

July 18, 2023

Michael Allen

RE: Response to Your Request for Erasure

Dear Michael,

We are writing in response to your letter, signed with Carlota on June 30, requesting erasure for yourself, Carlota, (redacted), and (redacted). As you would expect, we were saddened to receive that letter for many reasons, including what it shows about where our relationship is at at this point, and so we want to ask you to consider a few things in prayer.

As we write, you should know that we have also written to Carlota, addressing details particular to her. You are, of course, welcome to read that letter, as well as a previous one we sent her in February, detailing why we could not erase her from the church roll at this time. Below we will therefore address matters particularly related to membership for you, (redacted), and (redacted).

We want you to know, brother, that we understand and sympathize with your current position and your reasons for requesting erasure. The extended conflict we have all endured in recent months is discouraging and filled with frustration. Given how long it has persisted, we very much want an end to it as well. Of course, the simplest thing to do under these circumstances is certainly to just grant your request for erasure. However, we must also ask ourselves whether this course of action is really the most loving one or the one that would most honor Christ. There are many reasons why we think it is not and want to mention a few.

First, in the big picture, the conflict between the Session and Carlota centers around a series of increasingly strong accusations she has made against the Session and others over many months. We have spent much time listening, considering, and responding to these accusations, including by asking forgiveness by what we see has been sinful or inadequate on our part. Is it not also right for her to hear and consider our concerns as well, if we believe she has erred in some of what she has done, rather than making further accusations and leaving before the normal process of attempted resolution is able to play out?

Second, it is Christ himself who has established the church and its form of governance. Ephesians 4:11 says that he gave not just apostles and prophets but also shepherds and teachers for the church. He also taught that accusations of sin should be arbitrated before the elders of the church (Matt 5:22; 18:17). Surely Christ knew that the elders of the church were sinful and fallible when he set the church up as he did, and yet he establishes the

Session's role anyway, promising to work through it. Does it really honor him to set the government of the church aside when there is a significant disagreement, rather than using it?

Third, simply being erased from the rolls of the church without transferring your membership elsewhere would put you outside Christ's church entirely, without full fellowship, oversight, or a proper basis for taking the Lord's Supper. This would be a spiritually weakening and dangerous position to be in, and it also does not fit with your profession of faith. Would it not be much better to work together toward a proper resolution first, at which time you could either continue on at New Covenant or, if you felt it necessary, peacefully transfer together elsewhere? While the former (restoration and continuation at New Covenant) is what we desire, the latter (restoration and transfer) is at least far better than erasure while current conflicts still greatly divide us.

Fourth, leaving the church when the Session is trying hard to resolve a problem would communicate very poorly about the church to others, including (redacted) and (redacted). Is it ever best to make strong accusations and then refuse to discuss the consequences of that? When someone thinks you've sinned, does not Jesus say to leave your gifts at the altar and go seek resolution (Matt 5:22)? And what does it say about our view of Christ's own authority if we refuse to submit to proper, ordinary processes that he has set up for conflict-resolution? Surely it is better to persevere and to hear one another in an effort to find peace and reconciliation.

For all these reasons, Michael, we urge you to rescind your request for erasure. Yes, it is easiest for us to just part ways, but it would honor Christ and help everyone involved far more to work through the current conflict first and then to decide what is best from there afterward. And please be assured that reconciliation is and has been our great desire in all that we have done in the matters before us, including in our own repentance toward Carlota, in our urging her to also repent, in our offering to meet with her and a third-party mediator, and in our interactions with you. In fact, this is also why we eventually have had to write formal charges of sin to present to her, because that is the only avenue still available to us for seeking a biblical resolution. Truly, our actions have shown our desire to work through this together. And we have no desire to present any of you as "offenders" before the congregation. Rather, our desire is that the congregation would not ever know about any of these dealings, even as they do not know now, because we would like to reach a peaceful resolution as privately as possible, just as Scripture describes. Would you not support the efforts to reach such a resolution by withdrawing your request for erasure while proper processes are being followed?

Yours in Christ,

The Session of New Covenant Community Church