

NEWLIFE ⊕ BURBANK

New Life Burbank
1711 N Avon Street
Burbank, CA 91505

AUGUST 3, 2009

TO THE PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PSC-OPC),
Dear Fathers and Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

As many of you know, on September 14, 2008, we ordained Mr. Lee Irons to the office of Ruling Elder. Since the beginning of 2008, the matter of his having been censured by the PSC-OPC has come up and been considered both in our session and in our Pacific Presbytery (PP-PCA) on a number of occasions. At our most recent presbytery meeting, this issue came up again and the Pacific Presbytery enjoined us as a session to contact you to pursue rapprochement if that is needed and to do whatever we can to clarify Mr. Irons's status with your presbytery.

To that end, we want to offer you a brief outline of our thoughts concerning Mr. Irons's suitability for office and what we have considered to be his availability for office within our communion. We offer these thoughts in the spirit of humble conciliation – we regret deeply any ill-will that may have been stirred by our actions. It is our hope that this letter will at the least tend towards a charitable disagreement concerning the sometimes complex details of our shared polity. Our prayer, however, is that a resolute commitment to our affectionate unity in Christ will always prevail and that any communication we have with you would tend towards that far greater end.

The thoughts we want to offer concern Mr. Irons's orthodoxy, and the questions surrounding his membership and his censure.

With respect to his orthodoxy, we would humbly state that we simply do not agree with the doctrinal grounds of the discipline. We offer this with all due respect and the hope and prayer that if we are incorrect 'that too God will make known to us' (Philippians 3:15).

In the matter of his censure of indefinite suspension from office, it seemed clear to us that Mr. Irons, upon his orderly renunciation of the OPC's jurisdiction and your acceptance of his action, no longer held any office in the OPC from which he could be suspended. Mr. Irons and his family have been members of New Life Burbank, PCA since March 14, 2004 and have been under our sole jurisdiction since that time. It is not clear to us how he can be considered to continue under that censure when he holds neither membership nor office in your courts. As we wrestled with these issues as a session over the past year and a half, three particular lines of thought led us to the conclusion that he is in fact available for ordination in our communion.

First, on February 7, 2004 you accepted his decision to renounce your jurisdiction and erased his name from your rolls. Your minutes read: "On amended motion Presbytery erased the name of Charles Lee Irons

from its roll of ministerial members because he has renounced the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by declaring himself independent (BD V:2.b.(1)).”¹

Second, a few days later, the Clerk of Presbytery sent a letter to Mr. Irons, stating among other things: “We regret that further dialog proved untenable. May the Lord guide you as you seek new ways in which to labor for Him.”² This seems to suggest that you have relinquished jurisdiction over Mr. Irons and have dismissed him, perhaps reluctantly and without full resolution of the differences between you, yet in some measure of peace, so that he might seek the Lord’s guidance for other opportunities for ministry.

Third, our belief that he is no longer under your jurisdiction is reinforced by your May 2, 2008 letter to the PP-PCA, in which you stated that “his status is that of an unrepentant offender who no longer holds ordained office or membership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.”³ If Mr. Irons no longer holds membership or office in the OPC, it would seem to be constitutionally impossible for him to be currently indefinitely suspended from office in the OPC.⁴

These three pieces of evidence seemed to assure us that we had done nothing wrong in receiving him as a member of our congregation and that ordaining him to the office of Ruling Elder was perfectly acceptable. We do recognize, however, that you disagree with our assessment of these issues. A couple of statements in particular have caused a measure of confusion in our presbytery about how the PSC-OPC understands its relationship with Mr. Irons. For example, you wrote that “although the Presbytery subsequently acknowledged Mr. Irons’ renunciation of its ecclesiastical authority, it did not thereby lift the censure.”⁵ In the same vein, you added that Mr. Irons’s “use of the phrase ‘termination of censure’ on his website when referring to his erasure from the rolls of our Presbytery is his own characterization and is not the understanding of the Presbytery of Southern California.” And you concluded the letter by appealing to NAPARC, warning the Pacific Presbytery to consider the ramifications for inter-church relations. All of this has been taken by some men in our Presbytery as implying that you regard Mr. Irons as still under the censure of indefinite suspension from office

1 “Page from PSC-OPC Minutes (2-7-04)” (enclosure 1). *The OPC Book of Discipline V:2.b.(1)* reads: “When a minister, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the presbytery that he desires to renounce the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by abandoning its ministry and membership therein, or by declaring himself independent, or by joining another body without a regular demission, the presbytery shall seek to dissuade him from his course, and, if these efforts fail, it shall erase his name from its roll and record the circumstances in its minutes unless the presbytery institutes or continues disciplinary action.”

2 “PSC-OPC Letter to Mr. Irons (2-12-04)” (enclosure 2).

3 “PSC-OPC Letter to PP-PCA (5-2-08)” (enclosure 3).

4 See *OPC Book of Discipline VI.B.3* where indefinite suspension involves being deprived of “the privileges” of office but not of the office itself. Thus, if the Presbytery of Southern California wishes to maintain that Mr. Irons is still under censure, it seems that PSC must also hold that he is currently both a member and an officer in the OPC (albeit unable to exercise the privileges of office).

5 “PSC-OPC Letter to PP-PCA (5-2-08)” (enclosure 3).

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in the OPC although he is a member of the PCA. From our perspective, this is not constitutionally possible. From our point of view, the fact that Mr. Irons has not been a member of the OPC since 2004 is a critical issue, for if he no longer holds membership in the OPC, then our act of receiving Mr. Irons as a non-ordained member of our congregation by reaffirmation of faith on March 14, 2004 was a valid and regular action on our part. If for some reason your act of erasure did not fully resolve the question of Mr. Irons's status, then our action of receiving him as a member of the PCA should finally resolve all doubt and make clear that he has been under the jurisdiction of the session of New Life Burbank from March 14, 2004 until now and cannot therefore be under your jurisdiction. For this reason, we are unclear what objection you could have, at least on the grounds of the NAPARC agreement concerning transfer of members, to his subsequent election and ordination as a ruling elder in our congregation.

One of our great desires as a session and as presbyters is to work towards clarity in these matters so that inter-church relations can move in directions that promote health and unity. To that end, we are more than willing to hear from you on these issues. And if you as a presbytery have any specific concerns or objections to our actions, please do not hesitate to communicate them to us directly. We would be happy to further discuss these matters with you.

In closing, we do want to apologize for not being more proactive in discussing this with you when we first heard that there might be objections to our actions with regard to Mr. Irons. Please forgive us for underestimating the degree of concern this matter has posed for you and for any offense that it may have caused. As a congregation in a fellow NAPARC church, we wish to do everything in our power to pursue the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. If you feel that we have transgressed the bounds of your jurisdiction, or have failed in some ordinary Christian courtesy, please inform us of what we may do to pursue our unity and peace with you.

In Christ's service,

Dave Han
Clerk of Session
New Life Burbank (PCA)

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CHRONOLOGY:

Feb 7, 2004 PSC-OPC erased Mr. Irons from roll
Feb 12, 2004 PSC-OPC letter to Mr. Irons informing him of erasure
March 14, 2004 Mr. Irons received as member of NLB by reaffirmation of faith
March 2007 Mr. Irons nominated, along with 4 other men, for training as RE
Dec 2007 Mr. Irons applied to come under care of PP-PCA
May 2, 2008 PSC-OPC letter to PP-PCA
May 3, 2008 PP-PCA rejected Mr. Irons's application to come under care
June 7, 2008 NLB session approved Mr. Irons to stand for election as RE
July 6, 2008 Congregation of NLB elected Mr. Irons and 3 other men to be REs
Sept 14, 2008 Mr. Irons and 3 other men ordained and installed as REs at NLB
Jan 27, 2009 PP-PCA erected committee to examine possible irregularities
May 3, 2009 PP-PCA adopted Majority Report, which found no irregularities

PSC-OPC = Presbytery of Southern California (OPC)

PP-PCA = Pacific Presbytery (PCA)

NLB = New Life Burbank (PCA)

RE = Ruling Elder

ENCLOSURES:

1. Page from PSC-OPC Minutes (2-7-04)
2. PSC-OPC Letter to Mr. Irons (2-12-04)
3. PSC-OPC Letter to PP-PCA (5-2-08)