

November 12, 2020

Dear consistory of Byron Center PRC,

I never expected to do anything like this, but I feel compelled to protest your decision that was sent out by email today, regarding Andy's editorship of *Sword and Shield*. I was told generally of the decision and its grounds beforehand, but when I actually saw the decision and grounds in the consistory's email, I was so shocked that I feel I must protest. And I would like to clarify that although of course I intend to show this to my husband, this is from me personally.

The first ground states that Andy's "focus must be on the preaching of the Word." I think it is quite evident that Andy loves to preach, and loves to preach *for Byron Center*. He can hardly be persuaded to take a vacation away from this congregation, so that he preaches here even when we've been gone from home for the entire week. He preached when he had COVID (and wanted to do that!). If a classical appointment is canceled, he doesn't take the service off and sit in the pew; he asks you to cancel the pulpit supply so he can preach here. And he has said to me repeatedly in the past three years, "I love preaching for Byron Center!" So to imply in your ground that the preaching is *not* his focus is hurtful and extremely unjust.

You also speak of his focus needing to be the care of the congregation. Maybe I can share a special perspective as his wife. I saw the many, *many* hours he put into writing daily devotionals for the congregation when we were required to stay home during the coronavirus shutdown earlier this year. I see the excitement he has over teaching catechism each week, and the desire that it were possible for him to teach more of the classes. I see the visits he makes, both the times when he leaves home and the times when people come to his study. I saw all the reading he did to prepare for meetings with ----, the tears over ----'s unbelief, the hours he would spend thinking about what to say to him. I know that when a phone call comes, he is instantly ready to meet with whoever is calling him, whether for counseling or sickness or questions about the preaching or anything else. By contrast, I only very occasionally see him leaving the home to meet with a subcommittee of the Reformed Believers Publishing board for an hour. Meetings with them are rare and usually short, although your decision indicates that they take up a lot of his time. Also, Andy has no denominational work right now that is taking his time, as he did at Faith Church with the Contact Committee, and as all our other West Michigan ministers have with the Domestic Missions Committee, Contact Committee, Theological School Committee, etc. He does have one DMC meeting a month, but that is in his role as pastor of Byron Center, the calling church, not as a member of the DMC. He has time to care for this congregation and to edit a magazine. But that is not worded correctly, because his editing this magazine is *part of* his care of this flock. He cares that this flock knows the truth! He cares that this flock is warned about errors within and without! He cares that this flock has the assurance of their salvation in Jesus Christ alone! And many people from this flock, including long-term members of the congregation, have testified that they have been fed and learned much through his writing in *Sword and Shield*.

I also protest your second ground in regard to the form of ordination of elders. I believe that the "good advice" that a consistory is called to give to the minister must be grounded in Scripture and the confessions. I believe that forcing Andy to quit his work on *Sword and Shield* actually goes *against* Scripture and the confessions, which calls him to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3), to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2), and to be a "watchman unto the house of Israel," to "hear the word at my (God's) mouth, and give them warning from me," so that if "*thou givest him not warning...his blood will I require at thine hand*" (Ezek. 3:17-18). Belgic Confession Article 29 says that a mark of the true church is "in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word

of God, (and) all things contrary thereto rejected.” This is what Andy is working to do. The form for installation of ministers calls Andy to faithfully explain God’s Word to the flock, including “refuting with the Holy Scriptures all schisms and heresies which are repugnant to the pure doctrine.” And the Formula of Subscription vow that he made says he will “teach and faithfully...defend” the doctrine of the confessions, including exerting himself to keep the church free from errors. Your decision effectively tells Andy *not* to do all these things. You also quote that it is your duty “to have regard unto the doctrine...of the ministers of the Word.” I am puzzled as to how telling him not to edit a magazine that declares sound doctrine fits with having regard to his doctrine, unless you have a problem with his doctrine itself, in which case it seems that stronger measures should be taken against him.

In conclusion, I protest your decision with these grounds, as further explained above:

Ground 1: The work of editing *Sword and Shield* does not hurt Andy’s ministry in Byron Center PRC. He does much, *much* work for this congregation in the preaching and other aspects of the ministry, and in fact, editing *Sword and Shield* is even one of the things that can help this congregation to grow spiritually.

Ground 2: The decision to make him stop editing *Sword and Shield* forces Andy to go against his Formula of Subscription vow and his calling from God’s Word to earnestly contend for the faith and to be a watchman that gives warning from God’s mouth.

I pray that the consistory will have wisdom to judge rightly in this matter and in all your work.

In Christ,

Stephanie Lanning