

REPORT OF THE SHEPHERDING COMMITTEE

The Shepherding Committee of the Immanuel RPC was assigned the task “to help the Immanuel Reformed Presbyterian Church elders follow through with steps of repentance.” To that end, the Shepherding Committee has met with each of the elders at least once and with others several times. The Committee has met a number of times by ZOOM and phone calls to discuss what we were finding. The presentation of charges against the elders, especially because the prosecutors did not meet with the elders beforehand, has made the process more difficult.

Some general observations –

The Shepherding Committee sees God’s grace active in the Immanuel situation. Perhaps the most important way for our purposes is the repentance, confession, and reconciliation that has taken place in the congregation. Some members have left but for nearly all the rest there is a spirit of unity, love, and great support for the elders. God has blessed the congregation with 16 new members since the March meeting of Presbytery, including 3 adults making a profession of faith and being baptized.

Some observations about church discipline –

Book of Discipline, Section II; chap. 1, paragraph 1 states:

1. ...Formal process shall not be instituted unless evidence is presented that the means of reconciliation referred to above (section I, chap. 2) have been tried. Before such process is instituted, it is proper for the court to seek a solution of the case without formal trial.

While it is not in the purview of the Shepherding Committee to determine whether Matthew 18 was rightly applied, we do note that seeking a solution without a formal trial is encouraged. We are seeking to do this.

The two types of censures that do not require formal trial are:

Admonition—This is the lightest degree of censure and is commonly used by the court in cases of neglect of duty. It consists of reproving the offender, warning him of the danger of his course, and charging him to be more faithful in his Christian life.

Rebuke—This is a more aggravated sin and is commonly used by the court in cases of active transgression or of continued neglect of duty in spite of counsel. It consists of authoritative reproof in the name of Christ, and a call for repentance and reformation of life. Book of Discipline, Section I; chap. 4, paragraphs 1(a) and 1(b)

This is made clear in the Book of Discipline, Section I; chap. 3, paragraph 5,

5. However, if the accused takes steps to contest the charges, the court may not proceed to issue a censure beyond admonition or rebuke without conducting a formal trial.

Finally, we would also note that:

3. If the sinner confesses and repents, there must be forgiveness and reconciliation, and the matter shall be closed. You have won your brother. Such closure may include counsel or censure appropriate to the circumstances.

Book of Discipline, Section I; chap. 3, paragraph 3

All of the elders confessed sin on January 2, 2021 [the specifics can be found under David Carr section], sought reconciliation, showed fruits of repentance, and humility. They are very sensitive to the mistakes/sins they committed and are endeavoring not to repeat the errors made. The specifics of each elder are given below:

We would respectfully report that:

1) With regard to Nate Pfeiffer –

He has confessed sin to the congregation at the January 2, 2021, meeting of the congregation. His confession included failing to inform a victim family in a timely fashion, unwise assumptions during the initial phase of investigation, not asking the other elders for help when he was stymied by the investigation, his lack of informing the other elders soon enough, and not being active enough, along with the other elders, in assisting to monitor the perpetrator. He has also asked forgiveness personally from three families he offended. His resignation from the office of ruling elder was effective March 12, 2021. He has also asked that his ordination be terminated and it was granted. He has no desire to serve again as a ruling elder.

2) With regard to Jared Olivetti --

He has confessed on the floor of presbytery and to the Immanuel congregation to having undue influence and improper influence, involving a series of conflicts of influence, which disadvantaged the victim families. He also confessed that while indicating to the congregation that he was recused, he did not fully recuse himself and also he did not do everything possible to avoid the appearance of evil and to remain above reproach. Finally, he confessed that he did not help provide new structures to ensure the safety of the covenant children. He has also shared with the congregation the lessons he has learned from this experience and has shared with the Immanuel Session some basics of a plan for restitution. He has shown a pattern of repentance and asking for forgiveness whenever he has become aware of his sins. He has been granted forgiveness by most in the congregation and is willing to meet with anyone still concerned. He has been on a sabbatical and then a leave of absence for the last five

months. The Immanuel Session, including the provisional elders, have approved Jared's leave of absence to end on June 21, 2021.

3) With regard to Ben Larson –

He has confessed at the January 2, 2021, informal meeting of the congregation a failure to show adequate care and treat equally several of the injured families. On the floor of Presbytery and to the Immanuel congregation he acknowledged allowing influence of an undue and improper nature, involving a series of conflicts of interest, which showed deference to the interests of the offender, while disadvantaging certain victims. He also confessed a failure to notify the congregation of the abuse case adequately and promptly, neglecting to maintain a promised child supervision plan. He also stated that the overall lack of urgency and care contributed to disunity within the church body, distrust of the elders, and left certain victims' families feeling abandoned or even betrayed and caused them actual injury. He has acknowledged his sin publicly and individually to several affected families.

Ben and Anna would both want to serve on the Presbytery Youth Leadership Team even during Ben's leave of absence. The session feels the necessity of the moment is for him to continue active on the session until more ruling elders are in place.

4) With regard to Keith Magill --

He has stated on the floor of Presbytery and to the Immanuel congregation:

"LQ. 149. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? A. No man is able, either of himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed. We made several mistakes along the way. I thought the best way I could respond would be to list several things I would do differently if we could do it over again. 1. All six of us should have recognized just how serious the situation was and gotten more involved from the very beginning. Instead, we assigned dealing with this to Nate, Zachary and Jared. 2. Early on we should have involved the only victim family that we knew about more directly in our discussions and decisions. 3. We should have asked for Presbytery help much sooner. 4. The three of us who were not dealing as directly with discovery and ministry should have received regular reports from the investigators and urged them on in their work. 5. We made a terrible mistake in not communicating with F6 even though they had left the Lafayette area. As members they should have received all the communications from the Session at the same time everyone else did. Forgiveness has been sought by me and granted. 6. All five of us ruling elders should have joined in making right our terrible mistake when it was said at the January 2 church family meeting that Josh Bright gave no reasons for his resignation from the diaconate. Instead we let David take all the responsibility for that wrong statement. 7. We should not have overcommitted ourselves to watching all the children all the time they were not in a supervised church activity. Even though we regularly prayed for wisdom according to James 1:5, we missed it several times along the way. I am very sorry."

His extended family is a victim family. He offered his retirement as an elder on March 26, 2021. At the request of the provisional elders, he has agreed to delay his retirement first until June 1, and now until more local elders are in place.

5) With regard to David Carr – he has stated [several names have been removed]: “As a member of the IRPC Session, I repented at the January 2, 2021, Church Family Meeting of several sins in our conduct of the case, namely:

There have been many accusations made against the Session’s handling of these issues. These are ones to which we can clearly and readily admit that we failed:

- 1. At several points over these months, we did not act quickly when we should have done so.**
- 2. We have not ministered to some of the victim families as much as we should. However, early on the _____ family did not want their identity known to anyone except Jared, Nate, and Zachary. They said that they were hurt by the entire session and some of the elders’ wives knowing about the situation. As a result, session was inhibited from reaching out to them.**
- 3. We unwisely allowed two of our members, Zachary and Nate, to bear too much of the burden of the investigation of _____ sins and also of our ministry to the _____ family. We should have involved all 5 of us ruling elders much sooner and more vigorously than we did.**
- 4. In several specific situations, we made serious mistakes. One of the most egregious was at the Church Family Meeting on January 2 when we let stand David Carr’s misstatement that Josh Bright did not give reasons for his resignation as a deacon. David was genuinely confused and Keith Magill, who was moderating the meeting, was also confused. We should have stopped the meeting, retrieved Josh’s resignation email, and given his reasons. On January 12, 2021, David sent an email to the active members of the congregation and to all the other attendees at the January 2 meeting, Josh Bright’s letter of resignation and apologized for his mistake.**
- 5. We could have made our safety plans even more rigorous.**

I apologized to Josh Bright by phone and publicly via email to all IRPC communicant members for my error in misrepresenting his resignation from the IRPC diaconate. He accepted my apology.”

The Shepherding Committee would note David spends countless hours each week serving as the clerk of the Immanuel Session.

The relevant conclusions of the Shepherding Committee are:

- 1) we believe that all five men have repented and confessed sin
- 2) we should receive them as brothers who have been won
- 3) that they can still be censured
- 4) if the censure is more than admonition or rebuke, a trial is required
- 5) that the sins fall closer to the definition of the censure of admonition than rebuke

Therefore, we recommend:

(1) that the five elders listed above be admonished for their lack of carefulness in their responsibilities as elders.

(2) that Ben and Anna Larson be approved to resume their youth responsibilities in the Presbytery.

(3) that a new provisional moderator be provided the Immanuel session until the Spring meeting of Presbytery.

(4) that the three existing provisional elders be continued.

(5) that the Shepherding Committee be dismissed.

Respectfully submitted,

John Hanson

Wade Mann

Bill Roberts