

Cover Letter

28 April 2022

To the Ad Interim Commission of the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery:

Attached you will find charges of sin against a member of your court, Rev. James Faris. Here is a short history of the sins and our attempts to confront them out of love for Rev. Faris, the church of Christ, and Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the church.

March 3, 2022:

The sins of Rev. Faris manifested at a meeting of Presbytery during his speech (Appendix A) in support of a paper submitted by the Session of Second Reformed Presbyterian Church, which opposed the revised report of the Christ Church Reconciliation Committee. We were in attendance and shocked at Rev. Faris' words—so much so that we asked to respond. Presbytery granted us the privilege of the floor and each of us described his dismay at Rev. Faris' comments. Though he knew we were offended by his speech, Rev. Faris did not talk with us about what he said. We returned home, thankful that Presbytery had appointed a Shepherding Committee to help our church, yet grieved by Rev. Faris' sin.

March 12 - 15, 2022:

We sought counsel and were advised that we should meet with Rev. Faris accompanied by witnesses, so we decided to ask our Session for help.

March 16, 2022:

Since Rev. Faris would be preaching at Christ Church RP on March 20, we asked our Session if they could meet with us and Rev. Faris on Sunday, prior to worship. We were told that Rev. Faris could meet on Saturday, the 19th. Unfortunately, the Enases were out of town, so our Session said they'd reschedule.

March 21, 2022:

Our Session told us that James had changed his mind and that the Second RP Session wanted to delay the meeting until they could counsel Rev. Faris.

March 29, 2022:

We asked for an update from our Session but there was no new information.

April 5, 2022:

Nathan arranged to meet with an elder at Second RP to inquire about the delay. After that meeting, the elder stated he would discuss with Rev. Faris our desire to confront his sins.

April 13, 2022:

The Second RP elder told us that Rev. Faris did not believe he had sinned, so there was no reason to meet with him. Our session also told us that Rev. Faris was unwilling to meet with our elders present, but they said we could still try approaching him directly.

April 18, 2022:

We asked Rev. Faris directly to meet with us privately, and he agreed on the condition that two additional members of the Second RP Session would attend.

April 21, 2022:

Five weeks after our first request, we met at Second RP Church with Rev. Faris, Donald Cassell, and Justin Olson from the Second RP Session and Dale Koons from our Session. We read our charges (Appendix B) to Rev. Faris, asking him to confess after each sin was identified, but his repeated answer was that he came to listen. He requested that we send the charges in writing, so we sent the written speech that day.

April 23, 2022:

Rev. Faris kindly responded (Appendix C) but refused to admit any sin in his speech at Presbytery; instead, he asked us to “look beyond this matter....”

To date, we have attempted to follow the law and order of the church but have not won our brother. As to the following steps, we have received various counsel, including taking our case to the court of Second RP. We don't believe this is wise for two reasons. First, Rev. Faris sinned publicly while speaking on behalf of the Second RP Session against the Committee that Presbytery sent to help Christ Church. Second, the Second RP Session has provided counsel to Rev. Faris and has acted as a witness in our latest meeting.

As the Book of Discipline I.2.5 states, “If the sin is known generally, and therefore cannot be solved privately, charges may be taken directly to the appropriate church court.” Since the sins were committed at Presbytery, we believe you are the appropriate court, so we are appealing to you directly. Thank you for taking the time to listen to the sheep.

In Christ our Lord,

Nathan Enas & Kevin Swan

Charge of Sin

To the Ad Interim Commission of the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery:

Your informant respectfully states that Rev. James Faris, a member of your Presbytery, is believed guilty of serious sins, contrary to the Word of God and the profession of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in that Rev. Faris, on the evening of Thursday, March 3, 2022, during a constituted court of the Lord Jesus Christ, did

1. **bear false testimony against his neighbors** (i.e., the “two families,” namely, Nathan and Ginny Enas and Kevin and Rachelle Swan), as explained in Westminster Larger Catechism Q.143-Q.145, including “prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, ..., calling evil good, and good evil, ..., slandering, ..., misconstruing intentions, words, and actions, ..., not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name,” (e.g., see underlined text in the speech of Rev. Faris in Appendix A),
2. **publicize what he believed to be sin before seeking to win his brethren**, according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18:15) and the law and order of the church (e.g., Book of Discipline sections I.1.2, I.1.5, I.2.1)
3. **take the Name of the Lord our God in vain** (as explained in Westminster Larger Catechism Q.111-Q.113), including “misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it” (e.g., see **bold italic** text in the speech of Rev. Faris in Appendix A),

which sins were considerably aggravated (according to WLC Q.151) by the following facts:

1. Rev. Faris is “of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others,”
2. Those offended include “the saints ... and the common good of all or many”,
3. The nature and quality of the offense: was “against the express letter of the law,” did “break forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation,” and was “done deliberately, willfully, [and] presumptuously,”

and that Rev. Faris ought to be proceeded against by your court to determine whether or not these charges are accurate.

Date: April 28, 2022

Names: Nathan Enas & Kevin Swan

List of witnesses: all presbyters/delegates on record attending Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery on the evening of March 3, 2022, including but not limited to Rev. Nathan Eshelman, Rev. Adam Kuehner, Rev. Jack Baumgardner, Rev. Jerry Foltz, Rev. Richard Holdeman, Rev. Craig Scott, Rev. Dick Knodel, Rev. Drew Poplin, Rev. James Faris, Dale Koons, Jason O’Neill, Sean Bird, and Jeff Platt.

List of material offered in evidence:

- All manner of public conversation spoken on the floor of Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery on said date, under the oversight of the moderator (Rev. Nathan Eshelman), related to the report of the Christ Church Reconciliation Committee, including the speech of Rev. Faris (Appendix A).
- The Holy Bible
- The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
- Sermon delivered by Rev. James Faris on February 13, 2022, at Second RP Church, entitled “When Joshua Failed” (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k--fnNdFhTc>; sermon begins at about 20:40 and lasts about 35 minutes)
- Email correspondence supporting the timeline provided in the cover letter.

Appendix A: 2022.03.03 Speech Given by Rev. Faris

The following is a quotation of a speech given by Rev. James Faris on the floor of Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery (March 3, 2022) during the period of discussion related to the report of the Christ Church Reconciliation Committee:

“I think one of the things that’s important to note is just the impact on the congregation. I would say that maybe for those of you who are sitting here in this meeting wondering, what exactly does this mean, are we just sort of parsing words? To be frank, what we’re talking about here really is, who is it that leads this congregation? Is it the Session, or is it a minority that is constantly picking at the Session’s decisions and doubting them? And I think this takes us really fundamentally to the larger question that is really important for us as Presbytery. And again this has to do with the nature of the relationship with the elders to the Session. And, as interim moderator, I can tell you that there are those, and this was reported to the Committee, this was one of the communications from one of the elders, who said—and he may be happy to say it here, too, but it was said to the Committee as well as to the other elders—that this is just not an acceptable solution, this is the sort of thing that may be the death knell of this congregation. And I think that that may very well be the case.

“There are many people who are very much on the brink in the congregation. Many, many tears were shed when this communication went out to the congregation because they recognized the significance of it. And not only the significance of it in terms of the content but also in terms of the timing, all the way in which this unfolded. And it’s just remarkably weighty for the congregation. This congregation has been through a great deal, this congregation where the vast majority trusts their leadership. And so it is a question fundamentally of who leads the congregation.

“Now, certainly the elders have not led perfectly. This is part of the question we are wrestling with in our culture: can leaders be forgiven? ***When we go to Leviticus chapter 4, there are provisions for atonement for leaders who have committed unintentional sins, and they haven’t done things perfectly. What is to be the solution? There is to be a sacrifice that’s offered and then it doesn’t say that the person is to resign or to be submitted to some other sort of committee that would oversee them and these kinds of things. It says he shall be forgiven.***

“We have to understand the reality of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it’s really significant that William Symington who is so famous for writing “Messiah The Prince” wrote on the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ. That’s his first volume. ***Because it’s only as we understand the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly with regards to leadership, that we will see men raised up and led into positions of leadership with the knowledge that they may not do everything exactly perfectly as they begin. But where sins are committed, the atoning sacrifice is enough, because Jesus has provided that atoning sacrifice, and because He has raised from the dead, and He is leading from on high, and He raises up leaders.*** He does so, then, organically within the congregation. Jesus came to be a near kin to us. And He came as one of his own was raised up to be a leader. And we see that happening in this congregation. This congregation trusts its leadership. Yes, there are a couple of families that have dispute but the vast majority of the congregation trusts the leadership, and they are very disturbed by the things that they see happening here.

“And so the question is, will Presbytery acknowledge these men as the leaders of the congregation? Will it call out the sins of those who are on the other side of this dispute, these two families that are bringing a complaint as well, and call them to account, and set the leaders free in Jesus Christ to lead this congregation? So it’s really a question of leadership, and I’m just encouraging, brothers: there is no future in a model of “cancel culture”. There’s no future there. ***It’s not going to encourage people to be raised up to leadership. We have to understand the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His glory on the throne, the way in which He leads His people.***

“And so we don’t want to fall prey to the individualism of our day or the standpoint there is where one aggrieved party begins to sort of rule the whole. So this is very much why this is before us. And I do believe, as the interim moderator, as your Presbytery’s appointee to this, that this very well may be the death knell of the congregation. So what we have here before us is very, very weighty, and I just want the whole of the assembly to understand that.”

Appendix B: 2022.04.21 Speech by Mr. Enas to Rev. Faris

James, thank you for meeting with us today. You have been a dear brother in Christ to me for many years, and your family has been dear to my family for many years as well. We have had sweet fellowship together in God's house, and in our own homes. Our wives are dear friends, as are several of our children. We have homeschooled our children together. You have ministered to us in Word and in prayer, beginning with your involvement with the "west side" church plant. And when we were having concerns about the elders at Christ Church RP and their shepherding, you welcomed us to find shelter for a time back at Second RP, where we met new friends and reconnected with old ones. This also gave us more time in worship with our own children, who have enjoyed the fellowship at Second for many years.

So, today, we want to affirm and reaffirm our love for you, your wife and children, your extended family, and the congregation where you were ordained by God to shepherd. In addition to the various ways we have tried to show love for you and the church over these past 25 years, we also have a duty of love to confront serious sins in your life when we observe them, so that, by God's grace and mercy, you may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and made to conform more and more to the image of Christ, who created us for good works that glorify God. That is the topic of today's meeting. But, before I confront specific sins, I would like to ask you a question. Are you willing on this occasion to confess, repent of, and make restitution for sins that you have committed against God and your brethren in Christ?

[James indicated he was prepared to listen.]

Thank you for that affirmation. I have one more introductory remark. In this meeting, we are here to confront you with sins, but we will not be debating them at this time. So, allow me to confront your particular sins, and to give you the opportunity to confess them particularly.

At the meeting of the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery, March 3, 2022, while in a constituted court of the Lord Jesus Christ, you made a speech in favor of your Session's complaint, and against the revised report of Christ Church Reconciliation Committee, particularly their recommendation to send a two-man shepherding committee to assist the Session at Christ Church to execute what that Session called their "fruits of repentance". During your speech, you sinned in three specific ways. First, you bore false testimony against your neighbors (that is, Nathan and Ginny Enas, and Kevin and Rachelle Swan), as explained in Westminster Larger Catechism Q.143-Q.145, including "prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, ..., calling evil good, and good evil, ..., slandering, ..., misconstruing intentions, words, and actions, ..., not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name." Second, you publicized what you called our "sins" before seeking to win us, according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18:15) and the law and order of the church (e.g., Book of Discipline section I.1.2, I.1.5, I.2.1). And, third, you took the Name of the Lord our God in vain (as explained in Westminster Larger Catechism Q.111-Q.113), including "misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it." All of these sins were considerably aggravated (according to WLC Q.151) by several facts. First, you are "of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others". Second, those you offended include "the saints ... and the common good of all or many". And third, the nature and quality of your offenses were "against the express letter of the law," did "break forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation," and were "done deliberately, willfully, [and] presumptuously."

Allow me to explain each of your sins. First, you gave false testimony against your neighbors. Although you did not name us on the floor of Presbytery, there is no doubt about whom you were talking. You referred to "these two families that are bringing a complaint" at Christ Church RP. Only two families brought the complaint that led Presbytery to send a Reconciliation Committee, whose report you were discussing at the time. Hence, we infer that you were speaking of us. You broke the ninth commandment in a number of ways. To demonstrate this, I will quote your own speech on the floor of Presbytery:

- "To be frank, what we're talking about here really is, who is it that leads this congregation? Is it the Session, or is it a minority that is constantly picking at the Session's decisions and doubting them?"
- "This congregation has been through a great deal, this congregation where the vast majority trusts their leadership."
- "This congregation trusts its leadership. Yes, there are a couple of families that have dispute but the vast majority of the congregation trusts the leadership, and they are very disturbed by the things that they see happening here."

- “Will it call out the sins of those who are on the other side of this dispute, these two families that are bringing a complaint as well, and call them to account, and set the leaders free in Jesus Christ to lead this congregation?”
- “We don’t want to fall prey to the individualism of our day or the standpoint there is where one aggrieved party begins to sort of rule the whole.”
- “There is no future in a model of ‘cancel culture.’”

In these statements, as part of your whole speech, in the words of the Westminster Larger Catechism, you prejudiced the truth about us, and the good name of our neighbors; you called evil good and good evil; you slandered us; you misconstrued our intentions, words, and actions; not hindering what you can in others, such things as procure an ill name. You spoke falsehood about our intentions toward our Session (to lead this congregation). You spoke falsely about our demeanor towards our Session (ie, constantly picking at them and doubting them, don’t trust them). You spoke falsehood about our effect on our Session (ie, to enslave them so that they needed to be set free). You gave false testimony about our motivations for confronting our Session (ie, the individualism of our day). Instead of confirming our “fervent love for Christ and the purity of His Church” as the Reconciliation Committee did in their revised report, you condemned our complaint to Presbytery as sin that needed to be called into account. You also spoke falsehood about what our church believed with regard to our Session by repeatedly referring to the “vast majority of the congregation”. You never asked the congregation how they feel about their Session. If you concluded this based on Session’s input only, certainly you should have realized that they and their families constituted much of the congregation, so that such a statement before Presbytery, who were not acutely aware of the actual makeup of our congregation, would mislead them about the variety of opinions within our church. In any event, if there is sin within a Session, even if it is known to only one person, the fact that a vast majority doesn’t recognize the sin does not imply that God is not terribly concerned about the sin. That is, logic based on “vast majority” is erroneous, and intentionally using such faulty logic to achieve your goal is falsehood.

Let me pause and ask you, “Do you confess to committing these sins against us, and against God?”

[James repeated his commitment to listen.]

Second, you sinned when you publicized our so-called “sins” before seeking to win us, according to the command of Christ and the law and order of the church. Your speech at Presbytery was shocking to us. We have been available to you for confrontation for many months, both in your role as interim moderator of our Session, your role as our pastor while we attended Second RP, and just being your friend and brother in Christ. We have been available and near to you. Yet, you never approached us once about trying to usurp leadership from our Session, for constantly picking at them and doubting them, for trying to “cancel” them according to a worldly model, for not trusting them. You have not initiated conversation with us before Presbytery or since. Yet, you saw fit to use your pastoral privilege of the floor and a public court of Christ’s church to announce our “sins” to the church, prior to confronting us with them privately, and then with 2 or 3 witnesses, as Christ commands.

So, let me ask you, “Do you confess to committing this sin against us, and against Christ?”

[James repeated his commitment to listen.]

Finally, you took the Name of the Lord our God in vain, by “misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word” in your interpretation and application of Leviticus chapter 4. In your speech, you taught that, even though our Session sinned, because our Session has been atoned by the blood of Christ, there is no need or even warrant for Presbytery to enact any helpful measures, including the Reconciliation Committee’s recommendation to appoint a Shepherding Committee to meet with our Session over the next year. Simply put, your teaching confuses justification and sanctification. Your logic is, apparently, since the members of Session have been justified by the atoning work of Christ, there is no need for them to undergo the rigors of sanctification, which certainly could include a loving Shepherding Committee sent by a loving Presbytery to lovingly shepherd our shepherds to help them learn how to shepherd well. You knew that members of our Session admitted that no one has ever taught them how to be shepherds, and yet you perverted God’s Word in an attempt to sway Presbytery’s mind against the thought that “the person is to resign or to be submitted to some other sort of committee that would oversee them and these kinds of things”. So, let me ask you, “Do you confess to committing this sin against God and all those who witnessed your speech at Presbytery?”

[James repeated his commitment to listen.]

Appendix C: 2022.04.23 Email from Rev. Faris

JF

James Faris <james@2rp.church>

... Apr 23

to Nathan Enas <enasnate@gmail.com>, CC: Kevin Swan <me@kevinswan.com>, Donald Cassell <dona1d@sagamoreinstitute.org>, Jus Ro <jusolson@gmail.com>, and Dale Koons <dlkoons49@gmail.com>

Dear Nathan and Kevin,

I am thankful for you and for your concern for me. The comments I made on the floor of presbytery in March were made in the context of debate around the original and revised versions of the CCRP Reconciliation Committee along with the Second RP Session's paper and the many months of history behind those documents.

Obviously, we disagreed over those matters as I argued for the essence of the original Reconciliation Committee report. In the course of debate, I was not seeking to hurt you personally or sin against you, but rather to bring help to all parties. The nature of debates in church courts will always include our infirmities as finite beings in the scope of our knowledge as speakers and listeners, our words, how we hear what is said, and more. I am deeply sorry that you were hurt and offended by my comments and perceive them as sinful. Please know that I did not seek to hurt nor sin against you men. These were not my intent nor my desire. I pray you will be able to look beyond this matter and that we can press on to know the Lord together.

I pray this response will help bring the matter to a close. If you want to discuss this further, I'm sure our Session will be desirous to help being the next court of appeal in this situation. The Lord bless you both.

In Christ,
James