

The First Trial

On October 10, 2020, the New Hope Session admitted charges from two members of New Hope against Mr. Jason R.¹ They had been received in communication September 14, 2020, and came from members David C. and Matthew B. (husband of Aimee B.).²

In the same meeting the Session conducted the preliminary investigation³ found the charges in order, and proceeded to the first meeting of the trial. The charge was “the offense of violating the ninth commandment by the breach of his lawful promise upon installation as Ruling Elder, a promise “faithfully to perform all the duties thereof.”⁴

In essence this charge accused Mr. Jason R. of the sin of abandoning his responsibilities to the church as an elder, during the period of time when Mr. Jason R. was estranged from the Session through actions of the Session which the Presbytery found out of order, during (largely) the period of his administrative leave/sabbatical and during the COVID lock down era.

The lone specification was that Mr. Jason R. “neglected to gather with the congregation for public worship” from January 26 2020 through September 2020.⁵

Importantly, at that meeting the Session also suspended Mr. Jason R. from the right of duties of office. The language of the BOD provision is as follows: “If unusual circumstances *require* it [my emphasis], a judicatory may deny an accused person the right of...performing the functions of his office, until the case is concluded.”⁶

The minutes read:

“Motion was passed to deny [Mr. Jason R.] the right of performing the functions of the office of elder, until the case is concluded according to BD IV.A.1.d.

[Mr. Jason R.] took an exception to the motion passed in regards to IV.A.1.d.”⁷

On October 19, 2020 the Session met again. Mr. Van M. was present as a guest.⁸ At that meeting a second set of “Formal Charges” against Mr. Jason R. were received as incoming communication. The minutes do not note from whom, though the session itself became the filing party.⁹ November 3, 2020 was set as the date of the second meeting of the first trial.

The Session met again November 1, 2020 after church. Mr. Van M. was again present as a guest.¹⁰ Mr. Jason R. was not present, having been suspended from duties via the action described above. At that meeting the Session drew up their own charges against Mr. Jason R., based on the charges received.¹¹

1 Minutes of New Hope 10/10/2020

2 Minutes of New Hope 10/10/2020

3 As required in BOD III.7

4 Minutes of New Hope 10/10/2020

5 Minutes of New Hope 10/10/2020. Do note that this specification is not specific to his duties as an elder, but is part of his duties as a member generally.

6 BOD IV.A.1.d

7 Minutes of New Hope 10/10/2020

8 Minutes of New Hope 10/19/2020

9 Minutes of New Hope 10/19/2020, see the document “The Second Trial” for those charges.

10 Minutes of New Hope 11/1/2020

11 Minutes of New Hope 11/1/2020

This is discussed in the document titled “The Second Trial.” Those charges were to be formally filed November 2, 2020.

What the Session had done, then, is to overlap charges, so that Mr. Jason R. was accused in two trials at once, each trial in different places in the process.

On November 3 the Session met with Mr. and Mrs. B, again with Rev. Van M. present. During that meeting the Session apologized to Mr. and Mrs B., asking forgiveness, and committed to learn about spiritual abuse, and to meet with Dr. Phil Monroe, a psychologist and colleague of Diane Langberg.¹²

The Session also committed to read three books:

“A Church called Tov” Scott McKnight, “Something’s not Right” by Wade Mullen and “Redeeming Power” by Diane Langberg.¹³

Later that evening the Session met again, to conduct the second meeting of the first trial. There were many visitors, including Rev. Van M. The trial itself was short, lasting about an hour. It consisted of fifteen questions asked by Mr. Joel P., member of New Hope Session and three follow up questions from the Session.¹⁴

After Mr. Jason R. raised a motion to dismiss, citing the requirement of multiple witnesses, and that no witnesses testified, the minutes record the following:

“The moderator called a recess for 10 minutes to confer together. In private deliberations within the trial judicatory, the point was made that BD IV.B.3 does apply here and cannot be ignored.”¹⁵

After return, Rev. Van M. entered the deliberation of the judicatory, arguing that the Session should not dismiss.¹⁶

“The motion to dismiss the charges was sustained by the Session.”¹⁷

The charges were, then, so important in addressing “unusual circumstances” that they were **required** to suspend Mr. Jason R. from privileges of office, and at the very same time, so flimsy and poorly adjudicated that they were dismissed. This is in my opinion an egregious abuse of the Book of Church Order. An attempt at Presbytery to have Presbytery admonish the session for this egregious abuse was ruled out of order.

This ends the narrative of the first trial.

12 Minutes of New Hope 11/3/2020

13 Minutes of New Hope 11/3/2020

14 Minutes of New Hope 11/3/2020.

15 It is both odd and concerning, to call a recess to confer out of the hearing of the observers.

16 Minutes of New Hope 11/3/2020

17 Minutes of New Hope 11/3/2020