

# **Position Paper and Response To Questions Circulated About Sessional Authority Within The RPNA (General Meeting)**

In the Response that is before you, the Session has decided to focus its attention upon questions that have been circulated both publicly and privately as it relates in various ways to the authority possessed by the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting). We thank you for your patience in awaiting a Response to the questions that have been raised. We propose first that you carefully consider what is found in our Response. Second, we recommend that you privately send questions of clarification to us which we will publicly post, and to which questions we will publicly respond (as quickly as we are able to do). Third, after your questions of clarification have been submitted and answered, we will consider (if we deem it necessary and profitable at that time) how we might formulate a plan to facilitate a forum that will lead to a profitable discussion for everyone who desires to do so.

We will presently hold off on any specific comments on “restructuring” until we see more clearly what the direct impact will be upon the Session once Elder Barrow is no longer an employed officer of the Church and is working at another job in order to provide for his family. Due to a variety of difficult circumstances that members of Session have recently faced (health concerns, employment changes, financial concerns etc.), we have been in discussion and considering various possibilities in the event that the Session might not be able to continue to function as a church court. Presently, we deem it most expedient for the Societies that we continue to function as a Session so that we might continue to exercise discipline, serve the Lord’s Supper, and rule in the various controversies that continue among us. During this period of time, Societies are encouraged to pursue the edification of one another in matters that are not judicial, , but rather are of a non-controversial nature in ministering and serving one another.

We proceed at this time to list 4 questions with our answers following each question. As you read these questions and answers, you will find a certain amount of overlap in the use of the citations we have chosen to employ. This is due to the fact that these particular citations are useful in answering more than only one question. We have purposely chosen to leave these citations in our Response, even though they are duplicated, so that each question might be answered more completely.

**1. Does the RPNA (General Meeting) have a lawful Church Court with authority from Christ to perform that which is not only necessary, but edifying for the members under its inspection? Does the fact that the Session is composed of officers from different countries annul the lawful authority of the Session?**

A question has been raised on the Internet by those within and without our membership as to whether or not the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting) is in fact a lawfully constituted Court with power to admit and demit members, to authoritatively adjudicate and declare church censures, and in general, to exercise all acts of church power competent to a lawful court of Jesus Christ.

The main questions asked in regard to our proceeding as an extraordinary court of Jesus Christ are these:

How can you (the RPNA Session) be a lawful Church Court when you only have one Pastor living in Albany, and two Ruling Elders living in Edmonton? When the Presbytery dissolved, you no longer had a Session localized in Edmonton or Albany, and therefore, how can you act as a Court on this international basis? How do you justify this according to Scripture, history, and your principles of Presbyterian government?

In answer to these questions, we submit the following arguments from Scripture, and from the testimony and judgment of Ministers primarily present at the Westminster Assembly.

We recognize that in extraordinary times extraordinary things may be done to preserve the unity, peace and purity of the Church of Jesus Christ so that the faithful covenanted testimony we uphold may be preserved among us and in the world. This Scriptural right of self preservation is taught, in principle, in the Sixth Commandment wherein we see that “Thou shalt not kill” implies that we as people should use all lawful means to preserve ourselves and others. This principle not only applies to our human bodies, but also applies to the body of Christ—His Church.

Consider the position held by “The London Ministers” of the Westminster Assembly who spoke precisely to this very point:

“And what should become of such a congregation as either voluntarily transplants itself, or is accidentally cast among heathens and Pagans in far countries where there are no Christians or Churches to join and associate withal, **if they are denied an authoritative Presbytery within themselves for preventing and healing of Scandals, and preserving themselves from destruction and ruin** which Anarchy will unavoidably bring upon them“ (Sundry Ministers of London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: The Divine Right Of Church Government*, p. 197, Naphtali Press, emphases added)

Furthermore, these same faithful Ministers teach us that in extraordinary circumstances, particular Churches may, when unable to associate with other Churches, preserve themselves by means of exercising acts of lawful Church power.

In regard to that point they state:

“It is not denied that particular Churches have within themselves power of discipline entirely, so far as any cause in debate particularly concerns themselves and not others.

It is granted that **where there is no Consociation, or neighborhood of single churches, whereby they may mutually aid one another [that] there, a single Congregation must not be denied entire jurisdiction, but this does not fall within the compass of ordinary rules of Church Government left us by Christ. If there is but one Congregation in a Kingdom or province, that particular Church may do much by itself alone, which it ought not to do where there are neighboring and adjacent Churches that might associate therewith for mutual assistance”** (Sundry Ministers of London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: The Divine Right Of Church Government*, p. 237, Naphtali Press, emphases added).

Add to what is cited above, the position taken by George Gillespie, Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly and Minister of the Church of Scotland, one renowned for his knowledge and principles in regard to Presbyterian polity.

Gillespie states:

“Add unto these a distinction betwixt a congregation lying alone in an island, province or nation, and a congregation bordering with sister churches. If either there be but one congregation in a kingdom or province, or if there be many far distant one from another, so that their pastors and elders cannot ordinarily meet together, **then may a particular congregation do many things by itself alone, which it ought not to do where there are adjacent neighbouring congregations, together with which it may and should have a common presbytery”** (George Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland in the Points of Ruling Elders, and of the Authority of Presbyteries and Synods, 1641, Chapter II, p. 43, emphases added*).

And finally upon this point, we would add the comments of Samuel Rutherford who also was, like George Gillespie, a Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, and a Minister of the Church of Scotland, and also one renowned for his knowledge and principles in regard to Presbyterian polity.

Samuel Rutherford states:

“**That the church be so in the Island its alone, may possibly be extraordinary, but that in such a case they have the Word preached and entire power of discipline whole and entire within themselves to excommunicate scandalous persons is not extraordinary, when there be no consociated churches whom excommunication concerneth that are in danger to be scandalized, for it floweth connaturally from a church to which agree the essence of a church to exercise jurisdiction over all its own members if there be no more consociated with that church, that is by accident and an extraordinary exigence of Gods providence...neither doth a congregation transgress any rule of Christ’s at all when it exerciseth entire power of censures within itself, whereas there be no consociated churches to share with it in that power.** A congregation is capable of entire

jurisdiction because it is a church” (Samuel Rutherford, *“The Due Right of Presbyteries,”* p. 454, Still Waters Revival Books bound photocopy, emphases added).

Note, as Rutherford correctly states, a Congregation, or a body of professing Christians who share a common membership (such as the RPNA--General Meeting), do “not” transgress any rule of Christ when it exercises “entire” power of Church censures within itself (when such a Congregation cannot associate with other Churches).

Now are we in the RPNA in a very real sense, “in an island alone”, unable presently, due to our Terms of Communion, to lawfully associate with any other churches? Do we not view ourselves as holding “alone” our faithful testimony in the countries of Canada and the United States? Certainly we have tried (and continue to try hard) to associate with other Pastors and Elders so that we can move from a more extraordinary existence to a more ordinary existence. Yet in God’s good providence, we recognize that such is presently not the case. Do we then, according to the principles set forth by the faithful Ministers cited above, have a right to honor Christ, preserve our testimony, and “exercise entire power of censure” within ourselves? Yes, we believe we have that right, and it is our intention to continue to exercise that right in agreement with the Word of God and the testimony of our faithful forefathers. When, in God’s good providence, we once again (Lord willing) rejoice to associate with another Church or Churches in a greater Presbytery, we will, according to the Word of God and Presbyterian polity, gladly limit our jurisdiction to those areas which do, in more ordinary circumstances, pertain to a Session.

Next, let us consider if our small number of Elders should prevent us from exercising this “entire power of church censure” that the London Ministers, George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford just spoke of. Is it lawful then for only one pastor and two elders to admonish, to suspend from the Lord’s table, to excommunicate, to receive the repentance of excommunicated persons and readmit them into the membership, to admit members into membership, to call public fasts etc.? In short, does Scripture allow such a small body of Elders to do such things?

Yes certainly!

For proof of this, we turn to the Scripture, and we refer the reader to Matthew 18:15-19 in which our Lord Jesus Christ states:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.

And if he shall neglect to hear thee, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done of them of my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 18:15-19, KJV).

Consider next, the commentary of “The London Ministers” on the above cited verses of Scripture:

“Now touching the Matter of our Savior’s discourse, it makes this very clear to us: for by gradation he leads from Admonition private and personal, to Admonition before two or three witnesses, and from Admonition before two or three witnesses **to the representative body of one church (as the phrase “Tell the Church” must necessarily be interpreted)** if there the difference can be settled, the offence removed, or the cause ended; rather than unnecessarily render the offence, and so our brother’s shame more public and notorious. **And that the Presbytery or Eldership of a particular Congregation—vested with power to hear and determine such cases shall be brought before them—is partly though not only here intended, seems evident in the words following (which are added for the strengthening and confirming of what went before in v.17):**

’Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree in earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:18-20).

In which passages these things are to be noted:

1. That this Church to which the complaint was to be made is invested with power of binding and loosing, and that authoritatively so, [such] that what by this Church shall be bound or loosed on earth shall also be bound or loosed in heaven, according to Christ’s promise.

**2. That these Acts of binding and loosing may be the Acts but of two or three; and therefore consequently of the Eldership of a particular congregation.** For where such a juridical Act was dispatched by a Classical Presbytery, it is said to be done “of many” (2 Cor. 2:6) because in such greater Presbyteries there are always more than two or three” (Sundry Ministers of London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: The Divine Right Of Church Government*, pp. 194, 195, Naphtali Press, emphases added).

Consider also the words of George Gillespie on this topic:

“Secondly, The Apostles, and those that succeeded them in the work of the ministry, have the same power of the keys committed from Christ to them ministerially, which Christ hath

committed from the Father to him (as Mediator) authoritatively; for, in the parallel place, John 20:21-23, where he gives them power of remitting or retaining sins, he saith, 'As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.' But the Father gave Christ such a power of the keys as comprehends a power of government and not merely doctrinal; Isa. 22:21, 22, 'I will commit the government into his hand & c. And the keys of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder.'

Thirdly, It may be proved also by that which immediately followeth, ver. 19, [Matthew 18:19—RPNA-GM], 'Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth.' &c., which cannot be meant of the power of preaching; for neither the efficacy of preaching, nor the ratification of it in heaven, nor the fruit of it on earth, doth depend upon this, that two preachers needs agree in the same thing. **But it agreeth well to the power of discipline,** concerning which it answereth these two objections:

**First, it might be said, the Apostles and other church governors may fall to be very few in this or that church where the offence riseth; shall we, in that case, execute any church discipline? Yes, saith Christ, if there were but two church officers in a church (where no more could be had) they are to exercise discipline and it shall not be in vain.**

Again, it might be objected, be they two or three or more, what if they do not agree among themselves?

To that he answereth, **There must be an agreement of two church officers at least, otherwise the sentence shall be null.... Two must agree in that sentence or censure,** which is desired to be ratified in heaven, and then they binding on earth, and unanimously calling upon God to ratify it in heaven, it shall be done" (George Gillespie, *Aarons Rod Blossoming*, pp. 194, 195, Sprinkle Publications, emphases added).

The two citations above speak so clearly to the point in question that little further commentary is deemed necessary. By this Scripture proof (Matthew 18:15-19), we see that Christ has given warrant to even as few as two or three lawfully called Elders to "bind and loose" which means that even if the court of Christ is very small (where no more faithful Elders can be had) we have, in His Name, as His Officers, been given by Christ the Mediator, the authority to exercise all the acts of ecclesiastical power competent to our office and jurisdiction.

Next, in regard to this section of discussion, we will turn to the question of whether we, as three Elders, may jointly exercise acts of Church power as an extraordinary Session, "internationally", when lawfully called thereto for the edification of the Church of Christ.

We recognize that normally, in "ordinary" circumstances, a Church Court ought to remain confined to its own nation (except in the case of an Ecumenical Council). We pray for and long for the day when such faithful Church Courts at all levels will be erected in our lands and throughout the world. Sadly, in our present circumstance such is not the case, and we, as a few witnesses walking through the wilderness, endeavor to maintain the crown rights of our Lord

Jesus Christ in the midst of a very lamentable morass of ecclesiastical confusion. We maintain that when lawfully called to exercise Church power by God's people, when it can be conveniently accomplished, and when it edifies the Visible Church of Christ, that we may extraordinarily form a Church Court, even internationally, in order to serve Christ according to our calling as Ministers and Elders.

Our Scripture warrant for so doing is found in Acts 15. Please take a few minutes at this time to read this chapter and to consider what is taking place in this portion of Scripture. Especially consider "who" attended this Jerusalem Synod, and whether this Synod was comprised of Elders from only one nation.

In this chapter of Scripture we see that Pastors and Elders met together "internationally" to exercise acts of Church power which by lawful authority effectually bound to obedience the Churches under the inspection of these Elders who attended this Jerusalem Synod. Not only was the "decree" of the Synod of Jerusalem taken to those Churches residing in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (which likely had representation at the Synod through Paul and Barnabas and those Elders that accompanied them) as we see in Acts 15:23, but Paul and Silas took the "decree" of the international Synod that met at Jerusalem and delivered it to the Churches that were formed in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium (which were cities in the province of Galatia) as we see in Acts 16:4: "And as they went through the cities [of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium—RPNA-GM], they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem."

Before we discuss Acts 15 more particularly, we would refer you to the comments of the "Presbyterian" Divines at the Westminster Assembly who, as a sub-committee, argued their Presbyterian principles with those "Independent" Divines who also attended that same Assembly.

Please carefully note "the principles" of these Westminster Presbyterians as they state:

**"And as for the thing in question, we have already cleared that the Scripture holds out that as the church is one and all the Elders given for the good of that one church; so their Officers (when orderly called for) should be exercised in any part of it for the good thereof, and that a mutual consent and agreement is a sufficient warrant and call for the exercise of that power, whether in one congregation only, as suppose in Cenchrea, or in many, as suppose in Jerusalem, or yet more, as suppose when Antioch and Jerusalem joined (Acts 15), that in any of these, or all of these, they may and ought upon such a call exercise any of their gifts and offices as the church or any part thereof shall stand in need"** (The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren Against Certain Propositions Concerning Presbyterial Government, Together with the Answer of the Assembly of Divines to Those Reasons of Dissent\_, 1648, p. 8, Photocopy, Still Waters Revival Books, emphases added).

From this citation, please carefully note these principles.

- 1) The Church is one and all lawful elders are given by Christ for the good of that one Visible Church.
- 2) Officers when orderly called by the consent of the Church (mutual consent being a sufficient call) may exercise the power given them by Christ in “any” part of the Church of Christ.
- 3) This authoritative power may be used in only one congregation, or when it is for the edification of the Church, it may be exercised in a Court of Christ formed internationally as in the case of the Elders of Antioch and Jerusalem in Acts 15.
- 4) This should be done according to whether the Church of Christ needs this to be done for her edification and benefit.

Add to this the commentary of George Gillespie as he also explains that a Presbytery may consist of Presbyters of various nations for the purpose of ordination (which is an act of a Church Court with Church power).

Gillespie states:

“4. That as we read in Scripture **of ordination by a classical presbytery**, Acts 6, and the Assembly hath voted it, and where it is said that the power given to a presbytery not as associated, but as a presbytery.

I said, The two cannot be distinguished, for a presbytery is not a number of presbyters *utcunq̄ collecti*; **it may be occasionally some presbyters of divers provinces or nations, but it is a meeting of presbyters orderly associated** (George Gillespie, *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 2, “Notes of Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster”, p. 63, Still Water Revival Books, emphases added).

Although Mr. Gillespie is here speaking of the juridical power of ordination, his observation holds true of all acts of Church power. Clearly, he maintains that occasionally (at least)—and if occasionally, then it cannot be unlawful--Church courts may be comprised of Elders from different provinces or nations, and that these “international” Courts may lawfully exercise Church power, which is precisely the point we are now establishing.

Consider also this comment from the sub-committee of the Westminster Assembly regarding the international extension of Church power of deacons:

“The next head concerning the extent of the Deacons office the sum whereof is: That then the Deacons office might be extended to more congregations than one.

We answer—**so it was in Jerusalem and so it may be still as the like condition of the Church may require... The Deacons office of the churches of Asia was extended to send relief to the Churches of Jerusalem in a time of famine... and the Churches at Antioch sent some of their Elders to preach where they sent none of their Deacons to distribute alms. All these things are to be managed as the common good of the church doth require**” (*The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren Against Certain Propositions Concerning Presbyterial*

Do you see the principles that these “Presbyterian” Westminster Divines were using?

Does the Scripture then, in Acts 15, warrant an international body of Elders joining together to exercise acts of Church power as the need and common good of the church does require?

Consider who attended the authoritative and lawfully constituted Synod convened in Jerusalem in Acts 15. The Presbyters convened in this Church Court included (at least) Apostles, Ministers, and Elders from Antioch and Jerusalem, (and likely, though not certainly, from other nations as well), which by good and necessary consequence made this Church Court an international Court (unless one wishes to strangely assert that Antioch was of the same nation as Israel). As Presbyterians, we deem it unnecessary to prove to you that this Court of Christ met and exercised acts of Church power which did effectually and authoritatively bind the Churches and members under their inspection to obedience (see Acts 15: 22-31). Thus, we would assert that Scripture clearly warrants that Elders may, when orderly called thereto for the edification of the Church, meet together, even internationally, to exercise acts of Church power, when needed, to promote the unity, peace and prosperity of Christ’s Church.

The fact is that now in this day of the Internet, and modern phone communications, it is easier and more convenient for Elders in different nations to ordinarily conduct Church business and constitute a Church Court than it ever was prior to these advantages—even for Elders of days gone by who were living in the same city. This advantage in communication is very significant in our case. Without this advantage, we would not be able to conduct business as a Church Court in any significant way, and thus, were we living under that circumstance, we would not continue to do what we are presently doing.

In conclusion to this particular section, we affirm that we have the Scriptural right to preserve ourselves in this extraordinary circumstance, that we have warrant from Christ in Matthew 18, even as one Minister and two ruling Elders, to bind and loose (and thus exercise all acts of Church power), and that we have warrant from Acts 15 to do so, even internationally, for the good of the Church of Jesus Christ until such time as we deem it most beneficial and edifying for the Visible Church of Jesus Christ to do otherwise, or until we associate with other Churches and enter into a more regular organizational situation.

We would ask those who would affirm that we do “not” have Scriptural warrant to proceed as an extraordinary international Session to produce “Scriptural warrant” for their prohibitions, and we would ask them to argue from good and necessary inferences from Scripture (as we have done). We would note that thus far, in the arguments we have seen and heard, Scriptural argument has been sadly lacking-- even to the point of being non-existent. Unless we see argumentation from Scripture that clearly and conclusively demonstrates that what we have proved above is in error, and it is proved that we do not have warrant and authority from Christ

to proceed as a lawful Court, it is our intention to continue to proceed as a Court, as Christ gives us strength.

Next, are we then as a Session proceeding in a manner that is not truly Presbyterian because we are exercising acts of Church power “as a common Session” over many scattered Societies? Is what we are doing unlawful and invalid?

No, it is neither unlawful nor invalid (not according to the doctrine of the Presbyterian Ministers at the Westminster Assembly) which state:

“We answer, when a multitude of believers (though many thousands) agreed together in one Presbyterial government who had **but one only Presbytery, and who probably did all in common**, for feeding and governing, they were usually called by the name of one church and **the Elders were the Elders of that church and so it may be still in the like condition. They found it best in those times of persecution and public unsettledness to have one common treasury for all their poor, and one common consistory for all matters of censure.** But doubtless had the number of believers grown to such a multitude, as that it would have bred confusion to have all their ecclesiastical affairs managed in one court, and took them off from the rest of the work, the light of nature teaches us to conclude that they would have had more Consistories then one for government” (The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren Against Certain Propositions Concerning Presbyterial Government, Together with the Answer of the Assembly of Divines to Those Reasons of Dissent\_, 1648, p. 10, Photocopy, Still Waters Revival Books, emphases added).

Note, according to these Westminster Divines, when a multitude of believers, in times of persecution or public unsettledness (a broken state of the church), agreed together in one government (and thus in the same terms of communion), they did “not” consider it unlawful to have one common Church Court to rule over them all. Not only did the Divines consider this manner of proceeding to be “not” unlawful, but these same Divines state, in the citation below, that such a practice was lawfully being used “at this day” and thus, in their times:

“We doubt not to affirm that there may be diverse congregations joined in one Presbytery only, and **the Officers to teach and govern in common when it shall be found most for their edification, and so it is in some reformed churches at this day...** And we doubt not also to affirm that where there is joining of many congregations, there may be distinct Presbyteries in the several congregations, who may have some or all Officers fixed, and they may do what belongs to that congregation, only so far as they are able, **and their joining into a common Presbytery is for their helping an strengthening**” (The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren Against Certain Propositions Concerning Presbyterial Government, Together with the Answer of the Assembly of Divines to Those Reasons of Dissent\_, 1648, p. 5, Photocopy, Still Waters Revival Books, emphases added).

These same Presbyterian Ministers of the Westminster Assembly clearly set forth the true principles of Presbyterian polity when they state:

**“...for instance, suppose in Jerusalem there were ten congregations and twenty Officers feeding and ruling them in common, no one of them fixed to any one**

**congregation. This kind of Presbytery would pass for a lawful government,** and none of the incongruities or absurdities are charged upon it by this argument; but if they should find by experience that it would be more for the edification of the congregations to have two of the Officers fixed to each congregation to teach and to govern them in such things which concern themselves, and yet all of them agree in a Common College with mutual advise and consent to transact all things which should be of difficulty or common concernment: Such a Presbytery should make them liable to all these incongruities and absurdities by this their argument”

(\_The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren Against Certain Propositions Concerning Presbyterianial Government, Together with the Answer of the Assembly of Divines to Those Reasons of Dissent\_, 1648, pp. 5-6, Photocopy, Still Waters Revival Books, emphases added).

Notice carefully what they have just stated. If in the providence of God (supposing a hypothetical situation), the Church of Jesus Christ has ten congregations and twenty officers (with not one of them fixed to any one of these congregations) ruling them by acts of church power “in common” – as one common Court—this Church Court would be a “lawful” Church Court. Likewise, we as a Session, having but three Elders over many Congregations/Societies and ruling these by acts of Church power, as a Common Court, are also a lawful Church Court.

There are also historical examples of this concept of a “Common” Church Court which lawfully rules over many congregations. We shall cite two instances.

In the Privy Kirk of Scotland just prior to the Reformation of 1560 note how the Protestant Congregations in Scotland organized themselves and how they, in their initial stage of growth were governed.

The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology states:

“Privy Kirk, a feature of Protestant organization in its earlier phase as an underground movement before the Reformer’s victory of 1559/60.

As clandestine meetings for Bible study and worship, the privy kirks afforded contact and protection for the Protestants harried by the authorities. They also assisted in **developing a network of Protestant cells, at first isolated and dispersed, but soon well organized and militant**, as Reformers seized the initiative in the revolution against Rome and France. The problem of religious dissidents meeting for private worship in conventicles where literate lay preachers might read passages from the vernacular Bible to those assembled and discuss controverted passages, had led Parliament in 1541 to ban ‘the private congregation and conventicles of heretics where errors are spread’. The measure was less than fruitful, for conventicling persisted and was fortified in the 1550’s through the efforts of **itinerant Protestant preachers, who began to administer the Reformed Communion to those gathered in the privy kirks**. In 1556, John Knox had counseled that Protestants of one household or several should meet together each week as a ‘congregation’ for reading, exhorting and in making common prayers’. **The structure of Edinburgh’s privy kirk**, where believers gathered secretly in the large houses of merchants in winter or in the fields during summer, reveals how some were called ‘to occupy the supreme place of exhortation

and reading', and **how others were elected as elders to maintain discipline or as deacons to provide for the poor within the group.** The formation of the clandestine congregations greatly assisted the transition of Protestantism at the Reformation from a mere network of underground cells to a recognized Church intent on claiming the allegiance of the nation” (Nigel M. de S. Cameron, organizing editor, *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Intervarsity Press, “Privy Kirk”, J. Kirk, p. 679, emphases added).

Thus we see how, in pre-reformation Scotland, Societies were formed. Believers gathered together, itinerant (Ministers not fixed to any one particular Congregation) served communion, while Elders were elected to maintain discipline in the Church. For Ministers to serve communion and Elders to maintain discipline, they must have formed Sessions at least, since to admit and demit people from the Lord’s Table, and to exercise acts of discipline (Church power) cannot lawfully be done outside the context of a Church Court.

An excerpt from *The Scottish Reformation* by Alexander F. Mitchell states:

”The form of church government in Scotland was still further connected with that of the Calvinistic churches on the Continent (particularly that of France) by the establishment and gradation of church courts--the General Assembly having jurisdiction over the whole church, the provincial synod over the ministers and congregations within a particular province, and the session or lesser eldership or consistory over one or more neighboring congregations--**In the chief towns, just as in Geneva, there seems from early times to have been a common or "general session," although there were several congregations in each, as in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, and Perth.**

What afterwards came to be known as the greater eldership, or presbytery, or classical consistory, does not appear at first under that distinctive name; **Even the Second Book of Discipline does not sharply distinguish between the lesser and greater eldership or presbytery; and Gillespie admits they were not distinguished in the primitive church, though he holds that both were needed in Scotland to do the work which the one presbytery did in the primitive church”**

(Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Scottish Reformation*, p. 158, or on Reformation Bookshelf CD, Still Waters Revival Books, Vol. 1, PDF Image 103, emphases added. Mitchell’s footnotes [in bold] were inserted into this text for the benefit of the reader. For those who wish to look up Mitchell’s citation of George Gillespie, please see, George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies*, *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 1, p. 167, Still Waters Revival Books ).

Here we note, in conclusion, that we not only have the support of Scripture, but also that of the historical practice of faithful Churches. We see in the two citations above (and many more citations are available) that it is not a novel idea or an unlawful practice to function with a Common Session having oversight over many Congregations.

This is why when we wrote to the Societies under our inspection, just after our greater Presbytery dissolved, we quoted our subordinate document *The Second Book of Discipline* stating:

“In that regard The Second Book of Discipline in Chapter 7 section 10, states:

10. The first kind and sort of assemblies [the local Eldership—RPNA-GM] , although they are within particular congregations, yet they exercise the power, authority, and jurisdiction of the kirk with mutual consent, and therefore bear sometimes the name of the kirk. **When we speak of the elders of the particular congregations, we mean not that every particular parish can, or may, have their own particular elderships, especially to landward; but we think three or four, more or fewer, particular kirks may have one eldership common to them all, to judge their ecclesiastical causes.** Albeit this is meet, that some of the elders be chosen out of every particular congregation, to concur with the rest of their brethren in the common assembly, and to take up the delations of offences within their own kirks, and bring them to the assembly. This we gather from the practice of the primitive kirk, where elders, or colleges of seniors, were constituted in cities and famous places.

Likewise we must now do that which is expedient for the edification of the body, until such time as the Lord grants that we can return to a more settled and ordinary method of governing the church (Letter from Greg Price, Greg Barrow, and Lyndon Dohms, June 6, 2003).”

In that same letter we stated:

“Changing the "form" of organization from a Presbytery back into a state in which one teaching elder and two ruling Elders have the general oversight over the Societies does not alter our membership commitments or change the status of those who have already passed our communion examinations. Those who were formerly members we still consider to be members and those who were allowed to come to the communion table can still do so” (Letter from Greg Price, Greg Barrow, and Lyndon Dohms, June 6, 2003 ).

By means of this letter, it was our intention, consistent with Scripture and history and true principles of Presbyterian polity, to indicate to you that we were still a lawful Church Court. Although we were not “regularly organized” we were nevertheless “extraordinarily organized”, and as you can see above, we communicated to you that we believed (and still believe) that we still had the Scriptural right, even upon dissolution of our Presbytery, to continue functioning as a Church Court--to admit and demit from church membership, and to serve communion (which implies the right to exercise Church discipline) things which only a lawful Church Court may lawfully exercise.

We understand that there are some who did not consciously realize that we continued functioning as a Church Court upon the dissolution of our Presbytery, and yet within a very short time after Presbytery was dissolved, it bears mentioning, that we were “publicly” admitting members and exercising acts of Church power that only a Church Court may exercise. This was done publicly with the consent and participation of our membership. This consent (whether explicitly or tacitly) and actual participation by those in our membership

indicated to us that those under our inspection agreed with us that we had the Scriptural right to exercise acts of Church power as a lawful Court of Christ. We refer you to Appendix A where you will find a list of the public Church acts which the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting) have exercised since the dissolution of Presbytery June 8, 2003. In addition to that you will find in Appendix B an authoritative act of this lawful Church Court of the RPNA (General Meeting)—an act exercised just three weeks after the dissolution of Presbytery and an act that clearly refers to the jurisdiction of this lawful Church Court.

It is our hope and our prayer that what is written above will help to explain and demonstrate that we have proceeded lawfully, preserving our testimony, in accord with Scripture, in accord with the practice of our faithful forefathers, and in accord with true Presbyterian doctrine, and that those who have consented to our court and participated with us in the Lord's Supper have also followed us in that which is agreeable to God's holy Word and our faithful subordinate documents.

**2. Does the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting) have a lawful Court if there is no Court of Appeal above it? In other words, can a Session exercise the keys of the Kingdom with Christ's authority even if there is no Court above it?**

Yes, a Session may be lawful and possess the power of Christ to bind and to loose even if there is no Court of Appeal above it.

First, we would appeal to reason. If a Session does not possess lawful authority (simply because there is not a superior Court of Appeal), then the same would hold true for a Presbytery. If one were to be consistent with this type of argument, one would have to also say that a Presbytery would have no lawful authority, if there is not a Court of Appeal (a Synod) above it. Likewise a Synod would have no lawful authority if it had no Court of Appeal (a General Assembly) above it, and even a General Assembly and Ecumenical Council would suffer the same problem supposedly having no authority because of a lack of a Court of Appeal. Thus, at the outset, this argument, that a Session cannot be lawful when it has no Court of Appeal above it, is reduced to absurdity. This argument, if it were valid, would in effect nullify all authority at all levels of church government, which is clearly "not" what Scripture teaches, and "not" what is taught in any of our subordinate documents.

Second, whenever possible, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies should be formed as Courts of Appeal (Acts 15). However, Presbyteries are not so necessary that when they cannot be formed, a Session cannot exercise the keys of the Kingdom to rule on behalf of Christ. As we have already seen, the primary passage of Scripture that addresses the authority of Christ committed to the Officers of a faithful Church Session is Matthew 18:17-20:

“And if he shall neglect to hear them [the witnesses—RPNA-GM], tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

As we have stated already in our response to question #1, the context of this passage of Scripture is clearly that of Church discipline. We see that Christ, the Head of the Church, grants to even a Session (where “two or three” Church Officers are gathered in Christ’s name) the full authority of the Lord to even excommunicate (Matthew 18:17-20) when that Session cannot in an ordinary circumstance be joined with other Sessions to form a greater Presbytery. Furthermore, when a Session either binds or looses in accordance with the Word of Christ, Christ states that what is bound or loosed upon earth has already been bound or loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18-19). “Binding” and “loosing” were judicial terms used in Courts to lay a judgment upon a person or to lift a judgment from a person. The authority of Christ in exercising the keys of the Kingdom is given generally to the Universal Visible Church (collectively), and particularly, for the judicial execution of that power, to its officers as the first and primary recipients (Matthew 16:18-19; John 20:21-23; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-12).

George Gillespie makes this very point in the citation below where he states that every particular Church collectively taken—by which he means the Universal Visible Church—has been given the power of binding and loosing, yet “the exercise”-- the “judicial execution”-- of that power is specifically given to the governing Elders who labor in the Court as those to whom the execution of Church discipline pertains.

Gillespie states:

“Hitherto we have proven that the power of binding and loosing pertaineth to every particular church collectively taken; **but the execution and judicial exercising of this power pertaineth to that company and assembly of elders in every church which the Apostle, 1Tim. 4:14, calleth a presbytery. In Scotland we call it a session**, in France it is called a consistory; in Germany and Belgia, according to the Scripture phrase it is termed a presbytery. It is made up of the pastor or pastors of every congregation, together with the governing elders which labor there (not in doctrine, but in discipline only) of which things we have spoken before performed” (George Gillespie, *\_A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies\_*, The Works of George Gillespie, Vol. 1, p. 176, Still Waters Revival Books, emphases added).

Thus, all lawful Courts that meet in Christ’s name (as John Calvin expounds Matthew 18:20, “laying aside every thing that hinders them from approaching Christ, shall sincerely raise their desires to him, shall yield obedience to his word, and allow themselves to be governed by the Spirit”) have the presence of Christ in their midst and have the authority of Christ in their lawful decisions—even a Church Court as small as a Session (and if a Session as the least, then certainly a Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly as the greater/greatest).

We would agree with Gillespie that when there is a Presbytery above a Session, those matters that are common to many congregations (such as the greater excommunication or appeals) ought (in prudence) to be determined in “the greater presbyteries” (which implies that Sessions are in fact a lesser Presbytery as we shall see).

“Whence it cometh that, in Scotland, the cases of ordination, suspension, deposition and excommunication, are determined in the greater presbyteries, because it doth not concern one congregation alone, but many, who be taken into the common presbytery, and who be put out of the same; neither doth the excommunication of a sinner concern only one congregation, but the neighbouring congregations also, among whom, as it is to be commonly supposed, the sinner doth often haunt and converse” (George Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland in the Points of Ruling Elders, and of the Authority of Presbyteries and Synods*, 1641, Chapter II, p. 43).

However, Gillespie also provides this necessary qualification when a faithful Session or Congregation has no access (for various circumstantial reasons) to a Presbytery. Here Gillespie acknowledges that there are circumstances in which a faithful Session may not have a Presbytery over it, and yet that Session is lawful and has the full authority of Christ entrusted to its Officers to do that which it would not ordinarily do if it had a Presbytery over it.

“Add unto these a distinction betwixt a congregation lying alone in an island, province or nation, and a congregation bordering with sister churches. If either there be but one congregation in a kingdom or province, or if there be many far distant one from another, so that their pastors and elders cannot ordinarily meet together, then may a particular congregation do many things by itself alone, which it ought not to do where there are adjacent neighbouring congregations, together with which it may and should have a common presbytery” (George Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland in the Points of Ruling Elders, and of the Authority of Presbyteries and Synods*, 1641, Chapter II, p. 43).

It is a matter of historical documentation that Kirk Sessions were present from the outset of the Reformation in Scotland. In fact, before there were any Courts of Appeal above a Session, there was only the Kirk Session (and yet these were Presbyterian Churches with the full authority of Christ). This did not continue for much longer than a year or so, for in 1560 a General Assembly was established in Scotland. Nevertheless, until such a time as Scotland was able to form a General Assembly (in 1560) and Presbyteries (in 1581), Sessions exercised the full authority of Christ without there being a Court of Appeal over it. Now if our covenanted forefathers believed that a Session (in extraordinary times) could even excommunicate without a Court of Appeal and yet be lawful, we maintain that we may do so in extraordinary times as well. What was the scriptural basis for a Session to exercise Christ’s full authority (even if there was no Court of Appeal)? It was clearly Matthew 18:17-20 as the following citations demonstrate.

**“The session corresponds to the consistory of Calvin’s Genevan church order and was**

**the first court to appear when the CofS [Church of Scotland—RPNA-GM] was reformed.** Indeed St. Andrews Kirk Session minutes begin in 1559, and from 1560 sessions were formed, with ministers, elders and (at first) deacons, as they became available, for the interpretation of Scripture, and oversight of parish and congregation and **disciplinary action with regards to moral behaviour.** In the SBD [\_Second Book of Discipline—RPNA-GM] (1578) the ‘particular eldership’ is ‘to keep religion and doctrine in purity without error and corruption and to keep comeliness and good order in the kirk’” (Nigel M. de S. Cameron, organizing editor, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, InterVarsity Press, 1993, “Kirk Session”, A. I. Dunlop, p. 461, emphases added).

“The appealer [Bishop Patrick Adamsone who was excommunicated by the General Assembly in 1586—RPNA-GM] alleged that in case Excommunication should be admitted, it belongeth not to Ministers, when they are separated from their Congregations, and assembled among themselves in a Synod: For how can Ministers presumptuously expel without consent of the Kirk? For the Kirk, Prince & Noblemen disassenting, what can ensue, but schism and sedition? He answereth [James Melville responded to each of the objections from Bishop Patrick Adamsone—RPNA-GM], **Christ (Mat. 18) giveth power of binding and loosing to Pastors, Doctors, and Elders lawfully assembled, which Assembly is there called the Kirk, as the best learned expound; neither can it be otherways taken without intolerable absurdities. Yea, this power [of binding and loosing—RPNA-GM] is given to a few Pastors & Elders, in one congregation,** much more to a great number of Pastors & Elders, directed from many Congregations, to assemble in his name in a lawful Synod. This power given to the lawful Assemblies of the Governors of the Kirk, Particular, Provincial, and General, was received and put in particular practice for five hundred years after Christ” (David Calderwood--At the appointment of the General Assembly, *The True History Of The Church Of Scotland*, p. 204, 1678. Spelling changes made from the original to conform to contemporary standards, emphases added).

“A Christian having first admonished his brother in private [Matthew 18:15—RPNA-GM], then, having taken two or three witnesses [Matthew 18:16—RPNA-GM], after this, having brought it to the public cognizance of the ecclesiastical consistory [Matthew 18:17—RPNA-GM], and after that, the offender being for his obstinacy excommunicate: here is the last step, no further progress.... First, it might be said, the apostles and other church governors may fall [in number—RPNA-GM] to be very few in this or that church where the offence riseth; shall we, in that case, execute any church discipline? **Yes, saith Christ, if there were but two church officers in a church (where no more can be had), they are to exercise discipline, and it shall not be in vain**” (George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming*, pp. 194, 195, Sprinkle Publications, 1985 [1646], emphases added).

“Now touching the Matter of our Savior’s discourse [Matthew 18:15-20—RPNA-GM], it makes this very clear to us: for by a gradation he leads us from Admonition private and personal [Matthew 18:15—RPNA-GM], to Admonition before two or three witnesses [Matthew 18:16—RPNA-GM], and from Admonition before two or three witnesses to the representative body of one Church [Matthew 18:17—RPNA-GM] (as the phrase “Tell the Church” must here necessarily be interpreted) if there the difference can be composed

[settled], the offence removed, or the cause ended; rather than unnecessarily render the offence, and so our brother's shame more public and notorious. **And that the Presbytery or Eldership of a particular congregation--vested with power to hear and determine such cases as shall be brought before them--is partly though not only here intended, seems evident in the words following (which are added for the strengthening and confirming of what went before in v. 17):** "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:18-20). In which passages these things are to be noted: 1. That this Church to which the complaint is to be made is invested with power of binding and loosing, and that authoritatively so, [such] that what by this Church shall be bound or loosed on earth shall also be bound or loosed in heaven, according to Christ's Promise. **2. That these Acts of binding or loosing may be the Acts but of two or three; and therefore consequently of the eldership of a particular congregation.** For where such a juridical Act was dispatched by a Classical Presbytery, it is said to be done "of many" (2 Cor. 2:6) because in such greater Presbyteries there are always more than two or three" (Sundry Ministers of London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: The Divine Right Of Church Government*, , pp. 194, 195, Naphtali Press, 1995 [1646], emphases added).

Actually, the greater Presbytery as a distinctive and separate Church Court from the Session (and as a Court of Appeal) was not constituted by the Church of Scotland until 1581, some three years after *The Second Book Of Discipline* (which was written in 1578), some twenty-one years after the establishment of a General Assembly in 1560, and some twenty-two years (at least) after the establishment of Kirk Sessions in 1559.

"Some Brethren were appointed to consider the roles given in by Capringtoun, concerning the planting of Kirks and the number of Presbyteries, with the Kirks of every Presbytery, and to report what they think meet to be reformed therein. A great part of the said roles being reproduced with their judgment, so far as they could presently resolve in such shortness of time, till they be farther resolved with advice of their Countries [their respective geographic areas within Scotland—RPNA-GM], the whole assembly in the eight [eighth—RPNA-GM] session thought meet, **that a beginning be had of the presbyteries instantly, in the places after following, to be exemplars to the rest, which may be established hereafter....** that the Assembly praiseth God greatly for his Majesty's zealous and Christian affection, in promoting [promoting—RPNA-GM] of good order within the Kirk, with thanks to his Highness for the labors, **which have been taken for the constitution of presbyteries**, union and division of Kirks, wherein the Assembly hath so far travelled, **that certain presbyteries are by them erected....** The Assembly ordained every Eldership, that is, presbytery, **in their first assembly to be held by them**, to choose out of their number a Moderator, to continue till the next Assembly" (David Calderwood--At the appointment of the General Assembly, *The True History Of The Church Of Scotland*, 1678, pp. 100, 101 (Spelling changes made from the original to conform to contemporary standards, emphases added).

“With the General Assembly’s resolve by 1576 to end its experiment with diocesan episcopacy, introduced at the Convention of Leith, a renewed emphasis was placed on government through courts. Such a trend was evident in England, too, where supporters of the anti-Episcopal cause pressed for the elimination of bishops **and the adoption of the ’presbytery’, or congregational eldership**, and of the ’classis’, or district court, both to be subordinate to the provincial synod and national assembly. **In Scotland, however, where ’presbyteries’ (in the English sense [of sessions—RPNA-GM]) had existed from 1559**, there was less need for adopting an entirely new court modeled on the English ’classis’. Instead, what did emerge by the later 1570s was the decision that not every congregation need have an eldership of its own, and that in rural areas, particularly where kirk sessions may not have been fully established, several adjacent churches might share a **common eldership** on a basis similar to the ’general sessions’ which had emerged in some larger towns. This solution of the communal eldership, or presbytery in its Latinized form, was adopted in the *Second Book of Discipline* of 1578. At that point too, the General Assembly used ’presbytery’ as a synonym for ’eldership’ when it warned bishops ’to usurp not the power of presbyteries’. By 1579 the Assembly determined that the ’exercise’ for interpreting Scripture ’may be judged a presbytery’, **and in 1581 the assembly, with help from the privy council, decided to set up thirteen model presbyteries in the main towns of the central lowlands ’as exemplars to the rest’ of the country.** The earliest extant register--that of Stirling presbytery--**records the creation of presbytery on 8 august 1581**, with ministers and selected elders from the constituent kirk sessions (which continued to function) in attendance” (Nigel M. de S. Cameron, organizing editor, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, , InterVarsity Press, 1993, “Origins of Presbytery”, J. Kirk, p. 677, emphases added).

Thus, we see that both Christ (in Matthew 18:17-20) and our covenanted forefathers (in their writings) taught that a faithful Session is delegated the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loose (as being a member of the Universal Visible Church) so that if there is no Court of Appeal over a Session (as in the extraordinary circumstances and times of the First Reformation and as in our present circumstances), that faithful Session is both lawful and Presbyterial. It should not be overlooked in this discussion that a Kirk Session was called a “lesser Presbytery” so that a lawfully constituted Session that had no Presbytery over it but yet sought to be united with other Sessions and Congregations under a “greater Presbytery” was Presbyterial.

“Touching Congregational Elderships, or Parochial Presbyteries consisting of Ministers and Ruling Elders of various single congregations, which are called **LESSER ASSEMBLIES or SMALLER PRESBYTERIES**” (Sundry Ministers of London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: The Divine Right Of Church Government*, p. 192, Naphtali Press, 1995 [1646], emphases added).

“Hitherto we have proven that the power of binding and loosing pertains to every particular church collectively taken; **but the execution and judicial exercising of this power pertains to that company and assembly of elders in every church which the Apostle (1 Tim. 4:14), calls a presbytery.** **In Scotland we call it a session**, in France it is called a consistory; in Germany and Belgia, according to the Scripture phrase, it is termed a presbytery. It is made up of the pastor or pastors of every congregation, together with those

governing elders which labor there (not in doctrine, but) in discipline only, of which things we have spoken before. That unto this company or consistory of elders pertains the power of binding and loosing, it is averred by the best divines [at this point Gillespie lists specifically the following divines: Calvin, Beza, Zanchius, Junius, Polanus, Tilen, the Professors of Leyden, Gerhard, Balduino, Paraeus, Cartwright, Fenner, Alsted, Danaeus, Hemmingius, and Peter Martyr—RPNA-GM] (George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies*, pp. 375, 376, Naphtali Press, 1993 [1642], emphases added).

“With the General Assembly’s resolve by 1576 to end its experiment with diocesan episcopacy, introduced at the Convention of Leith, a renewed emphasis was placed on government through courts. Such a trend was evident in England, too, where supporters of the anti-Episcopal cause pressed for the elimination of bishops **and the adoption of the ’presbytery’, or congregational eldership**, and of the ’classis’, or district court, both to be subordinate to the provincial synod and national assembly. **In Scotland, however, where ’presbyteries’ (in the English sense [of sessions---RPNA-GM]) had existed from 1559**, there was less need for adopting an entirely new court modeled on the English ’classis’” (Nigel M. de S. Cameron, organizing editor, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, InterVarsity Press, 1993, “Origins of Presbytery”, J. Kirk, p. 677, emphases added).

“Now touching the Matter of our Savior’s discourse, it makes this very clear to us: for by a gradation he leads us from Admonition private and personal, to Admonition before two or three witnesses, and from Admonition before two or three witnesses to the representative body of one Church (as the phrase “Tell the Church” must here necessarily be interpreted) if there the difference can be composed [settled], the offence removed, or the cause ended; rather than unnecessarily render the offence, and so our brother’s shame more public and notorious. **and that the presbytery or eldership of a particular congregation**—vested with power to hear and determine such cases as shall be brought before them--is partly though not only here intended, seems evident in the words following (which are added for the strengthening and confirming of what went before in v. 17): “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:18-20). In which passages these things are to be noted: 1. That this Church to which the complaint is to be made is invested with power of binding and loosing, and that authoritatively so, [such] that what by this Church shall be bound or loosed on earth shall also be bound or loosed in heaven, according to Christ’s Promise. 2. That these Acts of binding or loosing may be the Acts but of two or three; and therefore consequently of the eldership of a particular congregation. For where such a juridical Act was dispatched by a Classical Presbytery, it is said to be done “of many” (2 Cor. 2:6) **because in such greater presbyteries [where there are greater presbyteries there must be lesser presbyteries in the Kirk Sessions—RPNA-GM]** there are always more than two or three” (Sundry Ministers of London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: The Divine Right Of Church Government*, pp. 194, 195, Naphtali Press, 1995 [1646], emphases added).

“Whence it cometh that, in Scotland, the cases of ordination, suspension, deposition and excommunication, **are determined in the greater presbyteries [where there are greater presbyteries there must be lesser presbyteries in the Kirk Sessions—RPNA-GA]**, because it doth not concern one congregation alone, but many, who be taken into the common presbytery, and who be put out of the same; neither doth the excommunication of a sinner concern only one congregation, but the neighbouring congregations also, among whom, as it is to be commonly supposed, the sinner doth often haunt and converse” (George Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland in the Points of Ruling Elders, and of the Authority of Presbyteries and Synods*, 1641, Chapter II, p. 43, emphases added).

For the reasons stated above, we believe we are a lawful Presbyterian Church Court or Session even though we do not presently have a Court of Appeal over us.

**3. Does the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting) have lawful representatives serving on it? In other words, is there a representative form of Church government in the RPNA (GM)?**

Yes, we affirm that the RPNA (General Meeting) is representative in nature. No Church Officers have been imposed upon any member without either their explicit or implicit consent.

Explicitly, consent is given by members to be governed by the Church Officers of the RPNA (General Meeting) as a lawful Church Court at their membership interview and at their communicant examination. In the membership interview, the question is asked of candidates for membership, “Are you willing to submit yourselves to the preaching and to the elders of this church (in so far as both are agreeable to the Word of God)?” In the communion examination, these questions are asked of members before coming to the Lord’s Supper, “Do you agree that the Elders of this church are duly called and qualified as the officers of Christ? Do you agree to obey and abide by the lawful decisions and commands of the Elders of this church insofar as their decisions and commands agree with the scriptures?” These questions are found on the official RPNA website under “Membership” (<http://www.reformedpresbytery.org/index.html>).

Implicitly, consent is given by members to be governed by the Church Officers of the RPNA (General Meeting) as a lawful Church Court when they receive the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and when authoritative acts of the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting) are not rejected by members upon the basis of an unlawfully constituted Church Court, but rather are silently received by way of an implicit consent. It is not necessary for a member to have voted for each of the members of the Session of a Church (or for that matter each of the members of the Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly of a Church) in order for that ecclesiastical assembly to be representative and Presbyterian in nature. Covenant children are members of our Church, and yet they never personally voted for each of the members of the Session in the RPNA (General Meeting). It is not supposed that new members within any Reformed or Presbyterian Church (of which we are aware) actually cast a vote for each member of the Church Court upon their becoming members. To the contrary, it is assumed that by their membership that they have voluntarily consented to the government of that Church and those

Officers that are already serving on the Session or shall serve in the Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly (unless they explicitly express their dissent).

Although, the members of Session reside in certain locations and among particular Societies, the explicit and implicit consent of those members outside the Societies in which members of the Session reside likewise bring those members and Societies under the lawful care and jurisdiction of the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting).

As James Renwick, a faithful martyr and Covenanted Minister expressed it:

“First, ruling elders are indeed admitted to respective parishes, in the case and time of a constitute church, **but now in the time of this her broken and declining state, there is a moral impossibility of doing it so**, for the most part of the people in the several parishes of this land, are either turned avowed and stated enemies unto God, or become such, that they will do nothing for God, and have no meddling in such matters; and **the want of that accidental circumstance can no ways warrant us to forbear such a necessary duty**.

2. These ruling elders, who are now to be admitted, are to exercise their office over such as elect them; **yea, and all such as will submit unto them, which none concurring with the testimony of the day will refuse**. Howbeit, they are particularly and specially tied to take inspection of that bounds where they are chosen; and therefore they are to endeavor to reside there, so far as the troubles of the time may allow.

3. They are, as to the their not being fixed in respective parishes, in the like circumstances with the ministers, who, in this broken state of the Church, do officiate to all who employ them; and if this manner be right to them, so it is also to the ruling elders in the present condition of affairs” (James Renwick, “Ruling Elders—The Nature Of The Office—Their Calling And Duties”, *The Contending Witness*, Vol. II, pp. 97, 98, edited by David Steele, emphases added).

There are two ways in which Church Officers of a lawful Session may be serving as representatives: objectively and subjectively. Lawful Church Officers are representatives of the people in that they serve the people for their good and edification, but they are not representatives of the people in the sense that they derive their power or authority from the people. Lawful Church Officers represent Jesus Christ in the sense that they are His Ambassadors and receive their commission, their office, and their authority from Him and Him alone. Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision in the objective sense of representation wherein He ministered to them for their good and well-being (Romans 15:8). However, Paul was a minister of Jesus Christ in the subjective sense of representation wherein He ministered on behalf of (and with the authority of) Jesus Christ (Romans 15:16). We will let Mr. Rutherford express the distinction between these two expressions of representation as he answers an objection from an Independent who presses the issue of a representative government from Matthew 18:17.

“Ob[jection] 11. If the Church here [in Matthew 18:17—RPNA-GM] be a representative

Church, then it hath power from those whom they represent, but they represent the people, and so the power is first in the people, and the people must be the first visible Church, not the presbytery, nor a general council. I prove the major, because the power the representer hath, that must be first in the represented.”

Answer:

“A representer standeth for another either **objectively** or **subjectively**. Whatever representeth another **objectively**, that is, doth such a business for another, or in rem ejus, for his behalf and good, though he some way represent that other, yet hath he not his power from that which he representeth; as the Eye **objectively** in seeing, and the Ear in hearing representeth the body, for the Eye seeth for the whole body, the Ear heareth for the whole body. But the Eye hath not its visive, or seeing faculty from the body, nor the Ear the hearing faculty from the body. Now the Presbytery [or Session—RPNA-GM] doth represent the people **objectively**, that is, for the good and salvation of the people, and so the Elders have not all their power of ruling from the people, but from Jesus Christ. That which representeth another **subjectively** hath indeed its power from that which it representeth, as he who carrieth the person and room of a King as an Ambassador, doth fetch his power from the King, and that power is more principally in the King. But now the assumption is false, because the Eldership doth not represent the people, in their power of jurisdiction, **subjectively**, as standing in the place of the people, but as the Ambassadors of Christ, and as stewards they have both the keys from Christ, not from the people, and do actually use the keys, in His name and authority, not in the people’s name and authority” (Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right Of Presbyteries*, pp. 316, 317. Original spelling has been altered to conform to modern standards, emphases added).

Thus, the Session of the RPNA (General Meeting) is a lawful Presbyterian Church Court because it has the explicit and/or implicit consent of its members and because it represents the people objectively for their good and edification and represents the Lord Jesus Christ subjectively as His Ambassadors having been given authority by Him to rule on His behalf.

#### **4. Does the use of the name, RPNA (General Meeting), contradict any actions in the dissolution of our Presbytery in June 2003 or violate the Ninth Commandment in identifying who we are as a Church?**

No, we do not believe there is a contradiction in regard to our actions or to our speech in presently identifying ourselves as the RPNA (General Meeting). When the dissolution of Presbytery was communicated to the Societies by email (June 8, 2003) and further explained by email (June 14, 2003), it was made clear that we no longer had a Presbytery (i.e. a greater Presbytery). And yet we retained the name, Reformed **Presbytery** in North America (adding “General Meeting”). Why would we retain “Presbytery” in our name when we had announced that we were no longer a Presbytery? Did we forget that we were no longer a Presbytery? Did we intend to deceive the Societies we had just earlier informed (and the masses) into believing we were a Presbytery when we knew we were not a Presbytery? Did we not know what a

Presbytery was? We would hope that you would agree with us that the answer to each of these questions must be given in the negative. If we did not forget, if we did not intend to deceive, and if we were not ignorant, then we must have had some reason(s) for including the word, “Presbytery”, in the name of the Church even after the dissolution of Presbytery in June 2003.

What is in a name? In talking about why people choose the names they do in various relationships, it might be helpful to consider the following matters. The NAME of God represents who He is in an absolutely unique way because there are no historical entities prior to Him or after Him who can lawfully hold that name. He is the one and only God. He is the original. There is none before Him, and there is none after Him. However, that is not the case when we choose names as human beings. When we give the name of a relative to a child, we are not saying that there is a one to one identity on the part of that child to that relative. We are saying that in some respect we are honoring the memory of that relative for various reasons in calling the child by that name. The name of God is absolutely unique in that respect for He is not named after anyone. However, we may call a person or a Church by a name and not intend a direct one to one identity to the forbearer of that name. There are many circumstantial differences between the child and the relative after whom the child was named (different color of hair or eyes, different facial features, different ages for sure, different callings, different parents, etc.). And yet in naming a child after a relative, we want some identity as well. We want to honor that relative. So likewise, it was our desire not to indicate a one to one identity in all circumstances with the Reformed Presbytery or the RPNA (as they were “greater” Presbyteries), but to honor and to remember the Reformed Presbytery by including it in our present name.

If we use the word, “Presbytery”, in our name do we mean that we are still a “greater” Presbytery, or a classical Presbytery? No, we don’t. But we do mean that we still identify ourselves with that faithful body known as the Reformed Presbytery because we have the same Terms of Communion. We are the same moral person (by way of our Terms of Communion) with the Reformed Presbytery. There is an identity with our forefathers that we want to communicate loud and clear. We do not believe that we are a “greater” Presbytery now as we once were, but we do believe we are the same moral person as we were before (because we have the same Terms of Communion).

When we use the term “Presbytery” we do mean that we are now a “lesser Presbytery” which is to say that we are a “Session”

George Gillespie states:

**But since we cannot find, in the Apostle’s times, any other presbytery or assembly of elders beside that which has been spoken of, how cometh it, nay, some say that the Church of Scotland, and other reformed churches did appoint two sorts of presbyterial assemblies, one (which here we call Sessions) wherein the Pastor of the parish, together with those Elders within the same, whom the Apostle calleth governments and**

**presidents, put order to the government of the congregation;** another (which here we call Presbyteries) wherein the pastors of sundry churches, lying near together, do assemble themselves? Which difficulty more increases, if it be objected that neither of these two doth in all points answer or conform itself unto that primitive form of presbytery whereof we speak.

Answer—The division and multiplication of parishes, and appointment of pastors to particular flocks, together with the plantation of churches in villages as well as cities, hath made it impossible for us to be served with that only one form of presbytery which was constitute in the Apostle’s times. But this difference of the times being (as it ought to be) admitted, for an inevitable cause of the differences of the former, **both those two forms of presbyterial meetings appointed by the church of Scotland** do not only necessarily result from that one Apostolic form, but likewise (the actions of the both being laid together) do accomplish all these ordinary ecclesiastical functions which were by it performed (George Gillespie, *\_A Dispute Against The English Popish Ceremonies\_*, *\_The Works of George Gillespie\_*, Vol. 1, p. 167, Still Waters Revival Books, emphases added).

Thus we see that, according to Gillespie (and many other writers on the subject of Presbyterian Church Government), it is neither inappropriate, nor inaccurate, to refer to ourselves as “one sort” of Presbytery—a lesser Presbytery, which is also called a Session. You may also want to review the citations under Question 2 above where a Session is often called a “lesser” Presbytery.

Thus, we have now demonstrated two ways in which we may be honestly called a “Presbytery”. First, we demonstrated (in Question #1), that in our extraordinary circumstances, we have the power of Presbytery to exercise the keys of the Kingdom (given to us by Christ our Mediator), and second, we demonstrated (in the citation above and in Question #2) that it is neither inappropriate, nor inaccurate to use the term “lesser Presbytery” in regard to ourselves as a Session, due to the fact that the term “lesser Presbytery” is an accurate term used by other faithful writers who wrote upon the subject of Presbyterian Government . By these two means we deem that we are indeed warranted to honestly use the term “Presbytery” in our RPNA church name.

Next, we consider, the term in our name-- “General Meeting”.

We recognized that we did not have a “formally” functioning General Meeting at the time the Presbytery dissolved. Although we did not establish a formal General Meeting when our Presbytery was dissolved, nevertheless, we believed that our Societies could yet form in the future a General Meeting for their own edification as circumstances dictated. In fact, General Meetings of Societies met for a number of years even when there were established Sessions and an established Presbytery in Scotland. So likewise, might the same be done in the RPNA (General Meeting). The name, General Meeting, was not chosen in order to deceive anyone, but was chosen to morally identify us with the “essential” parts of faithful General Meetings

that were historically established, for it was recognized that we shared the same Terms of Communion in substance with those General Meetings.

Because we know that some have objected to the fact that we have included the name (General Meeting) in our name, we wish to spend a little more time discussing this point, by making a distinction between the “being” and well being” of a General Meeting, in order to demonstrate that our use of this term in our name is accurate and descriptive of our current ecclesiastical circumstance.

The idea of a General Meeting should be considered more distinctly than in a mere “formal” sense. The idea of a General Meeting has an “essence” or “being”, and in its formal expression a General Meeting has a “well being”.

The “essence” of a General Meeting—that which gives it a “being”—that which this idea cannot exist without—is our common membership and our common Terms of Communion. With these things in common, even if Societies do not formally organize and send Commissioners to a stated meeting, we are still bound together by our profession of faith and our common testimony in doctrine and practice, and by our membership agreement to which each of us voluntarily agreed when we were admitted by the Church Court as members into the RPNA. This very concept was communicated to the Societies under our inspection in the email we sent at the time of the dissolution of our Presbytery (June 14, 2003):

“In short, we maintain that the dissolution of Presbytery does not change the agreement that each of the members made at the time they became members. Our unity is in the truth of Scripture, and it is in our stated doctrine and practice as summarized in our six terms of communion.

Changing the ‘form’ of organization from a Presbytery back into a state in which one teaching elder and two ruling Elders have the general oversight over the Societies does not alter our membership commitments or change the status of those who have already passed our communion examinations. Those who were formerly members we still consider to be members and those who were allowed to come to the communion table can still do so.

We do not believe that the error of one man (which consequently led to the dissolution of Presbytery) makes null and void all of our membership agreements, and our mutually expressed unity in the truth with their mutual duties. If we maintain that one Pastor's defection from the truth can void other real agreements, then our whole visible unity is based "not" upon the truth, but hangs merely upon unknown future circumstances or the alteration of one Elder's beliefs, which may variously alter our outward form of government.

We maintain that even if "all" the Pastors and Elders were suddenly killed, disorganizing the Societies one degree further, yet the union of the Societies (which is based upon our six terms of communion) would remain intact and our covenanted testimony would remain the

same. In such an event, it would be incumbent upon those remaining alive to maintain the same unity under the same terms of communion. Ministers and Elders and their associated government are given by God for the well being of the church and even their total removal does not mean that all of a sudden the covenanted remnant are without principles or visible unity in the truth (Letter from Greg Price, Greg Barrow, and Lyndon Dohms, June 6, 2003).”

This “being”, which is general and common to each of us, allows us to have familiar fellowship with one another, and visit and participate in Societal worship in locations different from that in which we normally reside. By this general bond of profession and fellowship in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, we, in an organized manner, communicate our mutual gifts and graces to one another in an orderly way. This then is the “essence” or “being” of the General Meeting and as long as that exists we maintain that we, as officers, may lawfully represent ourselves as those who oversee a General Meeting, and we as members may honestly represent ourselves as those who are part of a General Meeting.

Next, we consider the “well being” of a General Meeting. We may also choose, as circumstance permits, and for the edification of the Societies, to extend this essential idea of a General Meeting to a more formal expression in which our various Societies set a mutually agreeable time to send Commissioners to meet together to discuss matters common to all the Societies. This more “formal” meeting—a more formal expression of our common profession of faith, our mutual fellowship, and our membership-- contributes to the “well being” of the Societies. While this more formal expression is profitable to the Societies (when circumstances allow) it is “not” formally necessary to do so in all times and circumstances.

If it were necessary to have a “formal” stated General Meeting wherein “formal” Commissioners were chosen to discuss matters common to all Societies, where then do we find this “formalized” meeting commanded or even spoken of in Scripture? Which text of Scripture says that we are sinning if this is not being done? Where do we find this “formalized” practice in the early church or in the times of the First and Second Reformations? (In fact, there were no “formal” General Meetings until the first one met on December 15, 1681). Were these Christians sinning because they did not formally send Commissioners to attend stated meetings of Christian Societies? No, not at all, because while it is especially profitable in some circumstances (such as when there is no Church Court, or in times of persecution) to organize a formal General Meeting, it is not absolutely necessary. If we were to take the position that a “formal” General Meeting was always a necessity, then we maintain that we must find Scripture warrant for its formal institution. While we do believe that in some times and circumstances a formal General Meeting is both wise and edifying, we do not see the Scripture warrant for its necessity at all times and in all places where Christian Societies meet.

Finally, consider that without the “essence” of our General Meeting, the “formal” expression of it has no purpose. Without our common membership and Terms of Communion (the essence of a General Meeting) there would be no reason for such a “formal” meeting to exist. It is our

common membership and Terms of Communion which bind us together, and this is what we presently have in the RPNA—we have the “essence” of the General Meeting. We possess that part of the idea of a General Meeting that matters most, and thus, even though we do not have a “formal” General Meeting wherein stated Commissioners from each Society meet to discuss matters of common concern, we have no problem expressing that “essence” (which is the most important part) in our name. We do not believe that we “need” to have the “form” of the General Meeting to accurately or honestly express the term “General Meeting” in our name.

It may be the case that some of you would have preferred not to have used the name, RPNA (General Meeting). That’s fine. The Session is not saying that the only name that we could possibly have at this time is the RPNA (General Meeting). In fact, if you want to suggest a different name to us, we will take your suggestion under consideration. However, we do reserve the right to maintain the same name unless it can be proven to be immoral or imprudent. We believe that in order for us to change our name, very compelling reasons must be presented. To date, we have not heard such compelling reasons.

The same name may be used in the Bible at different times and in different circumstances, and yet God has chosen to use that name not because there is a direct one-to-one circumstantial identity with those who previously bore that name, but because there is one-to-one moral identity with those who previously bore that name. Consider the following biblical name: Israel. To what did that name originally refer? Originally, Israel referred to one man, Jacob (Genesis 32:28). Subsequently, the name, Israel, came to be used of the 12 tribes (Deuteronomy 5:1; 1 Chronicles 18:14). After the division of the 12 tribes (1 Kings 12:21), the name, Israel, was used to distinguish the 10 tribes (Israel) from the 2 tribes (Judah) as we see in 2 Chronicles 30:1 and Jeremiah 30:3. At other times, Judah is called Israel (2 Chronicles 19:8; 2 Chronicles 21:2,4; 2 Chronicles 24:5,9,16). Israel is even used of the Church in the New Testament that is composed of both Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 6:16; Revelation 7:4). The point is simply this: The various uses of the name Israel did not imply that it was necessary to have a one-to-one circumstantial identity with those who previously had that name any more than it is necessary for the RPNA (General Meeting) to have a one-to-one circumstantial identity with the Reformed Presbytery or the General Meetings of the Societies from the past. The 10 tribes could use the name, Israel, because they were the same moral person as the original 12 tribes by virtue of the covenant of grace (although there were many circumstantial differences). The 2 tribes (of Judah and Benjamin) could also use the name, Israel, because they were the same moral person as the original 12 tribes by virtue of the covenant of grace (although there were many circumstantial differences). Even the Church of the New Testament could use the name, Israel (Galatians 6:16; Revelation 7:14), because it was essentially the same moral person as the 12 tribes of Israel by virtue of the covenant of grace (although there were many circumstantial differences). Thus, we would propose that what is of supreme importance in the name we have chosen is the identity of one moral person (by means of our Terms of Communion) with those who bore the names, Reformed Presbytery and General Meeting.

Thus, in summary, when one asks, what are we?

We answer we are the RPNA (General Meeting). We are Reformed in doctrine. We are in this present extraordinary circumstance a Session comprised of Elders in both Canada and the United States—thus in North America--a lesser Presbytery, lawfully exercising the keys of the Kingdom. Finally, we are overseeing those members of our Societies, who, in essence, though not in form, comprise a General Meeting—those who are generally bound together in our common membership and Terms of Communion, and generally meeting together as one body of professing Covenanters who hold our common profession in doctrine, worship, discipline and government.

—In conclusion, when we represent ourselves as The Reformed Presbytery in North America (General Meeting), we are, in our judgment, accurately describing what we are. We realize that no name is perfectly descriptive, though we believe that our name adequately and honestly describes what we are, while maintaining historical continuity with the honorable testimony of those faithful Church Courts of the Reformed Presbytery which preceded us.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Acts of the Session of the RPNA-GM since the dissolution of the greater Presbytery**

Duff and Amy Mills were interviewed and received into membership (June 22, 2003).

Martin Doel was interviewed and received into membership (July 3, 2003).

Day of Prayer and Fasting (July 26, 2003).

Martin Doel was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 23, 2003).

Edgar and Juana Ibarra were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (August 28, 2003).

Clay and Dee Dee Shaw were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (August 30, 2003).

Stan and Me Me Birchfield were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (August 30, 2003)

Rebecca Faith Shaw was baptized (August 31, 2003).

Joshua Grant Price was baptized (September 7, 2003).

Bethany Hope Dubitz was baptized (October 19, 2003).

Carl Philip Wagner was baptized (October 19, 2003).

Andrew Patrick Flewelling was baptized (October 19, 2003).

Timothy Mark Flewelling was baptized (October 19, 2003).

Nathaniel Dean Flewelling was baptized (October 19, 2003).

The Lord's Supper was administered in Edmonton (October 19, 2003).

Nathaniel Asa Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Benjamin James Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Trahern Josiah Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Hanna Grace Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Samuel Addison Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Bethany Ruth Rose Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Tamara Eden Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Garnet Elisha Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Elodie Adalaide Grenon was baptized (October 26, 2003).

Brooke Victoria Grounds was baptized (October 26, 2003).

The Lord's Supper was administered in Prince George (October 26, 2003).

Lydia Rose Hautsch was baptized (November 18, 2003).

Evan Paul Lauderdale was baptized (November 23, 2003).

Emiliano Ezekiel Ibarra was baptized (December 14, 2003).

Matthew Ryan Hart was baptized (December 28, 2003).

Warren Ingram Dubitz was baptized (February 1, 2004).

Manuel Moussa Elossais was baptized (February 1, 2004).

Kathleen Janette Wagner was baptized (February 1, 2004).

The Lord's Supper was administered in Edmonton (February 8, 2004).

John West was interviewed and received into membership (March 11, 2004).  
Hanna Stole was interviewed and received into membership (March 11, 2004).  
Nathanael Jien Lee Birchfield was baptized (March 21, 2004).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Albany (May 2, 2004).  
Hannah Strole was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 2, 2004).  
Sarah Taron was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 3, 2004).  
Geneva Adair Carrico was baptized (July 4, 2004).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Prince George (July 4, 2004).  
Chris Tylor was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 14, 2004).  
Duff Mills was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (August 4, 2004).  
Darren Harr was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (August 7, 2004).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Albany (August 8, 2006).  
Gerald Royal was interviewed and received into membership along with his covenant children,  
    Laura, Maria, and Isabella (August 21, 2004).  
Isabella Hope Royal was baptized (August 22, 2004).  
Jeff Burns was interviewed and received into membership (August 21, 2004).  
Jeff Burns was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (August 21, 2004).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Clemson, SC (August 22, 2004).  
Joel and Maria Chairez were interviewed and received into membership along with their  
    covenant children, Phoebe, David, Elias, and Paulina (September 18, 2004).  
Michael Wyatt was interviewed and received into membership (September 18, 2004).  
Phoebe Ada Chairez, David Martin Chairez, Elias Antonio Chairez, and Paulina Chairez were  
    baptized (September 19, 2004).  
Nathaniel Price was suspended from the Lord's Supper (October 31, 2004).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Albany (November 7, 2004).  
A Day of Prayer and Fasting was called (November 27, 2004).  
Angela Hackler was interviewed and received into membership along with her covenant  
    children, Rachel, Rebecca, John, and Joshua (December 30, 2004).  
John Hackler was interviewed and received into membership (January 18, 2005).  
Rick and Joyce Taron were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (January 22,  
    2005).  
Kayla Taron was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (January 22, 2005).  
Seth Benjamin Putz was baptized (January 30, 2005).  
Julian and Donna Wierzchowski were interviewed and received into membership along with  
    their covenant children Rebekah, Micah, Anna, and Zachariah (February 6, 2006).  
Rebecca Suzanne Hackler was baptized (March 6, 2005).  
John Benjamin Hackler was baptized (March 6, 2005).  
Joshua Hal Hackler was baptized (March 6, 2005).  
Rocky Simbajon was interviewed and received into membership (March 8, 2005).  
Rocky Simbajon was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (March 8, 2005).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Albany (March 13, 2005).  
Cathie Soles was excommunicated (April 17, 2005).  
Emily Marie Price was baptized (April 24, 2005).

Laura Taron was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (May 3, 2005).  
Gerald Royal was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (May 5, 2005).  
Brian and Sheri Bernal were interviewed and received into membership (May 17, 2005).  
Brian and Sheri Bernal were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (May 18, 2005).  
Victoria Joy Shaw was baptized (June 19, 2005).  
Brandon Churchill professed his faith in Christ, was interviewed and received into membership (July 6, 2005).  
Brandon Lee Churchill was baptized (July 10, 2005).  
Tom and Sheryllyn McClintock were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 10, 2005).  
Julian and Donna Wierzchowski were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 17, 2005).  
Rebekah and Micah Wierzchowski (covenant children of Julian and Donna Wierzchowski) were examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 20, 2005).  
Walter Breidenstein was examined and approved to come to the Lord's Supper (July 28, 2005).  
James Robert Grenon (covenant child of Cheryl Grenon) was baptized July 31, 2005);  
Amos Gavin Dohms (covenant child of Jordan and Doralynne Dohms) was baptized (July 31, 2005).  
Dorothy Marie Wagner (covenant child of Mike and Ivy Wagner) was baptized (July 31, 2005).  
Zachariah David Wierzchowski (covenant child of Julian and Donna Wierzchowski) was baptized (July 31, 2005).  
The Lord's Supper was administered in Edmonton (July 31, 2005).  
Gabriel Liebi Hart (covenant child of Ben and Kathryn Hart) was baptized (August 21, 2005).  
Shelly Barrow was excommunicated (October 23, 2005).  
John Plouffe was excommunicated (October 23, 2005).  
Ethan Jeremiah Prevost (covenant child of Ed and Hannah Prevost) was baptized (November 13, 2005).  
Day of Prayer and Fasting called (January 21, 2006).  
Elette Shuen-Yi Birchfield (covenant child of Stan and Me Me Birchfield) was baptized (March 19, 2006).  
Nathaniel Price was excommunicated (May 14, 2006).  
Rick and Joyce Taron were excommunicated (May 20, 2006).

## Appendix B

This was an Ecclesiastical Divorce that was issued 3 weeks after the dissolution of Presbytery (June 8, 2003). The names and personal pronouns have been deleted from the text in order to preserve the anonymity of those involved. We would have the reader note that clearly authoritative power is being exercised by the Church Court of the RPNA (General Meeting). Furthermore, it should be noted that "jurisdiction" is likewise claimed by this same Church Court. Finally, the names of Greg Price, Greg Barrow, and Lyndon Dohms are listed as members of this Church Court that ruled in this case. Permission was obtained before including portions of this document in our paper.

### **AN ECCLESIASTICAL DIVORCE ISSUED BY THE REFORMED PRESBYTERY IN NORTH AMERICA (GENERAL MEETING) IN REGARD TO THE MARRIAGE OF \_\_\_\_\_.**

June 29, 2003

#### STATEMENT OF THE CASE

During a phone call with Pastor Greg Price (June 6, 2003), \_\_\_\_\_ explained the circumstances surrounding \_\_\_\_\_ marriages. \_\_\_\_\_ had for some time desired to know what was the status of \_\_\_\_\_ present marriage to \_\_\_\_\_. Pastor Price and \_\_\_\_\_ discussed all of the relevant information at that time. A summary of the relevant facts, actions, and judgment of the case follow hereafter. It was made clear to \_\_\_\_\_ that since \_\_\_\_\_ were not members under the inspection of The Reformed Presbytery In North America (General Meeting), advice might be given as to how to view \_\_\_\_\_ marriages, but no formal ecclesiastical judgment in regard to a divorce might be rendered until they should voluntarily come under our jurisdiction as members. *[The Case is then presented after this introduction]*

Forever indebted to the grace of God,

Greg Price  
Greg Barrow  
Lyndon Dohms