

To: the consistory of Byron Center PRC

From: Matthew Overway

Date: 12/14/2020

Dear consistory,

It is my understanding that the consistory has submitted the paperwork to classis for the deposition of Rev. Lanning. I ask that the consistory withdraw that information for this January classis. My grounds for this request are as follows:

1. Vandellen and Monsma in their commentary on the church order indicate that the proper way of wisdom is to proceed with deposition of a minister only after three to six months have transpired from the time of their suspension.
"Suspension of Ministers **will as a rule also require a period of three to six months.** At the end of the period of suspension the two consistories can lift the suspension and reinstate the Minister, or they can extend the period of suspension, or they may find that the Minister in question should be deposed, in which case the matter goes to Classis." (Church Order Commentary page 327) (emphasis mine)
2. The consistory in their announcement that the church visitors were being asked for help, cited Proverbs that "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." By the consistory going to Classis at this time there is no opportunity for the congregation of Byron Center Church to offer their counsel to the consistory. If the consistory truly was interested in seeking the advice of a multitude of counsellors she would withdraw her materials from Classis at this time and allow her own members to speak to the consistory. This is the way of love for Rev. Lanning, for our congregation and our denomination as a whole.
3. Because the congregation has not been allowed opportunity to see or interact with the decisions of the consistory this matter is not finished at the consistory level. If the consistory is truly interested in proceeding in the proper manner then Article 30 and 31 must be satisfied before you can go to Classis. Because of the hastiness of the consistory's actions, and their withholding of the actual decisions with their grounds from the congregation the consistory has not done their due diligence in this matter.
4. Due to the far reaching consequences of this decision to go to Classis for the deposition of a minister in the PRC it is unwise for the consistory to act rashly or in haste. It is in the best interests of all involved that this decision and process be given time lest we err because we did not think things through but acted with emotion rather than with knowledge and understanding.

5. If the consistory decides to proceed without giving Rev. Lanning or the congregation a fair hearing the consistory is in danger of scattering and losing this flock of Jesus Christ. Proceed if you must but you may not have any sheep to shepherd after classis. This is not a threat but a warning to the consistory. The majority of the congregation is not behind the consistory. You may lead, but many will not follow. If you truly love all your sheep you will do what you must in order to persuade them of the rightness of your decision. You can drive the flock like Esau but the ewes and lambs will fall behind and be lost. A good shepherd like Jacob loves his sheep by leading gently, slowly, but persistently in the way that we must go. Love does not lead by constraint and power, rather love leads by gentle persuasion and correction. I ask that you love your sheep at Byron Center Church by withdrawing the material from Classis at this time. If at the May classis the consistory still deems it necessary to proceed with deposition then proceed if you must. But not now, and not in this way, such is not the way of love for your sheep.

In love for all the members of Byron Center Church,

Matthew Overway
(email Dec. 14, 2020)