

Fwd: Invitation to encourage Immanuel

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Date: Jan 11, 2023 at 9:44 AM -0500

Dear brothers and sisters,

You are those who signed the complaint to synod last summer regarding matters pertaining to Immanuel. I write today especially those of you who live in Indiana.

I'm writing to invite you to encourage the Immanuel congregation in West Lafayette by joining them for worship with communion on February 5.

This beleaguered congregation has endured many hardships over the last couple of years, and they have held fast to Jesus Christ. My family and I have worshiped with them on a number of occasions and have seen the joy they have expressed in the midst of trial. Their faith, hope, and love abound and they continue to reach others in the community. Yet, it is a lonely season for these saints. So, I promised them that I would recruit friends to come and encourage them in their service to the Lord if they would help coordinate a fellowship meal after the worship service.

Worship is at 10:00 a.m. on February 5, 2023 at 2212 Yeager Road, West Lafayette, IN 47906. Interim Pastor Dan Perrin will be preaching.

Those who come are invited to participate in a pitch-in lunch after the morning service. It is not the week of the month for the congregation's regular fellowship meal, but many from the congregation will also be joining those who are guests for lunch. Please bring enough for yourself plus a little to share if you wish to stay.

Some of you may have questions about the current state of affairs. The congregation has voted to leave the RPCNA over disagreements of how ecclesiastical problems should be addressed (1 Pet. 4:8) and what it looks like to pursue a culture of gospel grace (Eph. 4:1-3; Jude 21). Yet, they have sought to work with the remaining commissions and committees of the RPCNA as much as they are able in order to live at peace with all men as far as it depends on them (Rom. 12:18). You may be aware that their pastor, Jared Olivetti, was barred from the Lord's Supper by the RPCNA in addition to being defrocked last year. Jared and his defense refused to attend the ecclesiastical trial because of what was obviously a kangaroo court.

Recognizing the gross injustice of the proceedings of the synod last year, many of Immanuel's officers and members objected to communing under the requirements of the RPCNA. So, for the peace and unity of the body,

the congregation had ceased to celebrate the Lord's Supper altogether for more than six months. Though the local elders believed Jared could be admitted to the Lord's Supper, they did not exercise their jurisdictional rights to admit him to the table out of deference to the RPCNA courts, even after the congregation voted to leave the denomination. It was a noble attempt to live peaceably with all men while seeking to resolve matters of dispute.

In the spring of 2022, the Synod Judicial Commission had declared Jared guilty of specific offenses in a ecclesiastical court setting without any defense present and without any cross-examination of witnesses.

At synod last summer, the RPCNA assigned a commission to follow-up with Jared Olivetti. It has now heard all of the statements of confession Jared made before he was barred from the table (which the earlier commission refused to consider before the trial). The commission has compared those statements with the charges against him and found that they were glad for his responses.

Yet, even now, after more than six months of work has been done since synod, the follow-up commission still does not believe Jesus has a place for Jared at his table, but the commission cannot articulate any substantive reason why. They are incapable of telling or unwilling to tell Jared what he has done wrong and for which he has not repented. Nor are they able to say what he should do to repent to in order to be welcomed back to the Lord's Supper. They simply say that other as-yet-unknown persons are offended for as-yet-unknown offenses...and that the commission will get back to him later. This, in spite of Jared's clear willingness to meet with or hear from any who believe he has sinned against them.

What might be the problem? Well, it seems that for the current commission to allow Jared back to the table without some new statement of repentance would be to imply that the original judgment of the SJC and synod to ban him from the Lord's Supper was wrong. And if it were admitted that this judgment was wrong because of the flawed judicial process that was pursued, what about the other judgments against Jared? Is it possible that the whole case against him could crumble as it was constructed if this were to be acknowledged?

Or is the problem that the church has a fundamentally flawed understanding and practice of justice, redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation? Or is the law of God being twisted in ways never intended by the Lawgiver? Or are there some involved in the process who would rather see vengeance than redemption? Or has a fear of man's opinion overtaken the desire to please God? Or some combination of some of these and/or other factors? Perhaps the Lord alone knows, but something is seriously amiss.

Whatever the case, the RPCNA continues to ban Jared from Jesus' table without valid reason. This injustice harms not only one man, but a whole congregation. While the RPCNA has constantly dangled a carrot of hope that restoration is just ahead, it has regularly moved the goalposts. Job stated in Job 6:14 that: "He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty." Is the RPCNA forsaking the fear of the Almighty by withholding the basic kindness God shows to his people? Is the church unable to feature the grace with which it has been entrusted?

The Immanuel elders who have walked closely with Jared and who have examined the claims against him have seen that the commission's ruling is unjust and is contrary to the word of God. Knowing that, like the apostles of old, they must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29), they exercised their rightful jurisdiction over the

congregation and admitted Jared to the Lord's Supper starting in December 2022. The congregation again began celebrating God's grace in this way, proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26).

Abraham Kuyper once wrote: "Only in churches which take their stand in Calvinism [biblical Christianity], do we find that spiritual independence which enables the believer to oppose, if need be, and for God's sake, even the most powerful office-bearer in his church. Only he who personally stands before God on his own account, and enjoys an uninterrupted communion with God, can properly display the glorious wings of liberty." The Lord has stood beside and strengthened the leaders of this congregation to follow Jesus, even in the face of opposition.

As many of you know, I myself (and others) have left the RPCNA, in part, because of the gross injustices of this situation. It fits a pattern of other legalistic actions and attitudes in the denomination that focus on rules and structure instead of cultivating the spiritual life of the church. Jesus gives strong warnings against those who shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces (Matt. 23:1-15). Elders are charged to prioritize bringing people to Jesus, not keeping people from Jesus. At the Lord's Supper, we get to celebrate this great privilege of bringing God's needy people to him and of seeing his kingdom strengthened and built.

Over the holidays, many of you enjoyed family meals together. Grandmothers and mothers were glad to have their family at the table. We also know that our matriarchs noticed with sadness who was absent from the holiday table in addition to rejoicing over those who were present. You can imagine Grandma's indignation if she were to learn that one member of the family had intentionally kept another member of the family away without justifiable reason. How much more indignant is Jesus Christ in such a situation? He died and rose again for his children. Jesus delights to have his repentant children at his table. He loves to see his people welcome one another as Christ has welcomed them (Rom. 15:7).

Obviously, the Immanuel congregation is moving forward in a new direction denominationally as they follow the Lord.

You may not know what to think of all of the decisions made by the various church courts. But, you can still take this opportunity to love and encourage your brothers and sisters in the Lord in a tangible way by joining them for worship to celebrate God's grace in Christ. They are your flesh and blood in the Lord who follow Jesus but have been isolated in many ways. Now is a wonderful time to come alongside and magnify the Lord with them (Psa. 34:3).

To help the congregation prepare, please let me know if you plan to come on February 5, and I will let the Immanuel elders and deacons know to expect you. An RSVP is not required of course, but it may help with planning. Finally, if you cannot call on the Lord with Immanuel in person, please call on him in prayer for the church there and for all involved.

In Christ,

James Faris

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