



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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October 28, 2021

Dear Congregation,

This is a busy, wonderful time in the life of First Presbyterian Church and in our own families as well, as we look forward to celebrating and reflecting on God's goodness to us over the holidays.

We've celebrated the birth of a new covenant child and taken vows as a congregation to assist his parents in their Christian nature. The covenant of God is so beautiful as it not only draws us and unites us to Him in Christ, but also knits us together as a people to support, encourage, and serve.

As presbyterians, our spiritual life involves more than ourselves, our families, and our congregations, but the denomination and presbytery of which we are a part. In light of that I want to update you on some matters going on in the Tennessee Valley Presbytery and the wider PCA.

I. Update on BCO Changes

As you may have seen in the weekly prayer list and updates (if you're not getting those, please sign up by calling the church office or emailing Tami: office@fpfo.org), earlier this month our presbytery considered whether to ratify certain changes to the *Book of Church Order* passed by the 2021 General Assembly.

The two most significant changes for consideration by the presbytery would strengthen the character requirements for ordination in the PCA. If the proposed changes are ratified, presbyteries and church sessions would be required to ask questions aimed at preventing those who hold racist views, are addicted to pornography, engage in abusive practices, mismanage their finances, have a reputation and identity defined by sinful predilections, and other character issues from being ordained in the PCA. These require a greater investigation and study of a candidate's personal holiness.

From my own experience, I have been examined for ordination and/or licensure by four different presbyteries throughout the country and most of them were very solid presbyteries. The sorts of enquiries that would be required by these BCO changes were not made of me when I was examined for the most part. Perhaps that is because I was already well-known to some of the elders examining me, but based on my own - subjective - experience, I believe ordination requirements in our denomination need to be strengthened especially as related to holiness of character.

In the background to these proposed changes is, of course, some matters of concern Nashville and Saint Louis, however the changes are not aimed only at those who identify with or have a reputation characterized by unnatural sexual desires.

Our presbytery narrowly (47-52) voted *against* ratifying the BCO changes passed by the General Assembly. Any change to the BCO requires a majority of two general assemblies as well as ratification by two-thirds of PCA presbyteries.

It remains to be seen how the other presbyteries will vote, but please continue to be in prayer for the PCA. We had an encouraging General Assembly with record participation that sent a clear message regarding the PCA's commitment to biblical fidelity. Now is the time to pray and patiently continue building and encouraging a commitment to the integrity of our shared Reformed Confession and salvation in Christ.

II. Standing Judicial Commission

The Standing Judicial Commission (SJC) is the supreme court of our denomination. Recently, they ruled in favor of Missouri Presbytery (MoP) and against a member of MoP who complained about the process MoP followed when investigating matters related to Memorial Presbyterian in Saint Louis.

While some may interpret this as a vindication of the views and activities of the church session and a particular teaching elder in that presbytery, what the SJC assessed was the procedure followed by MoP in requiring an explanation from the Session of the church and teaching elder in question. In that vein, they determined there was no “reversible error” made by MoP that the SJC could address.

Many in the PCA have recognized a problem in the particular polity of the PCA (not presbyterianism generally, but the PCA’s specifically) in that our SJC tends not to look as closely at *what* happened when it reviews cases, but *how* it happened. We should pray that a way to maintain our “grassroots heritage” as well as ensure confessional integrity across the presbyteries that comprise our denomination.

III. National Partnership Emails

This past week a large chunk of emails was released from a semi-secret/confidential organization or faction within the PCA calling itself *the National Partnership* (NP). If you’ve read my General Assembly reports over the last few years or been keeping up with PCA News on *The Aquila Report* or elsewhere, you might be vaguely familiar with them.

The emails reveal the efforts of the NP to pull the denomination in a broader, more progressive direction by way of 1) advocacy on the floor of General Assembly and 2) electing men to various permanent committees of the PCA. While there is nothing scandalous or unethical about encouraging greater involvement at the General Assembly, that is not what is concerning.

The emails reveal the inner workings of a highly developed political machine operating within the PCA. Numerous key denominational employees and past moderators are feted as “members” of this faction. The emails also show unbecoming and regrettable comments regarding elders with whom their faction disagrees.

In light of these revelations, this “apocalypse,” I want to encourage us in three ways:

1. The men who sent these emails are our family. We can’t deny or conceal what they said, even though they thought their comments and plans were protected by a veil of “confidentiality” (Cf. Luke 12:3). Since they are our PCA family, we need to address it, pray for their repentance and reconciliation with the brothers and strive to move forward together with unity and integrity.
2. I don’t know about you, but I have certainly said and written things in private that I have regretted. Perhaps you have as well? Bear that in mind as you pray and hear reports or read this record of emails.
3. One of the things these emails reveal is the level of organization and involvement within the church courts by those who favor a broader, more progressive PCA. For that very reason, our congregation should be all the more eager to be involved in the courts of the church and to advocate for confessional integrity, biblical fidelity, and joyful piety.

Above all, please continue to pray for the spiritual health and growth of this congregation as we seek to bear witness to Christ’s salvation here at the corner of Harker and LaFayette.

Your friend,



Ryan Biese,