

A LETTER FROM DR. SEAN LUCAS

July 25, 2019

My dear Friends:

I am looking forward to seeing you this coming Sunday from my accustomed spot on the platform, but I am also so grateful to my fellow pastors who have done a great job filling the pulpit and ministering to you during my sabbatical time. As they have cared for you and ministered the Word of God to you, God has been present in our midst; it is a constant reminder that God gives us faithful men to declare God's Word to us—it is a mark of God's care.

I'm grateful as well to all of you who have prayed for me and my family during this season away. I was able to get some work done: the first two weeks of June, I was able to write an essay that will be in a book published by Crossway in 2021: the essay title is "Confessional Revision and Ecclesial Reunion: Northern Presbyterians and the Doctrine of Election." It was a long piece of work—over 10,000 words! —but I was pleased with how it turned out. After Father's Day, I left for Atlanta where I taught my course, "Gospel and Race," at RTS Atlanta; I had seven students—a good, thoughtful group.

The following week (the last full week of June), Robert Browning, Ed Norton, and I represented IPC at General Assembly. It was an extremely busy week for me personally: I ended up chairing the Overtures Committee, which met for fifteen and a half hours (!). We had three "buckets" of important items to consider: eleven overtures that dealt with sexuality and gender, eight overtures asking for a study committee on sexual and domestic abuse, and five overtures requesting changes to our Book of Church Order that would allow non-ordained men and women to serve on our denomination's permanent committees and boards. There were also assorted overtures that requested other changes to the BCO, changes to our rules of how the General Assembly operates, and new statements on abortion. Perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise that it took so long to discuss all of this—maybe the surprise was that we got done as quickly as we did!

In the end, the most important topic was sexuality and gender. The Assembly ended up approving an overture that commended the 2017 Nashville Statement as a "biblically faithful" statement and as a useful tool for discipleship (if you want to read the Nashville Statement, you can find it here: <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>). And the Assembly also approved forming a study committee that would craft a document that speaks to these issues, building on previous PCA statements on sexuality, homosexuality, and gender (you can find those previous statements here: <http://pcahistory.org/pca/studies/index.html>).

In my view, that was probably the best resolution. It was clear, both in Overtures Committee and on the floor of the Assembly, that the brothers wanted to speak now; after all, this was the largest number of commissioners to attend a General Assembly in the PCA's history and they came to speak to this issue. And so, they did by affirming the Nashville Statement (and commending too the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America's 2011 statement, which was published as *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation*). But there

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was also a recognition that we needed a clear, strong PCA-written statement, which is why the Assembly voted for the study committee too.

There were three other things that happened at the Assembly that were significant for me. One was that I had the opportunity to participate on a panel on “Christianity Civility in an Uncivil Age: Speaking the Truth in Love.” The other panel members were Irwyn Ince, Bryan Chapell, and David Ritcher. Another was that Memphis was officially approved to host the 50th anniversary General Assembly in 2023—I’m so excited about that! And the third was that I was elected to the Standing Judicial Commission. The SJC is made up of twenty-four teaching and ruling elders from different presbyteries; it serves as the Assembly’s “court”—all discipline cases that get appealed work their way up to the SJC. It is an honor to be elected to SJC and I’m thrilled to serve.

After two weeks of vacation in early July, I’ve spent last week and this week writing a paper that I’ll be giving at a conference hosted at Wheaton College. My paper is called “Black and Presbyterian: Toward a New Account of Race and American Presbyterianism.” This has turned into a kind of programmatic, big-picture essay on how a new history of race and Presbyterianism might be constructed, one that pays attention not simply to “theological racism,” but to various examples of “racial interchange,” in which black Presbyterians themselves are viewed as actors who shape our Presbyterian tradition. I thought that I was going to be giving this paper in an out of the way session, but the program has me scheduled as the main after-dinner talk! Yikes!

After all of this, I’m energized to get back to what God has called me to here at IPC: serving you, ministering God’s Word and leading God’s people, asking him to shape us into new people for a new Memphis. I’m looking forward to preaching on Psalms 133-134 this Sunday and then getting into the Epistles of John in the morning services, starting August 4 and running through the fall. Thank you for your prayers and for your kindness to us during this season—we are ready for the next step in this adventure on which God has us!

In the grip of God’s grace,



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