

November 27, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church,

We are Andrew Falk, James Faris, Justin Olson, and John Westercamp. We are members of the three Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Indianapolis. We are serving as ecclesiastical counsel for your elders. In other words, we are their church lawyers. We are writing to explain some of what is happening and to encourage you in the Lord. Along with your elders, we believe that in Jesus Christ redemption trumps retribution. We want to see his redemption at Immanuel RPC.

Your elders at Immanuel RPC now face charges being brought against them by prosecutors through the Synod Judicial Commission. The Synod Judicial Commission noted in a letter to the synod on November 19 that “The SJC received detailed accusations against Mr. Jared Olivetti...[and]...the ruling elders of the 2020 session of Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church, including Mr. Zachary Blackwood, Mr. David Carr, Mr. Ben Larson, Mr. Keith Magill, and Mr. Nate Pfeiffer. The accusations allege, in part, that they did not shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ appropriately. The full, detailed accusations were delivered to the ruling elders in advance of a trial date to be conducted in January 2022.”

Your elders have remained largely silent up to this time. Now, they want you to know that they are in the process of defending themselves so that God would be honored and the truth would be upheld. They confess with the psalmist in Psalm 7:10 “God is my shield, yes, he is my defense, for he will surely save the right in heart” (from *The Book of Psalms for Worship*).

Your church family has gone through an incredibly difficult season. Your elders love justice, truth, and right. They are deeply grieved by sin that has been revealed within IRPC, as all of you have been. They continue to grieve for and with those who have been victims of the sin of others. They grieve their own sin and their shortcomings. We know that you and your elders, in various ways, have shared fellowship with the Psalmist who wrote, “My tears have been my food day and night” (Psalm 42:3). Please know that, with varying degrees of personal knowledge, we love you and care for you. We have prayed for your congregation and for all those who have suffered so deeply as a result of sins committed. We will continue praying as a chief part of our work.

Amid the most challenging season they ever faced, and one for which there is little or no precedence, your elders acted as best they knew how in good faith. They sought to honor God and love the church well. They kept the laws of the State of Indiana. When they became aware of criminal activity in your midst, their actions were used by God to prevent any further criminal activity. They listened to victims. They labored hard to care for souls. They have appreciated the government of our state administering justice as appropriate. Though certainly not everyone was satisfied, many good decisions were made by the elders along the way. The elders have sought to lead the whole of the congregation to believe Christ and experience his redemption.

Your elders have confessed and repented of their sins as they have been made aware of them. The presbytery’s shepherding committee that operated through the spring and summer of this year helped to facilitate spiritual progress and growth in the life of the elders individually and the session as a whole. Provisional elders have continued to lift their hands. The Lord Jesus has blessed this work. Certainly, some have left the congregation with dissatisfaction, but most have remained and more have been added.

As we approach the proceedings, it is good for you to know what your elders stand for:

- They stand for justice by the standards of Jesus Christ.
- They stand for due process.
- They stand for fair, impartial, and unbiased investigations by trained professionals.
- They stand for seeking resolution of cases without formal trials if possible (Book of Discipline II., 1, 1).
- They stand for honoring the commands of our Lord in Matthew 18.
- They stand for a judicial process that provides charges based on facts.
- They stand for acknowledging repentance.
- They stand for the healing of individuals and congregations.
- They stand for seeking to build the church up to purity by coming alongside those who are imperfect and building them up rather than seeking to lop off perceived impurities until the church is pure.
- They stand for redemption over retribution because Jesus Christ does the same.

Cases of sexual sin, even involving minors, are skyrocketing in our culture. Sadly, because of the nature of sin, and the Scripture's many promises that the visible church will never enjoy perfection in this life, other church leaders will inevitably face similar challenges in spite of the best of intentions and the wisest planning. Elders must be held to the standard of God's word in responding to sin; they must be faithful in Jesus Christ who forgives and empowers them. God's word is the standard; he calls us to faith, obedience, repentance, and forgiveness. His word is not only the standard, but it is also the power of God to change us. So we pray, "Sanctify [us] in the truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

We long to be part of a church where redemption flourishes in all its expressions. No one desires a church where either sin abounds unchecked or where justice without mercy is imposed. Your elders desire an environment that takes sin and grace just as seriously as God himself does. He has revealed himself as the God of redemption in his word. Our confidence is in his word. Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate is full of grace and truth. He prioritizes redemption over retribution. That is where your elders stand. We hope that you will support these redemptive purposes. Please pray for the pre-trial hearing to be held on November 30, 2021.

To slightly paraphrase the words of Senator Tim Scott: "So we are more than hopeful — we are confident — that our finest hour is yet to come. Original sin is never the end of the story. Not in our souls, and not for the church. The real story is always redemption. Generations of Christians, in their own circumstances, have asked for grace — and God has supplied it."

We trust that he will supply grace abundantly at Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church.

In Christ,

Andrew Falk
James Faris
Justin Olson
John Westercamp