



Judgment of the USC Appeals Board in the matter of:

***Kingdom Come Western v Clubs Governance Board, 2025:10 Clubs***

**Hearing Date:** May 8, 2025 (in writing)

**Judgment Released:** May 20, 2025

**Panel:** William Fawcett (Chair), Lydia Tzianas, Paul Zhao

**Reasons:** Zhao (Fawcett, Tzianas)

### **PART I: INTRODUCTION**

1. Kingdom Come Western (“KC Western”) applied for ratification during the most recent round of applications. The Clubs Governance Board (the “CGB”) declined to ratify the club, and KC Western has appealed that decision.

2. For the reasons addressed below, that appeal is dismissed.

### **PART II: FACTS**

3. KC Western applied for ratification. Its application package contained the usual materials.

4. Of note is a membership list with 50 names, associated email addresses and student numbers. While almost all names were associated with both an @uwo.ca address, a student number and a personal email address, one entry had only a personal email address and student number associated.

5. Additionally, the application materials framed KC Western as a Christian ministry of Reformed theology. The following examples are illustrative.

6. KC Western's written statement provides an overview of the proposed club's mandate.

### **Written Statement**

Kingdom Come Western is a Christian ministry that encourages and challenges students no matter what point they are at in regard to their relationship with Jesus Christ. We exist not merely to provide fellowship, but to help students build a robust theological foundation that helps students understand why they believe what they believe in. This is done through critical analysis of the Bible, more experienced guest speakers speaking on various topics, discussion circles with peers, prayer meetings, and more. Whether believer or non-believer we would like to provide for and equip students with the necessary tools so that they can live confidently with their identities in being Christians in university and wherever they plan to go after university. We emphasize the Gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ) when encouraging students to live out their lives confidently while upholding the importance of Reformed theology. A working definition for Reformed theology would be the belief that the Bible is the divine and authoritative word of God, and is sufficient for all matters related to faith and practice. Additionally, through cross-campus activities such as retreats, prayer nights, campus wars, and small group dinners, we hope to encourage a unified body of university students across Southwestern Ontario.

[...] It is unique in its emphasis on theological depth and its alignment with Reformed theology and teachings, commonly referred to as Protestantism. Kingdom Come's mission is not like many other Christian organizations with fellowship and social centric activities;

instead, Kingdom Come is focused on helping students in their journey's of faith through researching Reformed theology and providing the resources needed for such tasks. [...]

The Great Commission Foundation's (GCF) connection to other clubs known as Kingdom Come across university campuses in Southwestern Ontario adds another layer of support and network. Kingdom Come currently has five student clubs affiliated with our ministry across southwestern Ontario, which include: University of Waterloo, McMaster University, Toronto Metropolitan University, University of Toronto, and York University. This partnership allows us to coordinate campus-wide events with a variety of students coming from different walks of life through events such as retreats, prayer nights, and theological workshops.

7. CK Western's schedule of events and activities identifies its activities as seminars, workshops, and gatherings. It is helpful to quote here the description of the proposed Bible study workshop and testimony night.

### **Event 2: Inductive Bible Study Workshop**

This workshop will introduce participants to the inductive method of studying the Bible, focusing on observation, interpretation, and application. The session will highlight how this approach fosters a deeper, more personal understanding of the Bible while encouraging methodical exploration and reflection. Participants will engage in small group discussions, facilitated by executive members who have reviewed the material in advance to enrich the conversation. These groups will walk through a chosen passage of the Bible using the inductive method step-by-step. Activities will include highlighting keywords, delineating themes, locating historical context, and discussing how the passage applies to

contemporary life. We will provide materials (such as printouts with step by step inductive method instructions) for students who want to practice and encourage participants to continue using the method during their personal Bible study time. [...] This event will distinguish our club by encouraging students to engage thoughtfully with theology, rather than focusing solely on social or fellowship activities.

#### **Event 4: Testimony Night: Sharing God's Work**

Testimony Night will be a personal gathering where members share heartfelt stories of how God has touched their lives. The event will begin with a time of singing praises through music to set the tone. Members will then share their testimonies of lives transformed, prayers answered, battles overcome, and lessons learned through their walk with God. After each testimony, there will be a pause for group reflection and prayer, allowing attendees to process what they have heard and relate it to their own lives. The evening will conclude with an optional time over dinner, providing attendees with the opportunity to connect, share thoughts, and strengthen their relationships with each other.

8. On March 7<sup>th</sup> 2025, the CGB provided KC Western with its notice of ratification decision denying KC Western's ratification as a USC club. The CGB identified three reasons to support its decision and later identified a fourth.
  - a. The first reason was an alleged violation of section 2.4.6 of the *Club Ratification Procedure* (the “**Procedure**”) on the basis that KC Western duplicated services offered by Western Christian Students, Power to Change - Western, Western Campus Ministry, and numerous USC-ratified Christian fellowship clubs.

- b. The second was an alleged violation of *Procedure* section 2.1.2 on the basis that KC Western failed to submit the Western University provided email addresses of the mandatory executive members.
- c. The third alleged violation of *Procedure* was section 2.5.1. under which the CGB determined the club failed to demonstrate a financially feasible model of operations.
- d. Within the CGB's written submission on appeal, they identified a further alleged violation of *Procedure* section 2.1.4 on the basis that KC Western's membership list has a substantive omission and falls below the required 50 students.

9. It is from this decision that KC Western appeals.

### **PART III: ISSUE**

10. The issue is whether the CGB's decision not to ratify KC Western on any of the four grounds identified was reasonable.

### **PART IV: SUBMISSIONS**

11. At the request of the parties, this appeal was decided on written submissions alone.

12. The Club made the following contentions within their submission.

- a. KC Western fulfilled the requirements outlined in *Procedure* section 2.1.2 as the emails of required club executives can be found within the membership list.

- b. KC Western met the requirements outlined in *Procedure* section 2.1.4 and challenges the CGB's interpretation of section 2.1.4, arguing that it is reasonable to understand the membership list as 50 names and the associated information needed to verify the identity of the people listed within. As such while one @uwo.ca email address was missing, it is reasonable to conclude that the additional information KC Western provided, including student numbers, would be sufficient.
- c. KC Western satisfies *Procedure* section 2.4.6 and substantively differentiates themselves from current USC-ratified Christian fellowship clubs and other USC services through their specific focus on Reformed theology.
- d. KC Western disputes the CGB's assessment of their financial feasibility and argues that Kingdom Come staff tend to provide financial support through fundraising and donations to local chapters. Such support is implied when they mentioned staffing in their external affiliation form.

13. The CGB's submissions may be summarized as follows:

- a. The requirement for the club executive's Western email addresses to be provided is mandated by the *Procedure* section 2.1.2, and these email addresses must be part of the executive list, not simply part of the membership list.
- b. The requirement for Western email addresses to be included for all individuals on the membership list is mandated by the *Procedure* section 2.1.4. Student numbers cannot be accepted in lieu of Western email addresses because the CGB has no access to the information tied to a Western University student number.

- c. Prefaced first with an acknowledgement that no member of the CGB is an expert of the various denominations within the Christian faith, the CGB contends that KC Western duplicates many of the services already provided by USC-ratified clubs. In response to the contention that the club's affiliation with the Reformed denomination of Christianity distinguishes it, the CGB argues that KC Western failed to sufficiently elaborate on the practical differences present in Reformed theology. Additionally, the CGB argues that the manner in which KC Western described its proposed mandate, constitution, and activities made KC Western appear overly similar to other USC-ratified Christian faith-oriented groups.
- d. The Club's budget relies on external sponsorship to prevent a deficit position, and the Club failed to prove that this funding was likely.

## **PART V: ANALYSIS**

### *i. The Framework for Appeals Regarding Decisions not to Ratify*

- 14. The CGB has significant discretion with respect to the ratification of proposed student clubs (*AIM to Educate Western v Clubs Governance Board*, 2022:1, para 20).
- 15. In an appeal of a decision by the CGB not to ratify a club, the role of the Appeals Board is to ensure both the presence of fairness in the decision making process and the adherence to the relevant policies and by-laws. The discretionary power to determine whether a proposed club should or should not become a part of the USC community is ultimately within the purview of the CGB. The Appeals Board does not determine whether any proposed club deserves ratification, as

this lies beyond the scope of an appeal to the Appeals Board (*Western Clay Club v Clubs Governance Board*, 2023:6 Clubs, para 14).

16. Regarding the merits of a decision by the CGB not to ratify a club, the Appeals Board will look to see whether the CGB's decision was reasonable based on the material that was before it at the time that the decision was reached (*AIM to Educate Western v Clubs Governance Board*, 2022:1, para 32). The Board must determine if the CGB's decision was transparent, justified, and intelligible and if it fell within a range of acceptable and defensible outcomes (*AIM to Educate Western v Clubs Governance Board*, 2022:1, para 25).

***ii. The CGB's Decision to Deny Ratification Based on Section 2.1.4 of the Procedure was Reasonable***

17. Section 2.1.4 of the Procedure provides as follows.

2.1. To be considered for ratification, a club must submit an application package consisting of the following:

[...]

2.1.4. Membership List: A membership list containing at least fifty (50) current undergraduate and graduate student names, signature, Western University provided email address, and year of study, for those prepared to join the organization once ratified. Digital signatures are acceptable.

18. The wording of this section is unambiguous. For each of the 50 current undergraduate and graduate students named within the membership list, certain information is required, including their associated Western University provided email addresses. While KC Western provided exactly 50 names, the lack of a @uwo.ca email address for one student – identified as #32 on the membership list – places KC Western below the required number and constitutes a substantive omission.

19. Although KC Western provided student numbers for those on its membership list, including student #32, this is not a substitute for a Western provided email. The CGB has no method to access the associated information that is tied to a Western University student number. As such, given that KC Western did not meet the requirements of section 2.1.4 of the *Procedure*, the CGB's decision to decline to ratify the club was reasonable.

***iii. The CGB's Decision to Deny Ratification Based on Section 2.4.6 of the Procedure was Reasonable***

20. With respect to section 2.4.6 of the *Procedure*, where there is clear and significant overlap between a prospective club and an existing club, a prospective club is likely to be duplicative. Where a prospective club is able to distinguish itself in a meaningful way from its comparators, the fact that there is some duplication will not be grounds to deny ratification (*Speak Western v Clubs Governance Board*, 2024:5 Clubs, para 29).

21. As a corollary to this, when there exists clear and significant overlap between a prospective club and an existing club, a prospective club's materials on an application for ratification will need to clearly demonstrate how the prospective club is distinguished in a meaningful manner. As the degree of apparent overlap increases, it is likely that the degree to which the prospective club needs to clearly distinguish itself likewise increases.

22. On an appeal before the Appeals Board, the issue is not whether the appellant club can distinguish itself in a meaningful way from its comparators. Rather, the issue is whether the CGB's decision that the club was not able to distinguish itself in a meaningful way from its comparators was reasonable based on the information in the club's application materials (*LIFT Church – Western v Clubs Governance Board*, 2025:8 Clubs).

23. We find that KC Western's application materials do not meaningfully distinguish it from the comparators identified by the CGB.

24. This is exemplified by KC Western's proposed activities. This Board concurs with the CGB in their finding that the Club's "Event 2: Inductive Bible Study Workshop" appears highly duplicative of events held by USC-ratified Christian faith-oriented clubs which organize Bible study events. Similarly, KC Western's "Event 4: Testimony Night: Sharing God's Work," appears duplicative of other testimony nights hosted by USC-ratified Christian faith-oriented clubs.

25. Additionally, KC Western's drafted constitution and proposed mandate are similar to other USC-ratified Christian faith-oriented clubs. The main source of differentiation noted in these documents and in the Club's written appeal is their professed affiliation with Reformed theology which is best exemplified in the following excerpt from their written statement.

- a. We emphasize the Gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ) when encouraging students to live out their lives confidently while upholding the importance of Reformed theology. A working definition for Reformed theology would be the belief that the Bible is the divine and authoritative word of God, and is sufficient for all matters related to faith and practice.

26. While this definition might be sufficient for those well acquainted with the tenants of Reformed theology, with "the belief that the Bible is the divine and authoritative word of God, and is sufficient for all matters related to faith and practice" alluding to the doctrines of Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide, it is reasonable for someone unfamiliar with the nuances within Protestantism and Christianity to find it unclear as to how this differentiates Reformed theology from other denominations. The reasonable level of presumed knowledge of the CGB is that of an average community member which can not be expected to have the knowledge to differentiate Reformed theology from its ecclesiastical fellows from the definition provided by KC Western.

27. This case is very similar to that of *LIFT Church – Western v Clubs Governance Board*, 2025:8 Clubs, which was another appeal in which a Christian club seeking ratification failed to distinguish itself from other existing Christian clubs. In both that appeal and this one, the issue was not whether the club seeking ratification was actually distinct from other clubs. The issue was whether the club's ratification application materials established its distinctiveness. As in that case, we find here that KC Western's ratification application materials did not sufficiently establish the club's distinctiveness. Accordingly, the CGB's decision on this ground was reasonable.

***iv. On the CGB's Decision to Deny Ratification Based on Sections 2.1.2 and 2.5.1 of the Clubs Ratification Procedure***

28. Given the reasons above, it is not necessary to decide whether the CGB's decision with respect to sections 2.1.2 and 2.5.1 of the *Procedure* was reasonable, and this Board declines to do so.

**PART VI: OUTCOME**

29. For the reasons outlined above, the CGB's decision not to ratify CK Western is upheld, and the appeal is dismissed. As it appears likely that CK Western will seek ratification again next year, let us be clear that we have not found that CK Western is in fact duplicative of other services offered by Western and the USC. We have only found that it was reasonable for the CGB to conclude this based on the materials that were before it this year. Should CK Western seek ratification in the future, any such application would need to be reviewed on its own merits.

P. Zhao

W. Fawcett

L. Tzianas