

Organizational Meeting of First Reformed Protestant Church

January 21, 2021

What follows is a transcript of the opening remarks, the opening prayer, and the question and answer session at the organizational meeting of First Reformed Protestant Church. The transcript is presented with the lightest possible editorial touch to correct some glaring grammatical errors, but the meaning of the statements has not been changed. Toward the end of the transcript, the recording was not clear. Those sections of the answers that are missing are indicated by brackets. There was also a comment at the very end that the recording did not pick up well enough to be included.

Because there may be others who have the same questions that were asked at the meeting, we present this transcript as information to all interested parties.

“For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.”

—Ezekiel 34:11–13

In Christ’s service,
Council of First Reformed Protestant Church

Opening remarks and prayer by Rev. A. Lanning

I’d like to welcome everybody to this organizational meeting tonight.

The occasion that brings us together is very solemn, probably the most solemn thing we could imagine. In fact, it’s a thing unimaginable. To leave the Protestant Reformed Churches is something that is astonishing. It’s hard to wrap our minds around. The solemnity and the weight of the occasion is felt by everyone here, I’m sure. The solemnity that has led to this has been felt for a long time. This is not an event that happened overnight. It is not an event that happened even over the last couple of months. It has been an event that the Lord Jesus Christ has been bringing, because it’s the Lord Jesus Christ who builds his church, and it’s the Lord Jesus Christ who reforms his church. What we have tonight, then, is not men and women deciding whether they will be part of the church or not, but what we have tonight is the Lord Jesus Christ calling his people out and reforming and re-establishing his church.

That means, then, that tonight we can have joy even in the midst of the solemnity. In fact, we must rejoice in the work that our God does in building his church on his cornerstone and establishing her upon his truth. Our God is good. He is good to us, and he is good to our children. And the truth upon which we are built shall endure to all generations. The truth shall endure to all generations not because the generations are strong enough to bear the truth, but because the truth is strong enough to bear the generations.

So as we begin our meeting tonight, we commit our way to God in the singing of his word and the reading of his word and in prayer.

Sing: Psalter #422:1, 5, 6

Read: Isaiah 54

Let us ask God's blessing on our meeting tonight.

Our Father which art in heaven, in this solemn assembly, on this evening we draw nigh to thy throne of grace, who hast promised us in the holy gospel everlasting mercy and who hast declared that thou wilt lay our stones with fair colors and our foundations with sapphires, who hast declared that all our children shall be taught of thee and great shall be the peace of our children, and who hast promised that in righteousness we shall be established and that our righteousness is of thee, so that no weapon formed against thy church can prosper.

And how we need that assurance and that comfort of thy word in these days, when with grief, with confusion, with utter astonishment, we behold the falling away of an institution that is dear to us, that we have loved, and that has nurtured us. We behold a thing that we thought impossible. And in this, too, our own idolatry is exposed and revealed. For how could we think that we could be above and beyond apostasy and falling away, we who have the old man of sin, we who have seen in the history of the church corruption set in again and again?

We beseech thee, Father, as thou hast gathered us here together now in this evening, that thou wilt forgive all our sins, blotting them out in Jesus' blood, and establish us in righteousness.

As we form the church anew, which is not our work but thy work, we pray for thy blessing. We pray that even this will yet be a witness to thy people, both near and far, that all of thy people and all of thy remnant may continue to be gathered and established by thee.

So give us grace as we speak together this evening in the reading of the document and the questions and answers and signing of the document, that thy name may be glorified, thy righteousness extolled, thy mercy proclaimed, and thy people blessed. Be with those who lead in the meeting tonight. Give strength in answering questions, that good guidance from the scriptures may be given. And wilt thou forgive our iniquities, blotting them out in Jesus' blood, and keep us from sin. In Jesus' name alone we pray. Amen.

In a moment we are going to have the reading of the Act of Separation that the two elders and three deacons have signed, but before we read that, the consistory asked that I give a brief explanation of what's going on and the concept of the Act of Separation.

After my deposition when the six of us sat down together, it appeared to us there were three options in front of us. The first option would be to carry on as we had been. That is, we keep our membership in

Byron Center PRC, we continue to worship there as we are able, and in the meantime write a protest, or write protests, to Synod 2021. Over the last six weeks it's become evident to us, and I think to most of us assembled here, that that option simply was not tenable. That was impossible. Worship at Byron Center has become nearly impossible for several reasons that are listed in the Act of Separation. We did not see that as viable.

The second option was to form a kind of protesting Protestant Reformed Church. The idea there would be that we maintain a connection with Byron Center, we keep our membership papers in Byron Center, but we meet separately and have our own worship, our own sacraments, our own Christian discipline, and function separately as a church, and maintain this one connection to the denomination yet: that we have a protest coming to Synod 2021, and in that way be a protesting Protestant Reformed Church.

As we looked at that option, it became evident that the reason we need to separate and have our own worship is that we believe Byron Center and the denomination as a whole have corrupted the marks of the true church and are manifesting the marks of the false church. And how can we then in good conscience keep our membership papers in Byron Center and try to have our own separate worship services for the sake of a protest that very likely would be declared illegal come Synod 2021 anyway?

When we put it in those terms and looked at what the word of God calls when we see the marks of the true church corrupted and the marks of the false church displayed, we saw that the only option really before us was to separate, that it was time to come out from the Protestant Reformed Churches and to re-form the church by God's grace.

This would mean, then, for those who sign the Act of Separation tonight, that your membership in the Protestant Reformed Churches would be finished. There would be no more membership there. It would mean that probably you would write a letter to the consistory and ask for your papers to be sent to your home so that there's a record at the consistory that your membership is no longer there. And by the signing of the Act of the Separation tonight, your membership would be in this church that is being constituted tonight under the oversight of the two elders, the three deacons, and the one pastor.

This does not mean that as a consistory we are unconcerned for the Protestant Reformed Churches yet. God may yet be gracious to her. His arm is not shortened. And so our intention is as a consistory and on behalf of the church, to write a letter from our church to the 2021 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The synod has a bylaw that all letters from outside bodies must be included on the synodical agenda. And so in that letter we could put the same warnings and callings that we would put in a protest. The letter would not have the standing of a protest, but it would be a letter that could be received by the synod. And we pray that God would use that to yet turn the Protestant Reformed Churches as a denomination.

When we looked at all of those things, it became clear to us that we must separate. And so the Act of Separation was drawn up. It was adopted, officially, Tuesday evening by the five men. They signed that document and present it here tonight to read to you, to have a time of questions and answers, and that all who are so convicted may sign that document as well. That will constitute the formation of the congregation here in this place.

We don't go forward blindly. We ought to recognize tonight that we have suffered a little so far in the past few years in our struggle for the truth of the gospel and God's grace and fellowship with him. We have suffered a little. But we haven't even begun to suffer the way we will after tonight. There will be strong feelings, and already there is great anger that will be directed toward us. Jesus himself said this in Matthew 10: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Ye shall be hated. What form that hatred will take is hard to say tonight. We don't know all of the forms it will take. We pray for God's grace that we do not return that hatred but turn the other cheek to it; that when the truth of Jehovah is attacked, we stand without giving an inch in the defense of that truth; and that we stand firmly and even sharply, that we do that not in hatred for our mother, but in love for our mother and in earnest prayer for her turning yet even at this late date.

And as we face that hatred and that anger, we need not be afraid. We read from Isaiah 54 tonight regarding God's mercy to his people. He lays our stones and foundations with his beautiful colors of his grace in Jesus Christ. The truth of Jehovah *shall not fall*. It cannot. That is also our confidence as we go forward, that all who are founded upon that truth, in spite of the gates of hell themselves, cannot be overthrown, for that truth is none other than Jesus Christ, and he is our foundation.

So with that encouragement and with those words, we would like to present to you the Act of Separation. Elder Engelsma is going to read that for us, and we'll follow that with a time of questions and answers.

Elder Dewey Engelsma reads the Act of Separation.

Question and Answer Part of Organizational Meeting

1. *Is it the position of the Act of Separation that the Protestant Reformed Churches are the false and apostate church?*

AL: The position of the document is that the PRC is an apostatizing denomination, that it has corrupted the marks of the true church and that it manifests the marks of the false church. For the child of God, the question is not first of all, is the church apostatizing or all the way apostate? The marks of the Belgic Confession article 29 can characterize a church that has set itself on a path that will inevitably lead to its becoming entirely the synagogue of Satan, where there is no salvation whatsoever. The child of God does not need to wait for that point of no return or to wait for that moment, whenever that is, when no salvation happens in that church anymore. The child of God is called to evaluate the church according to what she does with the word of God. That's the essence of the marks. And when the pure preaching of the gospel is corrupted and Christian discipline is not exercised faithfully and the sacraments are not exercised or administered purely, that's when there is corruption of the marks of the true church. And when she ascribes more honor to herself and to her ordinances than to the word of God, when she persecutes those who live holily and rebuke her

for her errors, that's the mark of the false church. It is our judgment that the denomination, through its actions in these days, manifests those marks of the false church.

That is a long way of saying that the position of the Act of Separation is that the denomination is apostatizing, that she has corrupted the marks of the true church and manifests the marks of the false church.

- 2. I think I have a unique position here and that other ones may be in the same place; and that is, if I were to join with the church here and put my membership here, I will be viewed by the Protestant Reformed Churches as having separated myself from the true church. So my position will be that I keep my membership at [my current PRC] but that I will be attending here all the time. I want the Protestant Reformed Churches being responsible for me being put out of the church for neglecting the means of grace. That's the only thing that they can put me out of the church for. And so I will be coming here and still be a member of [my current PRC]. And where the sheep goes, that's where his wool goes. That was established in [classis] years ago, that if a member leaves for a while and goes [elsewhere] for six months, then he should put his membership over there. And that man said, "Well, if the sheep goes [elsewhere], then my wool goes with me." And so therefore, like I say, my financial support will all go here. I will be a member of [my current PRC] and I will continue to come here and give all my financial support to this place. That's my position, and I think that I could be in a unique position from other ones here. Thank you.*

AL: All right, that does bring up a fundamental question about signing the Act of Separation, and that is that no one may be compelled to sign that Act of Separation. No one here tonight may be compelled. No one here tonight may be compelled to sign it by anyone else who's here tonight or by us up here. There is no compulsion to sign it. Also there's this principle: everyone here is free to sign it. Everyone will answer before God for his own action, without compulsion and completely free before Jehovah in answer to that.

Our position, who have already signed this Act, is that we must. We believe we must. We believe that the marks are clear and that it's time for us to come out. And we have to do that by our own membership too. And we can only explain our position on that.

- 3. Are the five signatories together with yourself de facto the council and consistory of the new church?*

AL: That's correct. The church is being organized under the oversight of those two elders and those three deacons and myself as pastor. We don't know what the future holds as far as whether there will need to be officebearer nominations in the future. Those are all decisions we can make down the road.

- 4. I'm just in the position that where I thought and believe yet even though the decision of classis, that there's possible a protest going. I know you mentioned something about that there's probably the understanding that they would not be dealt with. But I feel yet in my heart, as a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches, that I still have to fight now. I understand that you as a congregation and as elders and as deacons have fought the good fight of faith. Your conscience has come to the*

realization that you must do what you do. My conscience yet at this hour says I must fight. So I guess, as you would say, one foot in the door and the other back where I belong. That's my difficulty. That's my difficulty that is very hard. I understand very much so the Act of Separation; I fully believe what was said. But I don't think that I'm ready. I feel before God that I do have to fight. But if there's no protests going to synod, then maybe that's telling me the end is near. I don't know if that's a question, but it's telling you how I believe in my conscience's sake.

AL: We hear you expressing what many here have wrestled with and are wrestling with. And we cannot solve that difficulty for you, obviously. That's between you and the Lord. But what we can do is give you some information. And the fact is that anyone who would sign the Act of Separation and would leave the Protestant Reformed Churches would not have standing to protest in the Protestant Reformed Churches. So if there is anyone who believes they are compelled to protest, that cannot happen in the church that is being formed here. There is work that can be done here. Whether that's sufficient or not, each will have to answer for himself. So with that information, I don't know if you other elders have any additional thoughts.

DE: "Struggle" is the right word. We had a unique position in the last number of months to see where our instinct takes us as Protestant Reformed people. Where is our instinct? Is it to pick up the phone, or is it to pick up the Bible? Is it to turn to men, or is it to turn to Christ? Is it to submit to the yoke of Christ or to the yoke of men? For us as officebearers, it's very clear where the Protestant Reformed Churches turn.

In the Belgic Confession, the 29th article speaks very clearly about that. That's our conviction, what we've seen, what we've witnessed. It's what we've labored over. It's what's grieved us—*grieved us*. Why will we not submit to the yoke of Christ? Those things will be revealed, if the Lord wills it. Not in any sense of bitterness, because I can speak for myself and the other men that there is none. There is no sense of bitterness toward the Protestant Reformed Churches. She's our mother. We love her. And standing on this stage tonight, there's a sense of bewilderment. But we hope to show some of those things so we can reveal where that instinct is.

- 5. Have there been discussions in our churches that other of our churches would write up the same type of document and have separation or secession themselves? I've had some discussion along those lines. But if someone were to sign here, then they wouldn't be able to sign their own churches' secession letter, if their own churches would desire to do that. I don't know if that's the case. But as we have other ministers involved in this controversy, particularly Rev. Langerak and Rev. VanderWal, is there any direction that you can give those that are not part of Byron Center's congregation in light of the other ministers involved in the controversy?*

AL: We can give information on that again. We have not, as a body, had any kind of official correspondence with any other church or any other minister on this. That is, there are no plans officially, either instigated by us or discussed by us, toward other churches leaving. We stand ready, as the Act of Separation says, to exercise fellowship with anyone who is also convicted of the apostatizing of the denomination. We stand ready to have those discussions. We have not. What

informal discussions there may have been simply carry no weight here. As far as I am concerned, anyway, I can't see that we can build anything on that.

It is the case, as you indicated, that someone who's not a member of Byron Center who signs this tonight and goes in with this congregation being formed tonight will not be part of whatever reformation might happen in their own congregation. And I suppose that each congregation is going to have to face this in its own time, in its own way, and I don't think any of us can predict how that's going to unfold. So those are facts to keep in mind as you consider your calling here.

6. *The stated clerk of classis sent out a summary of decisions in which they detailed the rationale from your deposition. So we've seen one side of the story. But I think it's likely that we'll face a lot of questions about responding to that. And I don't know that—I speak for myself—but I'm not well-prepared to have a succinct response to that because I can see only one side of the story. I wonder if you can help us out with a summary about why that deposition is improper, unjust, so—help me out with that.*

AL: We have intentions to write regarding the events of the last two months, to lay out what has happened, how it has unfolded, to produce documents that were involved in all of that work. I cannot promise right now how extensive that will be or exactly when that will be published, but it is, I'd say, a pretty high priority on our part.

I'll try to give a very brief answer to classis' deposition and decision. In my judgment, the error of classis was that it saw the whole case as behavior, sheer behavior, the behavior of a minister, the behavior of a minister in relation to synod, in relation to the September meeting of Classis East in 2018, and my behavior with relation to Byron Center's consistory. The issue was never behavior. The issue was always the truth of the gospel and a defense of that gospel over against false doctrine that we as churches had taught, and false doctrine that was minimized and therefore minimized the truth. If the case had been seen as doctrinal and had been handled that way, then there never could have been a charge of schism. There never could have been that charge because the defense of the gospel of grace is never schismatic. Division may happen in defense of the gospel of grace, but it's never schismatic because that truth of the gospel unites God's people, and a defense of that gospel unites God's people. I realize that I'm simply stating things here, that I'm not demonstrating. I'm stating my view of what happened. Demonstration of these things is more for publication in the future.

DE: One thing I would add to that is that as a consistory we are going to examine the Jeremiah sermon in the light of scripture and the confessions, which to this point has never been done, which ought to have been the first work of the consistory. And we intend to distribute that broadly so that everyone can see that sermon was faithful and true. When a sermon is faithful and true, it cannot be schismatic. And to declare it schismatic is to declare the word of Christ which came through that sermon as schismatic.

7. *There's been a concern about protests. Church politically, rules of synod—what is the possibility of protesting that decision to Synod 2021? Is it actually synod's decision then, until they approve the*

work of the Western delegates? Because if we hold out here and want to say we want to protest, and then find out you can't even bring a protest, then church politically, rules of synod, how is that?

AL: There is not clarity on exactly where a protest would go. One thing that seems clear is that the protest could not go to the May classis. When the synodical deputies gave their judgment regarding my deposition, that was synod's work. Synod had its representatives there, which means that it's out of classis' hands. Now there are two options. Synod 2021. One could try to protest to Synod 2021. There are those who have said a protest would be received at this synod. The difficulty is that the synodical deputies have not given their report to synod yet. Technically, synod doesn't know anything about my deposition yet, just formally speaking. When the deputies give their report, synod will approve their work and then synod will have approved my deposition. So it's possible that someone sends a protest to 2021 and synod uses that protest in their decision whether or not to approve the synodical deputies' work. But it's also possible that synod rules that protest is a year too early and says you have to wait until Synod 2022.

With regard to protesting, this is simply our position now; this is not meant to impose that on anyone else; but there's always one more step you can take. You can protest to Synod 2021, and maybe that's passed and maybe that's not. You can appeal to Synod 2022. You can write an overture to Synod 2023. There's always one more step in the Church Order way. In our judgment, we were convinced that last step had been taken for us, and it was time to get out.

8. *A stumbling block for a lot of people is "militating" against the consistory. Could you explain that a bit? Is there anything you can reveal that would be helpful and pertinent? We have some firsthand knowledge being from Byron Center, so I have some facts, whether right or wrong.*

AL: Yes, so the question is about the charge of militating against Byron Center's consistory, and that charge has two parts. Number one, the charge is that I militated against the decision of the consistory that required me to resign as editor of *Sword and Shield*. And that charge comes about because on a Thursday it was distributed to the congregation that I was required to resign as editor, and that Sunday I preached Jeremiah 23:4, 14 in the morning service. That sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14 was occasioned by the decision requiring me to resign as editor. It was occasioned. The sermon itself was nothing about being editor. I maintain that there was no militancy against the decision. In fact, very deliberately I did not mention anything about the decision to be an editor.

And the occasion of that sermon was not only a decision regarding editorship, but the occasion was also everything that has happened. That Jeremiah 23 sermon is the controversy. That Jeremiah 23 sermon is the controversy as it unfolded over the past years in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The decision regarding editorship revealed something. It showed that, in my judgment, we as churches in some ways are at square one in the controversy. And so I believe it was time to preach such a sermon in order to warn us as a denomination to watch out; beware; we are on the path to destruction; wake up. That sermon was nothing about editorship. That sermon was about the controversy.

The second part of the charge of militating against the consistory is that I took the church visitors' advice, which was given privately, and on Thanksgiving morning in an Ecclesiastes 7 sermon, summarized that advice publicly and warned the congregation and the consistory about that advice, going so far as to say that if we adopted that advice, we would go to the house of feasting, where we may not be. We must be in the house of mourning. And the charge is that by that sermon I set the congregation against the church visitors' advice. I acknowledge that. I did set the congregation against the church visitors' advice, and I meant to. That was good and, in fact, I intend to do that right now and intend to keep doing that. The church visitors' advice was spiritually destructive advice. By the time that advice was in the hands of the consistory, it was not official. The church visitors' advice is, I suppose, as any letter that any of us would write to the consistory and say, "I advise you to do this." Church visitors are not an official body. They don't have the authority of classis when they speak in that advice. It is just advice. The consistory can take it or leave it. So there was no ecclesiastical body, you might say, that I was fighting against. But the advice, the essence of the advice, was this: Jeremiah 23, that sermon, was schismatic. And because that sermon is schismatic, nobody may preach the controversy that way in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Nobody may accuse the Protestant Reformed Churches of having walked in lies by our toleration of false doctrine. Nobody may accuse the Protestant Reformed Churches of continuing to minimize our error and even falling into it again. That was included in the sermon, which I believe is correct. The advice of the church visitors was that from now on, the controversy may not be preached from that point of view, and it is schismatic to do so. And if anybody does preach the controversy that way, they are out. And I think the proof of my summary is before us tonight, that there was deposition for preaching the controversy in that way. I say that is destructive to souls of God's people in the Protestant Reformed Churches. If we cannot warn against false doctrine and if we cannot warn against the toleration of our own false doctrine, we're going to die. That will be the result for the Protestant Reformed Churches.

And that same warning has to follow us into this new congregation. If the pulpit is silenced, and as a matter of fact, if the voice of God's people as believers is silenced in rebuking the church for her own errors, then God's people will perish in their generations. So I do not believe that the sermon was schismatic against the consistory in any way whatsoever.

9. *In your opening remarks you made a comment that you might write a letter to Synod of 2021. In the letter of Act of Separation, you make a statement that we will no longer be part of their ecclesiastical assemblies. Does that at all contradict each other?*

AL: The language of the Act of Separation is that we will not hold ecclesiastical fellowship with the Protestant Reformed Churches until such a time as God may be pleased to restore them to our fellowship. That does not say we will not have any interaction, that we wouldn't make any rebuke, that we wouldn't defend our cause and make one last appeal for them to turn. What it means is that we will not send delegates to their synods or classes. We won't hold ecclesiastical fellowship. So I don't believe that's contradictory, and I believe that that gives us the right as a body even to rebuke and warn and show the right way to the Protestant Reformed Churches yet.

BVB: That doesn't mean that we may not have fellowship with saints still in the Protestant Reformed Churches and that we're saying they're unbelievers. That's my position. We still love our fellow saints in the Protestant Reformed Churches—we do.

AL: That's a valid point. Belgic Confession article 29 makes a distinction between individual members of the church and the church as a body. And our judgment regarding apostatizing is not a judgment about individual people but about the body. The body is apostatizing. And when the body is apostatizing, it's time to come out. There may be other implications in all of this that we don't even see yet regarding individuals. But very definitely this is a judgment about the body of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

10: *If by the grace of God they do turn, what would it take for us to be reunited with them? How would that happen?*

AL: It's difficult to draw up a checklist because repentance is not a checklist of rules. It's not "seven steps to a repentant church." So what would that look like? It's hard to say exactly. But when a body is repentant, you don't have to stand back and say, "I wonder if they're repentant or not." If the body of the Protestant Reformed Churches is gripped by the horror of what they have done and are doing, if God works that in their hearts, that will roar through the body in a way that will be obvious. There will be a turning. Maybe it would involve Formula of Subscription exams for some of the ministers and elders. Perhaps it would involve discipline even. It's hard for us to say right now, "These are the steps that we need to see."

Second Corinthians 7:11 shows what repentance looks like. There is zeal, there is revenge, there is clearing of themselves. We know it when we see it. ["For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7:11).]

11. *In regard to membership, you talked about it a little bit. You said that if you sign the Act of Separation, you would have your membership papers sent to your house. Tell me a little bit how that works. Or if you didn't sign it and you just have them sent to your house and you constitute it that way. Explain that a bit.*

AL: Okay, so the mechanics of how this works is that those who sign the Act of Separation tonight are by that signature constituted as this church under the oversight of these officebearers. I suppose technically, then, nobody would have to say anything to Byron Center's consistory, for example. Personally, I have written and asked for my membership papers to be sent to my home because I want the record in the minutes of Byron Center that I am not a member of that church anymore. But we don't have to wait for our papers to come here and then we'll be constituted as members. By the signing of this Act of Separation tonight you are constituted as a member.

If there is anyone who is not convicted that they can sign tonight, and they want to wait a while and sometime down the road decide that it's time for them to come out and join too, that mechanic

would be a little bit different. Then it would be that you would have to ask the consistory where you are a member for your papers and bring those to the consistory here, and then there would be a decision to receive you as a member, just like it would go in any other membership transfer. The difference is that you ask for your papers to be sent to your home, and then you go from there.

12. *The question could come up: could we sign this document at a different time? In other words, if we're not ready to sign it tonight, could we sign it, let's say either on Sunday or a week from Sunday or whatever, or at the prayer service or something like that?*

AL: It's my judgment on that, and that's something we talked about—I think this is the right way to view that—that a church is only constituted one time. The church is only instituted at one time. I think the illustration that might help is a daughter church. When a daughter church is formed, then there's one night where all of those who are going to belong to that daughter church have their membership papers read out, and that constitutes the daughter church. And if somebody wants to join a week later, they don't join somehow back from a week before. They would get their papers and send them in to be approved by the consistory. So there can be only one institution, one constitution of the church, and that's happening tonight. So my judgment would be that if somebody's not ready tonight and is not convicted tonight, they ought not sign tonight. But if a week from now they are convicted that they must join, then ask for papers, have them sent here, and they can be received as a member. But the signing of the Act of Separation, I think, is tonight only. To be fully transparent, there are a couple of exceptions of those who are sick or infirm and simply could not be at the meeting tonight, and we are going to bring the book to them tomorrow if they want to sign. But that's not because they don't know until tomorrow if they want to sign. If they could be here in God's providence tonight, they would sign tonight. But that's the one caveat there is. For the rest, I believe tonight is the time to sign.

13. *My wife is not able to be here tonight. When I sign, do I sign on behalf of our household, or does she have to then do that separately?*

AL: Yes, the head of the household may sign for the household. We trust that the head of the household understands what's in their hearts and what's intended. The head of the household signs for the household. And if there is a husband who signs, a father who signs, and the wife also wants to sign, she certainly may. The head of the household signs for the whole, but if the wife signs, that's fine too.

14. *I looked at the Act here, and you state many, many things about the Protestant Reformed Churches, and I don't doubt your word. But if we sign, we can't personally verify every—I'm going to call it—charge. How do you deal with that? You say you are going to inform us later, but for tonight—?*

AL: Yes, that is a very good question. That is correct. The Act of Separation does not include proof. It simply is a statement: this is what is going on. Those who are here tonight, or at least many of us, have lived through it. And the point of the Act of Separation is not to be a ten-page demonstration: here's the proof of every charge or proof of everything we state. But it's self-evident to those who have lived through it: this is actually the case; this is what we've seen too.

So if there are specifics that somebody says, “Well, I’ve seen all of them except that one; I want some clarification on that,” we can try to provide that tonight. But the idea is that this is a document we sign who have seen these things and witnessed these things ourselves.

15. *Kind of a two-part thing. What about the catechism instruction for the youth? Has there been any talking of that? And then also what about benevolence for those who may need it? Is there any thought for monies for assistance for those who might need it presently?*

AL: There has been some thought to catechism. We intend to teach catechism. So we will be a full functioning church. The question is as to logistics and timing. Once we have signed the Act of Separation, for those who have signed it, we can have a discussion tonight about our thoughts. Everyone is welcome to hear that discussion. So yes, we will be teaching catechism. We have to settle on a day. We plan to announce that Sunday for sure when that will be happening, after the discussion tonight. The offerings we’ve adopted are for the general fund and benevolence in the morning and building fund at night. And then the deacons will be coming out with a longer term collection schedule.

16. *I think it’s unique, the different situation for those who are outside Byron Center who come here. If we ask for our papers, they have to inquire and say to you, “You are leaving the true church,” you know. That’s what we’ll all face. So it’s a little different situation than for those from Byron Center. So that is another reason I would be willing to face them, that I’m leaving, but it is a matter that they have to go and visit you and declare to you that you’re leaving the true church. And that’s why I say I will be as good as a member here and all my support will be here and I’ll be here all the time, as long as I’m able. But my membership will stay at [my current PRC] until they put me out for neglect of the means of grace. And if they want to do that, then the responsibility is on them, that they’re putting me out of the PR Churches for neglecting the means of grace, when I’m going to be here, listening to the means of grace.*

AL: All right. Anyone else?

17. *Rev. Lanning, I’m sorry, do you condone that? What is your advice or response to that?*

AL: My conviction is that one who leaves a church that is apostatizing, and that one can no longer be part of that church, then he comes out with his membership too. I say that without making that the rule or a law on the spot here. There are some things that we need to consider, I suppose. My advice—and I say that deliberately: advice, not my rule—my advice would be that if there is someone who is convicted that they cannot be a member in their current Protestant Reformed Church, that they must come out with their membership. What we can’t get into here and what we can’t judge here, is to have a debate on whether one may do it that way and one may not do it that way. There is private advice and such that could be given.

The word of God in Jeremiah says when the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so, what will we do in the end thereof? Leave, O Benjamin. Gather yourselves together and flee [Jer. 5:31–6:1].

18. *Going back to asking for your papers from the existing church that you're a member of amounts to the issue of signing the Act of Separation. I have a hunch that there could be some of us here in churches, that we would sign this and then ask for our papers. The elders from that church will visit us then and say, "You're charging us with sin." They'll read this Act of Separation and they'll say, "You're charging us with sin. You've got to get that straightened out before we give you your papers." We're not saying to other members of the Protestant Reformed Churches that we're fine and we've done everything right. There's some who say they have done everything right, though. They've got themselves covered. And they're convinced that if you sign this, that you are sinning against them. How do we deal with that?*

AL: One who signs the Act of Separation tonight is a member of this church. Your dealings from a certain point of view are finished with the church you're a member of right now. I think it would be good for a member to sit down with the elders who will call him up, and say, "These are my convictions, and this is why. You believe you're doing everything right, but you have not, and here's why and here's where." You do that as a testimony to them. But if the consistory refuses to give you your papers and says, "We will not give you anything until you clear up these charges of sin," the response of the member can be, "But I'm not under your oversight anymore. Before God, who gathers his church, I have been gathered in that new congregation."

And there is provision for that in the Church Order too, that when a new church is formed, if the consistory will not give papers, then the members themselves give a testimony to each other of their doctrine and confession, and attest that this is somebody who can be a member in good standing. So the Church Order itself recognizes that there might be such a situation.

19. *It talks in here about the false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings. Are these the ones that you are referring to that have been debated, or are there more out there that we are not aware of?*

AL: That is correct. This is referring to articles in the *Standard Bearer* from 2018 in regard to what must I do. That is heresy. That's false doctrine. [Unclear recording at this point.] There are also articles being published now on Witsius which is teaching that same thing, that deceptive thinking. [Unclear recording.] That's also heresy and false doctrine. There have been other writings here and teachings there. But the writings we are referring to are those.

20. *We're hearing in response to the meeting tonight that people who would sign this tonight are violating their vows to submit to church government. How do we answer that?*

AL: Submitting to church government—therein lies part of the apostatizing of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Church government is not the rule of men. Church government is Jesus Christ's rule through those men. When a believer is convicted that the church he is a member of is corrupting the marks of the true church and is displaying the marks of the false church, the calling to him is: find a true church. That's the calling of Christ through his prophets and apostles. [Unclear recording.] The church is always called according to Revelation 18:4—Come out of Babylon lest ye partake of her sins and partake of her plagues. If the church is showing herself to be that, come out

of her. That's the only church government. That's not being disorderly. We don't just leave as a mob. But this is orderly. [Unclear recording.] [We are] organized under the oversight of officebearers. There's nothing about this that is fighting against or militating against true, proper church government. [Unclear recording.]

BVB: We're going to be accused of being schismatic, that this is an act of schism. Prof. Engelsma helps us with that on page 122 of *Bound to Join*, where he says:

The fault for the separation and disruption of the unity of the church is that of the unfaithful denomination, not that of the congregation that separates. The apostatizing body, of course, will scream, "Schism." As patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels, appeal to church unity is the trump card of the false church. But the faithful congregation, or believer, separates on behalf of the unity of the church, which is always and only a unity in the truth of the gospel.

Every believer must insist on the truth in his or her congregation and in his or her denomination. This is not unreasonable. This is what God insists on.

With no more questions forthcoming, Elder Dewey Engelsma led in prayer, and all those present were given opportunity to sign the *Act of Separation*.