

Report of IRPC Session to Fall 2022 Presbytery

Dear brothers in Christ,

This is a brief report to the presbytery concerning the current situation at IRPC, along with a brief history of the path which brings us to this point.

Following the spring presbytery meeting the session consisted of four local elders and three provisional elders. Three of the local elders had been elected and ordained shortly before the presbytery meeting, and one had been ordained last fall. The session perceived at that time that our understanding of the disposition of the many members of the congregation was insufficient to support our ability to shepherd the congregation appropriately. The congregation at that time had 173 members, 100 of them communicant.

In order to address this situation, the local session members spent much time and effort building relationships with the members of the congregation, and we as a session decided to distribute a survey to systematically assess many different questions, including the people's spiritual state with respect to the turmoil surrounding the congregation, needs for focus in worship, how to seek pastoral leadership, avenues for future ministry, and their disposition with respect to the denomination. The results of survey were in most ways very encouraging, and indicated a strong unity of purpose in the congregation, with one obvious and troublesome exception. The members' disposition with respect to the denomination showed very little unity. Some expressed a wish to take leave of the denomination immediately, others expressed the conviction that no circumstance would cause them to wish to take leave of the denomination, and others filled in most imaginable positions between these two extremes. The survey also showed a strong understanding of the concepts of Presbyterianism, and that most people indicated a strong commitment to these principles.

To help move the congregation forward in a positive direction and resolve this conflict, the session called two 'family meetings', which are congregational meetings without the possibility of motions or deliberation. These meetings were well attended, and most members of the congregation spoke to the grounds for their opinions, in ways which were compelling, respectful, and well expressed. This process allowed the congregation to continue together into the summer, though with two issues arising over the next couple of months. The first is a perception, well founded in some serious problems, that the congregation was basically treading water, finding it difficult to work together in a positive direction. The second is the presence of an upcoming congregational meeting.

Since the IRPC fiscal year follows the academic calendar, the annual meeting of the congregation was scheduled for the middle of July, and since these meetings allow for the congregation to address new business, it was very likely that there would be a forthcoming motion from the congregation to take leave of the denomination. In light of this, the local elders, outside of the context of the larger session, worked out a compromise motion to allow the congregation to move forward without addressing the ongoing conflict, until such time as

there would be a clearer sense of the possible path forward toward congregational health and ministry.

This compromise motion called for assembling various committees in the congregation to address various issues concerning the future of the congregation, while putting off the question of the denominational affiliation. These committees were to work through a number of questions, including seeking pastoral leadership and appropriate topics for classes, youth ministry questions, various legal and financial issues, the relationship of the leadership to groups outside of the congregation, and reconciliation with various parties with whom congregation is at odds. There was much deliberation at the meeting, but the motion passed with a strong $\frac{3}{4}$'s majority and no successful attempts to change the motion. Participation in this meeting was very high, with well over $\frac{3}{4}$ s of the local active communicant membership being in attendance. This has allowed the congregation to continue working together, though eight members in two families decided to ask for a transfer to the Lafayette congregation at that time. This outcome was reported to the AIC in August.

Since then, the committees have all been busily at work, finishing their proposals within the last two weeks. Also, as part of the motion, the congregation is petitioning for a follow-up meeting, which the session duly called for, to be held on the 30th of September.

From the synodical level, there are currently two synodical commissions working with the former session, one working with the former ruling elders, and one specifically charged with working with Jared Olivetti towards restoration. In addition, another synodical committee appointed by motion from the floor of synod this summer assembled members of the former synodical commission with the current IRPC session for a first step in drawing the commission and the congregation together. This meeting with the congregation occurred September 19th. During the meeting, the local members of the session acted as mediaries between the commission and the congregation, and engaged in a lengthy public conversation with visitors who were part of the former commission's work. As part of the preparation for this meeting, the congregation was asked for questions they would like asked of the commission (with the proviso that the questions could not impinge on the work of the two synodical commissions). This request drew out approximately 75 questions, from which six main topics were canvased in the public meeting. In general, this discussion was helpful and constructive, though the degree to which the large volume of questions could be addressed was not great.

Currently, we do not know what will arise from the congregational meeting on the 30th of September. We would appreciate your earnest prayers for the Lord's leading in this matter. We intend to update the presbytery at the time of the fall meeting, and will present appropriate recommendations and petitions at that time.

Ken de Jong, for the IRPC Session