

January 4, 2021

Dear Byron Center Consistory,

After weeks of wrestling with whether to write this letter or not, I simply cannot remain silent any longer.

I am struggling immensely with the dishonesty that I see coming from my elders. For the sake of clarity, I will move chronologically in my effort to explain.

On Saturday evening, November 28th, 2020, my husband received a call from Elder Kaptein that he had been relieved of his duties as elder until he apologized for his charge against the consistory. His relief of duties stemmed from the fact that the consistory had taken a vote to suspend Rev. Lanning (upon concurrence of a neighboring consistory) and my husband could not bow his head with them in prayer. It would have been a sin against his own conscience.

After absorbing this news, Dewey and I sat with the children and explained to them what had happened in an effort to prepare them for the reality of the next day's announcement.

The following morning, November 29th, 2020 this announcement is read from the pulpit:

"Dear Byron Center congregation,

The Consistory informs the congregation that we have relieved Rev. Lanning of his ministerial duties *to have sufficient time to consider the material and recommendations from the Church Visitors.*

We covet your prayers that the Lord will lead us in our deliberations. Be assured of our prayers for you during this time.

Proverbs 3: 5,6

In Christ,

Consistory of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church"

"...to have sufficient time to consider the material and recommendations from the Church Visitors."

How is it possible that this statement be made when the vote had already been taken? You voted to suspend Rev. Lanning from his office but told the congregation you were still considering it. A motion to suspend Rev. Lanning was made, supported and approved. The decision was made.

All six of you men then sat together and drafted an announcement to read to your flock that says we "have relieved Rev. Lanning of his ministerial duties to have sufficient time to consider the material and recommendations". You sat together and crafted this announcement. Did not one man raise his hand and question the integrity of it?

Can you understand my struggle? That announcement was not honest. In fact, it was completely dishonest! In the very House of God, you lied to the entire congregation and used a visiting minister as an accessory in your sin.

What am I to think? How am I to explain this to my children? They knew the truth when they sat down in the pew that morning but left confused and troubled by the dishonest report read by Prof. Huizinga.

Credibility is questioned. Trust is fractured.

To make matters worse, in the consistory room that very morning, a man asked "where are Bryan and Dewey?" and they were told "They relieved themselves of their duties." In the parking lot after the morning service, when concerned members asked why Dewey and Bryan were sitting with their families before the service, this is the response they received from their elders: "They removed themselves from office"

"Why don't you ask them why they were sitting with their families." "Go home and read Article 31 of the Church Order."

"They relieved themselves of their duties."

Not only was this lie told repeatedly, it was insisted upon. Within hours, this slanderous report raced throughout the denomination. And it all originated from the heart and lips of you men, the church's elders.

James 3:5 "...behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

Credibility is now destroyed. Trust is now shattered.

On Wednesday, December 2, 2020, the congregation received an email from the consistory.

"Dear congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
During this most difficult time, we wish to communicate our love and prayers for you while we deliberate, day and night, the serious issues that face our congregation. *We assure you we are doing this most carefully and deliberately, seeking God's wisdom and guidance.* Psalm 25:4-5..."

"We assure you we are doing this most carefully and deliberately, seeking God's wisdom and guidance..."

Again, as a sheep in the flock, I am deceived by the very ones that are called to lead and protect. Deliberately told a lie. This was not being done "most carefully and deliberately".

Definition of *carefully*: "in a way that deliberately avoids harm or errors; cautiously"

Definition of *deliberately*: "in a way that is meant, intended, or planned. : slowly and carefully : in a way that is not hurried."

How is the following “most carefully and deliberately”?

On Sunday, November 15th my minister preaches a sermon on Jeremiah 23 that brings many to repentance. Thirteen days later, as a ruling body of elders, you vote to suspend the man.

Thirteen days.

Four days after this, my consistory assures me that they are doing this “most carefully and deliberately, seeking God’s wisdom and guidance.”

As ordained elders in the Church of Jesus Christ, you are telling the entire congregation that you worked most carefully and deliberately that in thirteen day’s time you were comfortable and confident that you had the Lord’s blessing on your judgement to suspend Rev. Lanning?

With all due respect, you men held more meetings and labored far more “carefully and deliberately” to follow Covid protocol than you have in this most weighty of cases.

Psalms 120:2 - “Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.”

I have exhausted myself these past 18 years to teach my children that their words and actions must be pure and honest. Lying is inexcusable and never tolerated.

God insists on it.

Therefore, I insist on it.

Because of the office you hold and the respect that comes with that office, you have undone all of that instruction by your lies and deceit.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness.” 9th Commandment: second table of the Law - duties we owe our neighbor.

Every single Sunday we hear God’s demand for our life when the commandments are read.

Just minutes after my children hear this command read to them on November 29th, they hear a lie read to them off the pulpit. Their elders just committed this very sin. Publicly. What are we to make of this? You have violated God’s Law and corrupted your office before the face of God in His very presence. What boldness.

1 Peter 4:17 - “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God...”

You men have been elected to the highest office in the Church. You made a vow before God and the entire congregation to “walk in all godliness”. Immediately upon taking this vow, you

were charged to "take heed that purity of doctrine and godliness of life be maintained in the church of God."

How can you possibly "admonish those who behave disorderly" when you yourselves are behaving disorderly?

Am I to sit idly by and allow my elders to taint the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of my children?

I cannot do so. I will not.

Like each of you, I, myself, made a vow before God and the entire congregation. I promised to help or cause my children to be instructed in these truths to the utmost of my power. This is the very reason I cannot with good conscience send my little lambs to Catechism.

Read Lord's Day 43 below.

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 43:

Q. 112. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer, that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings, I love the truth, speak it uprightly, and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor."

I cannot allow you to instruct my child on what God requires in the ninth commandment. I must stand before the Judgment seat of God one day and give account for their souls. Tender, impressionable souls that He has entrusted to my care.

Those souls are far too precious for me to jeopardize by placing them under your instruction.

Matthew 18:6 "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

I do not trust the elders of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.

You have repeatedly proven yourselves deceitful and are not honorable in your office.

I weep over this reality. I don't trust my elders. What a shame.

The pain you have caused with your lies has cut deep. We will forever bear the scars of your dishonesty and deceit.

So, you tell me how I can reconcile your actions with the Word of God?

This is what your actions say to me and my children: Men of leadership roles in the Church of Jesus Christ are free to lie, deceive, slander, & brawl. Their office is of such a high nature that the requirements of God's Law do not apply to them. In addition, their actions may cause irreparable damage to the souls of the entire congregation but they are not responsible for the casualties and cannot be punished.

And this is what the infallible Word of God says to me and my children about your actions:

Proverbs 12:22 - "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight."

Proverbs 10:18 - "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool."

Proverbs 19:9 - "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and [he that] speaketh lies shall perish."

Psalms 101:7 - "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

Revelation 21:8 - "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

1 Timothy 3:1,2 - "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach..."

Proverbs 6:16-19 "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:

*A proud look,
a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,
feet that be swift in running to mischief,
A false witness that speaketh lies,
and he that soweth discord among brethren."*

God be praised for His Word. It is so simple and so clear.

As the past few weeks have demonstrated so clearly, any and all confidence in man will fail. Man will disappoint. Man will betray. Man wavers.

But the Word of God is proven. It has never failed me. It has never disappointed me. It has never betrayed me. It has never wavered. Therefore, it can and will be my *only* Guide in life.

II Timothy 3:15 - "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

This was not an easy letter to write. I am not of the nature to confront or expose. But, if this Word of God is to be my Guide, then I cannot remain silent while you men walk contrary to it.

As the elders of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, you have destroyed this congregation and scattered the Lord's sheep.

Proverbs 15:3 - "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

You cannot expect the Lord's blessing on your work while you continue to transgress His Law.

Isaiah 59:2 - "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

I pray that you will understand the seriousness of this and acknowledge your errors. May the Holy Spirit stir your souls to repent and turn from your sin.

Galatians 6:7 - "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

In Christ,



Dawn Engelsma