

Unity Protestant Reformed Church

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

PO Box 381 Byron Center MI 49315

clerk@unityprc.org

Dear Unity PRC Congregation,

You have by now probably received a magazine entitled *Sword and Shield*. This magazine was sent by a new organization, Reformed Believer's Publication. We did not provide the publishers of this magazine with the addresses of our members nor did they seek the consistory's approval to mail the magazine to the members of our congregation. We believe that the publishing and mailing of a new magazine to our members with the stated purpose of promoting the truth in our denomination would have sought the input and permission of our consistory that is called of God to maintain and proclaim the truth and watch over the faith and life of its members. The consistory of Unity PRC sends this letter to inform our congregation that we have serious concerns regarding the publishing of this magazine and the content of it.

First, the magazine comes at a time in our history where we have spent a considerable amount of time coming to a clearer understanding regarding the sovereignty of God in our salvation and our calling as God's people to live in that life of covenant fellowship and obedience to God's Word. Consistories, Classis East and Synods have spent much time discussing and clarifying. The perspectives of many office bearers based on the Word of God and our confessions have been considered and clarified. This is the Reformed and orderly way of resolving controversy and disagreements which orderly way is laid out in our Church Order, Art. 31. This process, as it has been followed throughout our history, begins at the Consistory level and proceeds, if necessary, to the Classical level and then finally to the Synodical level. Every office bearer promises to follow this way of decency and good order when he signs the Formula of Subscription which says, “whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the consistory, the classis or the synod, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgement already passed.” If members of a denomination believe other members in the same denomination are guilty of heresy, they must bring charges in a way that follows the Church Order. Article 31 reads, “If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by the general synod.” Even if one is bringing an appeal to an ecclesiastical assembly, it is wrong to agitate and sow discord through public writing and speaking. This is clear from Art. 31 of the Church Order which we quoted earlier: “...until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgement already passed.” As a consistory, we do not believe the publishing and mailing of this magazine, whose purpose includes “condemning doctrines, attitudes and practices” within the PRCA, follows this orderly way and, in fact, it will promote further division and unrest in our denomination.

Second, although the magazine purports the development of the Reformed truth, statements made in the publication give evidence that the content and manner in which this is done will only cause further division, promote discord and will lead to schism. This becomes evident when in the magazine it states its purpose in our denomination this way, “Sword and Shield exists to draw blood in battle so that the enemy is killed or routed from the field” (Editorial pg. 7) The publication goes on to give itself the authority to “condemn doctrines, attitudes and practices” within them (the PRCA) (Editorial pg. 8) that they perceive to be false, even if that criticism and condemnation is of the highest ecclesiastical assemblies of the church. Ecclesiastical assemblies can err, but the way to resolve error and maintain unity in the church and denomination is to use the orderly way laid out in the Church Order. If there are disagreements, then these must be dealt with in the proper way that the Church Order lays out.

Third, we also have concerns regarding the transparency and accuracy of statements that describe the relationship that exists between the Standard Bearer and this new magazine. No mention is made of the criticism and dissatisfaction with the Standard Bearer out of which this new magazine arose. Rather, the editorial in the new magazine leaves the impression of a cordial relationship existing between these two magazines. This is misleading.

Finally, as your consistory, we ask for your continued prayers that God will use us to lead and guide our congregation in the way of truth and proper understanding. May God grant wisdom to each of us that we may rightly understand and live according to the truths of Scripture and our confessions.

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Eph. 4:1-3

In Christ,

The Consistory of Unity PRC

(Some of the material in this letter was gleaned from letters from Georgetown and Faith PRC consistories. We thank them for allowing us to use this material.)