

Emmanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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Dear Emmanuel Church Family,

Acts 20:28 says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

We are all sinners. As Christians, we continue to struggle with the remnant of sin that remains within us. We will not be perfect until we get to heaven. Yet the Scriptures are clear that there is a level of sin that a professing Christian involves himself in that crosses the line between a struggling sinner and a sinner who is in danger of showing himself to be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

It is our sad duty as your Session to inform you, the congregation of Emmanuel OPC, that one of our members has crossed that line. Acting as his own accuser, Mr. Steven Sitler has acknowledged to the Session that he has been actively engaged in a serious and persistent pattern of sin. The Session has determined that the offense committed by Steven Sitler is the breaking of the seventh commandment (the sin of sexual immorality) in an egregious manner. The session has accepted his confession and has proceeded to pronounce the censure of suspension from the privileges of church membership for an indefinite period of time.

Suspension is not the same as excommunication. Excommunication is the most severe censure and is resorted to only in cases of offenses aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists in a solemn declaration by the session that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ. We have not excommunicated Steven at this time. We have determined to suspend him for an indefinite period of time.

Indefinite suspension is the step before excommunication. It is a censure that serves as a grave warning. It declares that a person's life contains such grievous sin that the elders have serious doubts concerning the salvation of the person. It declares that the person's soul is to be considered in grave jeopardy. In practice it means that the person loses the privileges of membership, such as participation in the Lord's Supper, voting at congregational meetings and taking baptismal vows for one's children. It also means that he has lost the trust of the body of Christ. He is to be looked at with spiritual suspicion.

When the elders declare a person indefinitely suspended, it means that the elders are so deeply concerned for this person's soul that they believe the entire church family needs to be aware of the situation. The church is being asked to join them in praying for this person, encouraging the person to follow the instructions of the elders, and to join the elders in helping this person in his spiritual journey. This person is still to be given the comfort of Christ as part of his flock but with the constant warning that if he does not bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, then the elders may determine it necessary to excommunicate him. The elders will seek to work very closely with the person and help him bring forth fruit worthy of repentance.

This is what we have declared concerning Mr. Steven Sitler. We are deeply concerned for the condition of his soul. Steven has come as his own accuser and has expressed a desire to work toward full reconciliation to God and to His church through the Biblical process of church discipline. We are seeking to help Steven to bring forth fruit worthy of his repentance which we pray will eventually lead to his restoration.

Our Guidelines for Church Discipline, which have been approved by the session, states the following in section 21: "Since the church is a body made up of many parts (see I Corinthians 12:12-30), what happens to one member of the church necessarily affects and is of legitimate concern to other members (see Romans 12:15-16; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 12:12-30). Therefore, the indefinite suspension, deposition, or excommunication of a member shall be announced to the church so that its members will be able to pray for, encourage, and exhort the accused as opportunities arise, as well as be on guard against any gossip or divisiveness that might arise from the offense of censure (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14; Titus 3:10). The public announcement shall always be accompanied by prayer that God will graciously use the discipline for his own glory, the restoration of the offender, and the edification of the church. The announcement may be made during a regular worship service, at a special meeting of the congregation, or by letter."

Brothers and sisters, please take these words to heart. This discipline is being done for the good of Steven, for the protection of the name of Christ, and for the good of the body of Christ. Please pray for Steven and the church body. Pray that we will be protected from gossip or division. Pray that Steven will truly be repentant of his sins and follow in the ways of Christ. Pray for Dave and Roxanne as well as the rest of the Sitler family as they bear the burdens of Steven's sins. And pray for the session that we might be faithful shepherds of the flock of God put under our care.

The session has forbidden Steven to attend or be involved with any of the ministries of Emmanuel OPC, including worship services and any other sponsored event for an undetermined period of time. The session will be working with Steven outside of these normal ministries of Emmanuel OPC. The session is also fully cooperating with an ongoing police investigation.

Parents, please explain this announcement of discipline to your covenant children as is appropriate to their age.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if we can be of assistance in any way, please feel free to speak privately with one of the elders.

The Session of Emmanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

Randy Bergquist

Jack Bradley

Roy Van Gorkom