJC

From: Riepe, Christina [for e-address, see clerk]

To: pastor@stillwaterrpc.org; jmmlawrence@aol.com; bruce.backensto@gmail.com; John Bower jbowerr@gmail.com; Brian Coombs briancoombs@me.com; Thomas Fisher tafisher@post.harvard.edu; Kelly Moore covenanter.kelly@gmail.com; Tom Pinson pinsontm@gmail.com; Micah Ramsey pastor.micah.ramsey@gmail.com; Andrew Silva andrewsilva80@gmail.com; wing@thekaysource.com. Cc: Oluyemi Aladejebi aaladejebi@gmail.com

Sent: April 7, 2022

Subject: Complaint regarding the trial of Jared Olivetti

Greetings from [Africa]! I have attached a document containing a complaint I would like to share with Synod and the SJC. CC'd is my shepherding elder from IRPC. I apologize if I have excluded anyone I wasn't supposed to address this to or included anyone I should not have. This was not consciously done. What I haven't included in my letter is that despite living 7,000 miles away, the Immanuel congregation and I have made attempts to remain in close contact. I attended Immanuel while I was on a four-month home assignment in 2021 and for a month in 2020 as well as regularly attending Zoom meetings, virtual Sunday schools, and streaming services. I feel that my complaint is just as relevant as anyone else's, despite the distance. I mention this in my letter, but please do not mention my organization or my country of service in any written record as they have no relevance or say in my complaint to you now. Praying for you and your ministries.

—Christina

April 15, 2022 jmmlawrence@aol.com wrote:

Dear Christina: Greetings in Christ Jesus. ... Thank you for submitting your complaint in a timely fashion. In order to process the complaint with care, it will help me to know that you ARE a communicant member of Immanuel RPC. Is that correct? I may have missed it, but I did not see such an identification in the complaint itself. If you are NOT a member of I-RPC at this time, please explain with care and precision your relationship with the congregation. Thank you. God bless you in every righteous endeavor. ... *John M. McFarland*

From: Riepe, Christina

To: John McFarland

Sent: April 15, 2022

Re: Question for Christina (from a rep. of the RPCNA Synod) ...

Dear Mr. McFarland: ... I was not quite sure what the due date for complaints was, so I am glad I acted with urgency. I AM a communicant member of

Immanuel and I intend to remain a communicant member. Sorry my complaint was vague about it. I have not joined as a member at my local church here in [Africa] even though I regularly attend a solid, national church here each Sunday. I know you asked for an explanation if I am not a member, but may I bother you with an explanation for why I still am? It's not very long. I was sent out from Immanuel three years ago February and the care and shepherding I have received from both congregants and the sessions since I have left have been a great encouragement to me. David Carr was my shepherding elder from before I left until his resignation; it is now Yemi Aladejebi. Having a strong relationship with my sending church was something I've always wanted and I have that with Immanuel. I felt transferring my membership to a church here would distance myself from the care and correction I wanted and Immanuel had committed to give me. It is certainly more care and correction than my church here can give and it makes breaks from the field that much more refreshing. Based upon my membership, I have been privy to every communication to the congregation and I've attended nearly all of the church meetings and elections since I left. I am committed to them and they are committed to me. I am not sure whether this is helpful or qualifies as a communication, but I feel this is necessary context.

Sincerely, Christina

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Dear members of Synod and anyone else who will read this complaint:

I am writing this complaint primarily from the perspective of someone (1) who is also a caretaker for the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being of many followers of Christ and their children and (2) who has no blind loyalty to the RPCNA aside from the vows of membership I took three years ago. On the first point, I am currently the HR Director for a field unit in ... Africa for a Bible _____ organization. Even before my current role, I was expected to do numerous child safety trainings and be familiar with child safety procedures. I would prefer the organization I serve with and the country I serve in not be mentioned in any written record so as not to involve them in this complaint or process. They are merely the context from which I speak. On the second point, I did not grow up in the RPCNA and, while I have submitted to this form of church government, I know Presbyterianism is not perfect and is not self-executing. There have been a few times in the past four years where I knew a safety standard was either not present that should have been or was unrealistic and I have remained silent until now. There were reasons for this such as me not yet being a member of the church or thinking I was too far away to have any input. I wish I had said something then and hope that a voice of someone from "the outside" will give some perspective. The following are

the actions the SJC has taken, what my objection is, and what I would like to request as a next step.

1. Action: Continuing with an internal investigation.

Objection: The RPCNA is not qualified to handle child safety cases.

Request: That an independent, professional organization start from scratch, conduct an objective investigation, and give recommendations to this case as well as provide recommendations to the RPCNA for reasonable, clear, and consistent child safety policies.

2. Action: Continuing internal investigation based upon Presbytery's investigation.

Objections: (1) Mentioned above, the RPCNA is not qualified to handle this investigation, (2) the investigation carried out by Presbytery was sloppy and inconsistent in its methods and (3) there were such strong feelings against Presbytery's investigation from multiple parties.

Request: That everything regarding Presbytery's investigation (and the investigation the SJC built off of it) be discarded and replaced by the independent investigation.

3. Action: Speed with which we went to a trial.

Objection: Pursing a trial was brought forward without adequate attempts at mediation and without adequate time to prepare for a trial.

Request: That the SJC repent of their urgency to take a follower of Christ to trial without adequate attempts at mediation and insufficient time and effort to attain all the facts. That in the future, Synod have clearer, more realistic timelines for when trials can occur.

4. Action: Verdict.

Objection: The verdict given to Pastor Olivetti is inconsistent with the facts that are known. The SJC disregarded any testimony by the shepherding committee and other evidence of steps of repentance and disciplined without appropriate process or assessment. To discipline someone who is repentant is evil. Either the SJC is privy to information the public is not or the SJC verdict is lacking in both justice and righteousness.

Request: That the SJC retract the verdict including church discipline until a full independent, professional, and objective investigation and report have been completed. That the SJC repent of their unjust discipline.

We all love to think that because we are the people of God that abuse amongst ourselves does not happen. However, we know this is not the case. In the early 2000s my organization began having child safety policies and processes and began tracking abuse within the organization. Our numbers are congruent with the world's numbers of who is abused and by whom they are abused. The most common abuser is a trusted family friend (either an adult or

a child). Recent statistics show that 62% of children who are abused in my organization are abused by a parent, an adult in the organization, or another child whose parents are members of the organization. 62%! Keep in mind, that the adults and parents in these families are heavily vetted before they can join the organization; much more heavily vetted than your average visitor or regular attendee for worship.

The prevalence of abuse makes child safety standards both relevant and necessary regardless of whether or not it is a religious organization. Previous to this case, the RPCNA had not established or enforced child safety standards and procedures. The victims and session in this case had no guidance on how to resolve what happened because the RCPNA did not provide adequate protection, guidance, or care for them. The RPCNA's neglect in this area left every church vulnerable to this abuse. It just happened to occur at IRPC first. To put it another way, the RPCNA is penalizing the former IRPC session for a situation the RPCNA put them in. Due to the RPCNA's failure to safeguard against this situation, it should certainly not be trusted to respond well to it. It is in everyone's best interest to admit that this is too much for us to handle and ask for help.

It is good practice when there is a child safety issue to have an independent, trained professional give guidance and implement clear procedures that were established ahead of time. I would like to recommend an organization called ThirtyOne:Eight (thirtyoneeight.org). My understanding is they would be able to give guidance on how to move forward now, including doing an independent investigation, and help the RPCNA develop better procedures and practices for the future. The organization is based in the United Kingdom, but their investigations are very thorough and can make recommendation within the framework of US laws and standards.

If I have spoken out of order, I do apologize. I have never written this type of letter before and I feel this whole situation has been handled very badly at every level. My hope is that a harsh word now will prevent further harm and hurt in the future. I would also like to apologize for getting this letter to you so late. I fell and broke my foot the week I was going to work on this document and I didn't have the energy until now.

Your sister,

Christina Riepe ... 06 April, 2022