

Some officers and other leaders of the Presbytery, writing as individuals, sent the following letter to the SARC on Wednesday, Dec 28th.

To: The Special Administrative Review Committee for Albany Presbytery

Grace and peace to you, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We appreciate your sacrifice of time and energy to serve our Presbytery, the Synod and the larger church.

We are, however, puzzled and concerned about the methods that your Committee is using to conduct its review, and we ask you to reconsider your approach. We are writing this as individuals who are current and recent officers and current committee and board chairs of the Presbytery.

- First, we are puzzled by the apparent change of your mandate. On October 10, 2016, the Stated Clerk of the Synod wrote that several Albany presbyters had complained of “irregularities and disregard for the Book of Order as well as the Standing Rules of the Albany Presbytery.” The documents referenced are very specific in their requirements for compliance, so the complaint must have cited particular actions or omissions of the Presbytery that the complainants deemed erroneous or irregular. [Your recent post on the Presbytery blog](#) makes no mention of how the Book of Order or the Standing Rules may have been disregarded or violated. Rather, you invite any participant in Presbytery to write to you about any matter whatsoever. Your investigation seems to have expanded into a comprehensive inquiry into the Presbytery’s “health” and “practices.” This broadening seems to us to fall outside the constitutional definition of an administrative review (G3.0108a), which is supposed to focus on a governing body’s “proceedings and actions.”
- We are especially troubled that after four months we have yet to learn the nature of the complaint that brought you here. Furthermore, your methods of operating—promising confidentiality to those who meet with you and swearing to secrecy all who engage with you—are not healthy. There are certain circumstances in which confidentiality and secrecy are appropriate, such the first phase (only) of a disciplinary case against an individual and personnel matters. Allegations against a governing body, however, are always public, taking the form of either a protest of actions taken or a remedial judicial complaint. In our view, you are misapplying a provision for a specific judicial proceeding to a non-judicial review, turning an inquiry into an inquisition. You have interviewed persons without explaining what allegations have been made that might implicate them. You have urged people to inform you secretly about perceived misdeeds or unhealthy practices of their colleagues or local government. This is not the Presbyterian way.
- Last, your blog post suggests you are not impartial. You report that the complainants are concerned for the health of the Presbytery. That may well be, though their failure to follow the dictates of Matthew 18 and bring their complaint to any of us in Presbytery leadership before taking it to outside judges does raise questions. As you know, complaints can also be filed as harassment or revenge against persons or groups whose legitimate actions disfavored the complainants. Before collecting evidence or even telling us the specific actions that have led to the complaint, how can you know the complainants are acting in good faith? Yet you assert their goodwill *a priori*.

Your methods of review are sowing seeds of suspicion and mistrust. As officers and committee leaders we have been asked repeatedly why you are here, who or what has given offense, and who may have complained. Recently, several of us were the focus of a vicious unsigned e-mail mentioning your activities. Your actions, as shown by the writer's own citation of them, emboldened the writer to level anonymous accusations. Albany Presbytery has had to make some tough decisions that do not please everyone. We have tried, however, to "speak in the light" (Matt 10:27) whenever possible as we strive to follow Jesus, who "spoke openly to the world" (John 10:20). By empowering anonymous complaints and secret proceedings, your approach undermines the norms of Christian community we are trying to practice.

We are sure this was not your intention. But secrecy and confidentiality have only a limited role to play in the church, and in this case they are poisoning our fellowship together. Christ taught us to model openness in our relationships. Therefore:

- We ask that you tell the Presbytery what specific complaint led the Commission to create the SARC.
- We ask you to focus your investigation on "proceedings and actions" related directly to the complaint.
- We ask you to conclude your review quickly rather than dragging on for the year or more your blog post mentioned. In these difficult times we all need to devote ourselves to the true work of the church—healing the world Jesus Christ came to love and save.
- We urge you to proceed "in the light," with transparency and openness as your watchwords as you learn more about our Christian ministry in the Capital Region. Secret investigations have no role in the life of the church.

We ask this in the hope that you will reframe your review better to conform to the Book of Order description. If you do not, we will take appropriate action to protect our Presbytery and its members from conduct we find detrimental to the peace, unity and good order of the church.

We are happy to meet with you to discuss this request, but we will not keep such a meeting confidential. Nor will we discuss any other matters with you until we know the specific nature of the complaint and your methods going forward.

Respectfully yours,

Cara Molyneaux, Moderator

Arthur Fullerton, Vice Moderator

Jerry McKinney, former Moderator (2016)

Donna Elia, former Moderator (2015)

William Levering, Chair, Board of Trustees

James Reisner, Chair, Committee on Self Development of People

Barbara Wheeler, Chair, Personnel Committee