

To: John and Julie Austin
Subject: apology
Date: December 7, 2005

John and Julie,

I was very glad to hear the news tonight that you have finally been released from membership by St Peter, and that John's censure has been lifted. The both of you have been gracious and valiant during this very ugly episode. And you are fortunate to have Peter Kershaw as a friend, since his efforts were critical to getting the matter resolved. Both the Austins and the Kershaws have much to celebrate tonight.

I want to ask your forgiveness for not coming to your defense when John's censure was first announced to the congregation. ——— had informed me that it was about to happen, and I privately asked him some very pointed questions about whether the session had the authority to do such a thing. But I merely asked him to consider my objections; I considered him a friend and an honorable man, and I trusted him to do the right thing. At the men's meeting I sat by silently as the session announced a course of action that I thought was not only misguided but unbiblical, and I stayed silent as some very ugly things were said about you and your family.

It wasn't until the end of July that I tried again to persuade ——— that the behavior of the session and the congregation was indefensible. And even then I let the matter go once it became clear that the session was fully committed to its course of action. Quite frankly, I stopped asking about the situation when I began to suspect that pursuing it might bring the same sort of treatment upon me and my family; rather than pursue it, I transferred our membership to a church in Kentucky as quickly as possible.

It was cowardly of me not to come to your defense at the men's meeting. It was cowardly of me to stop pursuing the matter with ——— when he hinted that I might myself be censured. Worst of all, because I doubted from the beginning that the session had the authority to bar you from the Lord's Table and order the congregation to shun you, I almost certainly could have cut the whole matter short by simply contacting the Westminster Presbytery and asking them whether the session's actions were within bounds.

Please forgive me for my shameful behavior.

Rick Saenz
Columbia, Kentucky