

May 9, 2021

Dear Consistory of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, The Shepherd of His sheep.

“And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them” (John 10:4-6).

After witnessing the events that have transpired in the PRC over the past six years, culminating in the deposition of Rev. Andrew Lanning in January, we have judged that faithfulness to our confession of faith vows requires of us that we remove our membership from the Protestant Reformed Churches and join ourselves to First Reformed Protestant Church.

We have “diligently and circumspectly” from “the Word of God” discerned that the marks of “the true church” are found at First RPC. “The pure doctrine of the gospel is preached” there, the sacraments are purely administered, and “discipline is exercised in the punishing of sin”, not in persecuting “those who live holily according to the Word of God” (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

Sadly, and ominously, as it has been very plainly displayed, the marks of the true church are under assault in the PRC, and especially at Byron Center PRC. Rev. Andrew Lanning, a minister sound in doctrine and faithful in the proclamation of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, has been cast out. And this was done, when even by the admission of Classis East and the Consistory of BCPRC, Rev. Lanning was sound in doctrine. In the closing words of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, Rev. Lanning “rebuke[d] her (the PRC) for her errors” and for it he was “persecute[d].” “More power and authority” have been ascribed “to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God” in the PRC and the “yoke of Christ” is being cast off (BC, Art. 29).

Being a witness to this we stand before God and answer to God for our church membership and that of our children. We may not remain in a church where the office bearers knowingly and deliberately silenced a prophet who faithfully taught the true and complete doctrine of salvation as contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Reformed Confessions (Question #1, Public Confession of Faith). Nor may we remain in a church where the rejection of repugnant heresies is silenced (Question #2, Public Confession of Faith).

You have written in a form letter sent to members who have requested their membership papers, “you vowed to submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent to church discipline. Are you living what you promised God?” It is revealing that you ask that question divorced from the first two questions of the confession of faith vow. We did not vow to submit to church government simply for the sake of submitting to church government. We vowed, as Article 28 of the Belgic Confession enjoins, to bow our “necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ was faithfully proclaimed by Rev. Lanning from Byron’s pulpit. That Word was silenced. As the Article also declares, “doctrine and discipline” are united. If you corrupt the doctrine, or silence sound doctrine, you have also corrupted discipline. It is

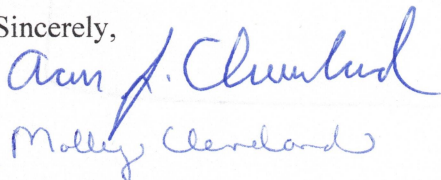
ominous that you dare ask this question of sheep who faithfully keep their confession of faith vows by believing, confessing, and living in sound doctrine? Sheep, who by the grace of God, adhere to sound doctrine and reject all heresies repugnant thereto, are asked “are you living what you promised God?”

Further, in that letter, you say of the members of First Reformed Protestant Church, “If they disagree with the decisions of Classis East and the synodical deputies, the correct way of dealing with this is to appeal to synod. They are not doing this.” Men, if ever there was a group of believers who protested and appealed in order to battle error and hierarchy in the PRC, it is this band of believers. The rightness of their cause is confirmed by their willingness to suffer the loss of many things for the cause of the truth (Matt. 10:35-39). The question should be, “What does the consistory of Byron Center PRC think of the protests brought to them?” Sorely troubled believers brought them to the consistory. Were any of them answered? Acknowledged? You require that members protest and appeal. Yet, we have not met one ordinary member of First RPC whose protest was answered by Byron’s consistory. There may not be a record in the consistory minutes of these unanswered protests, but one day soon the infallible heavenly record will be opened (Psalm 56:8).

Our promise “to lead a new, godly life” requires of us, before God, that we leave BCPRC and join First RPC. We have diligently examined the marks of the true church and found them to be under assault in the PRC. And, we have found them to be most visibly present at First RPC. We request that you send our membership papers and those of our 8 baptized children to our home.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures in blue ink. The top signature is 'Aaron J. Cleveland' and the bottom signature is 'Molly Cleveland'.

Aaron & Molly Cleveland