

**Staffa v. Session of Hill UPC,  
Remedial Case 202-3,**

**GEORGE STAFFA,  
Complainant/Appellant**

**v.**

**SESSION OF HILL UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
Respondent/Appellee**

The above captioned matter came before the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on February 2, 1990, pursuant to an appeal filed by Mr. George Staff from a decision rendered by the permanent judicial commission of the Synod of the Trinity.

Based upon a pre-trial conference conducted by the permanent judicial commission of the Presbytery of Beaver-Butler, the complaint was summarized as follows:

*That when it is in order for a person leading a Public Prayer to acknowledge in that prayer other persons' requests for such prayer, that person leading does not have exclusive control of the content of that prayer; and that the Session of The Hill United Presbyterian Church, empowered to appoint whomsoever under its discipline it will to lead such a prayer in Public Worship, was delinquent or derelict in its duties in not using that power, or some other at its disposal on behalf of the Requesters for Public Prayer to guarantee acknowledgement of their requests; and that this same Session was delinquent or derelict in its duties in not rendering appropriate care and instruction to anyone whose requests for prayer remained unacknowledged for being abhorrent to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

As relief Mr. Staffa seeks to have the session or the presbytery establish a policy that would govern the items to be included in the pastoral prayers, as well as the specific language to be used in such prayers.

This Commission has jurisdiction, the parties have standing, and the appeal has been brought to this Commission in a timely fashion. Contrary to the opinions of the permanent judicial commissions of the Presbytery of Beaver-Butler and the Synod of the Trinity, the complaint does state a claim upon which relief could have been granted.

Under the Form of Government G-10.0102c the session of a particular church has the responsibility "to provide for the worship of the people of God ...," and while that responsibility does allow the session to provide guidance to the pastor in respect to the conduct of such prayer, it is also within the power of the session to leave the matter of the conduct of public prayer to the discretion and judgment of the pastor.

The session of Hill United Presbyterian Church chose, after careful consideration of the issues raised by Mr. Staffa and his proposed remedies, not to provide guidance to the pastor in respect to the conduct of public prayer. It is the judgment of this Commission that the session's decision in this matter was neither delinquent nor derelict.

**IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED** that the appeal of Mr. Staffa be dismissed.

Signed and dated this 2nd day of February, 1990.

