

**GREAT LAKES – GULF PRESBYTERY
CHRIST CHURCH RP COMMISSION
REPORT TO PRESBYTERY
Fall Presbytery Meeting**

The Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian (CCRP) Commission was appointed by the Great Lakes – Gulf Presbytery *Ad Interim Commission* on June 10, 2022, in response to Communication 22-14 from the Christ Church RP Session requesting “outside assistance”:

“It was moved, seconded, and passed, to appoint a three-member commission of presbytery:

- (i) to investigate issues raised by Christ Church RPC (“CCRP”) by communication GLG 22-14,
- (ii) to seek reconciliation, and
- (iii) to take any other appropriate and necessary actions to resolve issues raised by communication GLG 22-14.”

The Commission consists of the following three members:

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator (RE, Orlando RPC – Orlando, Florida)
Bryan Dage, Clerk (RE, Hetherton RPC – Johannesburg, Michigan)
Steve Sturm (RE, RPC of Southside Indianapolis, Indiana)

On June 21, 2022, at the Presbytery meeting at Synod, the Commission’s remit was expanded:

Adopted: “That presbytery refer GLG 22-15 (Complaint v. CCRP Session) to the Christ Church Commission (the “Commission”) for adjudication.”

The Commission met twelve times in constituted court:

July 20, 2022
July 28, 2022
August 3, 2022
August 10, 2022
August 13, 2022
August 15, 2022
August 17, 2022
August 31, 2022
September 7, 2022
September 12, 2022
September 14, 2022
September 21, 2022

A copy of the approved minutes of each meeting is included in *Appendix A*.

On August 5 and 6, the Commission visited the Christ Church congregation to conduct a series of in-person meetings. On the Lord’s Day of August 7, moderator Jonathan Schaefer gave a message from the Commission to the congregation following the morning worship service. The text of the message is included in *Appendix B*.

Appendix C includes the August 17, 2022 report the Commission distributed to the congregation through the CCRP Session describing the Commission’s remit, investigation, and conclusions. In summary, the conclusions are:

- That CCRP Session’s counsel to Mr. Enas “was a reasonable and wise communication for the good of Mr. Enas, the congregation of CCRP, [and] for the peace, purity and progress of the church.”
- That “the Commission does not sustain complaint 22-15.”

Following the distribution of the Commission’s report, the congregation was invited to submit questions or comments to the Commission via email. The Commission collected thirty-three written questions and comments submitted by CCRP members from August 8 through August 30. On September 12, 2022, the Commission distributed written responses to the four individuals who had submitted the questions/comments and cc’d the CCRP Session on the responses.

Since distributing the August 17 report to the congregation, the Commission has responded to questions and requests for counsel from the CCRP Session regarding the path forward for the congregation.

Recommendation:

1. That Presbytery receive this report.

Respectively submitted,

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
Bryan Dage, Clerk
Steve Sturm

Appendix A – CCRP Commission Meeting Minutes

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
July 20, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, July 20, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:04 PM.
3. By common consent, Bryan Dage was appointed clerk of the commission.
4. Discussion of main issues to explore, questions to answer and objectives to pursue. Each commission member will develop further thoughts and suggestions on these items to be discussed at the next meeting.
5. Discussion of schedule, including a visit to Christ Church. Tentative schedule involves worshiping at CCRP on a Lord's day and holding meetings on the following Monday and Tuesday. Possible dates discussed were August 6 and 13, to be determined.
6. Steve closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 8:41 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
July 28, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Thursday, July 28, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:03 PM.
3. The minutes of the July 20, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. Discussion of our thinking on the questions from the previous meeting. Jonathan will prepare a planned schedule and clarifying questions for the session and for the concerned families for the weekend visit of August 5-7. Bryan will attend these meetings via zoom.
4. Steve closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 8:57 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
August 3, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, August 3, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm (Clerk *pro tem*) (Bryan Dage excused absence due to illness).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:03 PM.
3. Steve agreed to serve as clerk *pro tem* in Bryan's absence.
4. The minutes of the July 28, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
5. The draft of clarifying questions prepared by Jonathan in advance of the meeting were reviewed and discussed for each of the four scheduled meetings to take place August 5 and 6. The meetings schedule was confirmed.
6. An outline of topics to be addressed in the presentation to the congregation on Sunday afternoon was discussed. Jonathan's travel schedule for the weekend was reviewed.
7. Jonathan closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 8:57 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Steve Sturm, Clerk *pro tem*
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
August 10, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, August 10, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Bryan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:04 PM.
3. The minutes of the August 3, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. Discussion of the report to the congregation.
5. Jonathan closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 8:53 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
August 13, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Saturday, August 13, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Steve opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 2:31 PM.
3. Discussion of the report and schedule for its delivery.
4. Jonathan closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 3:17 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
August 15, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Monday, August 15, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 5:02 PM.
3. The minutes of the August 10 and 13, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. Editing and discussion of the report and schedule for its delivery.
5. Jonathan had to leave early for a session meeting.
6. Bryan closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 6:22 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
August 17, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, August 17, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Steve opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 12:34PM.
3. The minutes of the August 15, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. Final editing and discussion of the report. Report was adopted and scheduled for delivery.
5. Jonathan closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 1:32 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
August 31, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, August 31, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 8:17PM.
3. The minutes of the August 17, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. The Commission worked on responses to some of the questions and comments that have been received following the report of August 17.
5. Bryan had to leave the meeting early.
6. Steve closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 9:45 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
September 7, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, September 7, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:07PM.
3. The minutes of the August 31, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. The Commission continued work on responses to some of the questions and comments that have been received following the report of August 17.
5. Steve closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 9:53 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
September 12, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Monday, September 12, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, and Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Bryan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 8:43PM.
3. The minutes of the September 7, 2022 meeting were approved as written.
4. The Commission finalized responses to all of the questions and comments that have been received following the report of August 17. Jonathan will send out answers via email to the four parties who asked questions with their respective answers.
5. Steve closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 9:50 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
September 14, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, September 14, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm (Clerk Pro Tem). (Bryan Dage excused absence due to family illness)
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:03PM.
3. Steve agreed to serve as clerk *pro tem* in Bryan's absence.
4. The minutes of the September 12 meeting were approved as written.
5. The Commission reviewed questions received from the CCRP Session in preparation for a meeting with them following adjournment.
6. Steve closed in prayer and adjourned the court at 7:50 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Steve Sturm, Clerk *pro tem*
CCRP Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
Minutes of the Christ Church RP Commission
September 21, 2022

The Christ Church RP (CCRP) Commission of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery met remotely on Wednesday, September 21, 2022.

1. Commission members present were: Jonathan Schaefer (Moderator), Steve Sturm, Bryan Dage (Clerk).
2. Jonathan opened the meeting and constituted the Court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, at 7:03 PM.
3. Minutes from September 14, 2022 were approved.
4. Discussion of final report and recommendations to Presbytery, and its distribution.
5. Minutes from September 21, 2022 were approved.
6. Steve prayed and adjourned the Court in prayer in the name of and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the Head and King of the Church, at 8:07 PM.

Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator
CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage, Clerk
CCRP Commission

Appendix B – Moderator Jonathan Schaefer Message to the CCRP Congregation, delivered orally on August 7, 2022

Message to the Congregation

On behalf of the Commission, I want to begin with a word of thanks for the kindness and care you have extended to us. Many hours of time have been dedicated to communications, some have provided many documents, some have taken time to write personal letters, or spent time on the phone with us, we have been fed, lodged, and transported and I am sure that many if not all of you have prayed for and about our efforts. For these and other loving gestures we are truly thankful.

We want to assure you that you are also being faithfully prayed for by brothers and sisters in several other congregations, including the ones we represent.

This weekend we met with Session on Friday evening from 6:15-8:15pm. Saturday morning from 10-12pm we met with Nathan Shaver and 2-5pm and 6-9:30pm Saturday afternoon and evening with met with members of the congregation.

We began meeting officially after COVIFAMIKOI Family Conference. If you haven't been to a family camp, I highly recommend it as a time of worship, praise, prayer, fellowship, recreation and for you young men and women perhaps a time to meet a like-minded Christian spouse, as I did at RP International Conference at Carleton College.

We have read over a large amount of the written material generated over the past year, discussed and prayed much over this current situation, and we remain hopeful that that the Lord will continue His work among you. The meetings this weekend have helped further clarify our understanding and our goal is to first leave you today with some words of encouragement and then to summarize our counsel and have that back to you electronically in two weeks.

Message of Encouragement

First, I think it is important to remember that the members of this congregation are co-laborers in Christ. We are wrestling with issues of dissention among believers in the same congregation. Having witnessed the confession of sin and the corresponding forgiveness, what remains appears to be disagreements on opinion and perspective, rather than continuing sin.

Disputes of this kind are not new to the body of Christ. In fact, the apostle Paul addresses one such issue in Philippians 4.

Philippians 4:2-7

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in [the cause of] the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle [spirit] be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4 deals with a situation wherein there was discord among two faithful believers, both with good intentions and serving Christ well. Before I get too much further, I need to talk about what I am not saying. I am not saying that there was no sin involved. I am not saying that there were not biblical principles that come into play. However, Paul does not address any sins committed.

Paul singles these members out by name, noting their faithful ministry but encouraging them to live in harmony in the Lord. He then asks his true companion to help these fellow believers resolve their conflict. I think it is significant that Paul implores the two women in conflict by name. I find it interesting that he leaves

the arbiter, the "true companion", urged to "help these women" unnamed. Some commentators think it could have been Timothy, others suggest it could have been Epaphras who carried the letter. Whether we name the arbiter or not, it is helpful to observe that this disagreement was important enough in the life of the church to admonish the parties publicly and solicit help to settle the matter, which echoes our commission's remit.

Paul's counsel was to:

- Rejoice in the Lord;
- Let your gentle spirit be known to all men;
- Be anxious for nothing, but pray; and
- Expect the Lord to bring the peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ.

We see many similarities between this situation and the situation that we are here to address. First, we are not questioning the intentions of those who find themselves at odds. We believe that all are seeking to honor Christ and move forward, yet there are differences in the way those at odds see the path forward.

We know that locally efforts have been made by both parties to resolve conflict, yet currently the remains at an impasse. Now, we have been appointed to come in and address the situation. Our message this to you now is the same:

- 1.) Rejoice in the Lord: we encourage you all to consider deeply the grace of the Lord evidenced in Philippians 2 – Jesus condescended to take on the lowly form of His own creation and being found in this low form, He the very Son of the Most High God humbled Himself even to that dreadful death on the Cross for the sins of people such as you and me, redeeming to Himself His own enemies to everlasting glory with Him in the Heaven of God for eternity.
- 2.) Let your gentle spirit be known to all men: we encourage you to all consider your own spirit before the Lord. His people are characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the fruit of which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. This fruit does not come as payment in exchange for the agreement of others, it comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives through His sanctifying work in our hearts. These outworkings demonstrate His transforming work and our grateful, self-emptying response.
- 3.) Be anxious for nothing but pray: there is anxiety here present. This anxiety is deeply affecting not only the worship of God and ministry of this body of believers, but many others. We need to continue in fervent prayer. That is our work – to pray. This is so very humbling. We are people that want to take action and see our results, yet this is the Lord's body, not ours. He is not surprised by what has happened. What has happened is for His glory and perhaps unbelievably at times, our benefit.
- 4.) Expect the Lord to bring the peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ: we must live out our lives expectantly waiting for His peace to transform our hearts and minds in and toward Christ. Psalm 37 encourages believers to not worry, but to trust in the Lord and do good. We are to dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness, delighting ourselves in the Lord. When we trust Him and commit ourselves to Him, He will give us our heart's desires – Trust Him, He will do it!

Our hope is that this message of encouragement will resonate with you and in the coming days as you wait expectantly on our counsel. We encourage you to pray fervently over these words and rest in Christ, your salvation and peace.

Appendix C – Commission Report to CCRP Regarding GLGP Communications 22-14 and 22-15, August 17, 2022

CCRP COMMISSION

Report to CCRP Regarding GLGP Communications 22-14 and 22-15

Galatians 5:14-15. "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."

Commission Remit

This Commission was established by the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery (GLGP) Ad-Interim Commission (AIC) on June 10, 2022, in response to GLGP Communication 22-14 from the Christ Church RP Session requesting "outside assistance":

"It was moved, seconded, and passed, to appoint a three-member commission of presbytery:

- (i) to investigate issues raised by Christ Church RPC ("CCRP") by communication GLG 22-14,
- (ii) to seek reconciliation, and
- (iii) to take any other appropriate and necessary actions to resolve issues raised by communication GLG 22-14."

On June 21, 2022, at the GLGP Meeting at Synod, our remit was expanded:

Adopted: "That presbytery refer GLG 22-15 (Complaint v. CCRP Session) to the Christ Church Commission (the "Commission") for adjudication."

The Commission's Work

The Commission had an initial email exchange and phone conference the week before the COVFAMIKOI family conference. Shortly after the conference, the Commission began meeting regularly by phone. Jonathan Schaefer, having served on the CCRP Shepherding Committee, was able to quickly provide several background documents to the other two members of the Commission. This written material was surveyed by Commission members independently in advance of our meetings where they were reviewed and discussed. A list of formal GLGP Communications, Reports, and related actions from GLGP meeting minutes that were considered are listed in the Appendix titled "Background".

While the review of written material was very helpful for our investigation of issues described in GLGP 22-14, the Commission agreed it would be wise to conduct an in-person visit with various parties at CCRP over a weekend to ask clarifying questions and to worship together with the congregation on the Lord's Day. The Commission scheduled and conducted a series of meetings on August 5 and 6:

- Friday, August 5 from 6:15 pm to 8:15 pm with the CCRP Session, including interim moderator Joel Hart.
- Saturday, August 6 from 10:00 am to noon with Interim Pastoral Assistant, Nathan Shaver.
- Saturday, August 6 from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm with individual CCRP members who responded to our invitation for an in-person conversation with the Commission.
- Saturday, August 6 from 6:00 pm to 9:30 pm with concerned members who signed the GLGP 22-15 complaint and responded to our invitation to meet.

The Commission also received a number of written communications from members before and during the visit. Due to family illness, Bryan Dage was unable to attend the meetings in person, but he did attend each scheduled meeting either by phone or video conference.

Our visit affirmed many of the assessments expressed by the CCRP Session's GLGP 22-14 request for the formation of the Commission. Despite significant effort invested by GLGP's Reconciliation Committee and the subsequent Shepherding Committee, the congregation remains deeply divided, perhaps more now than ever, over their "level of trust and confidence in the Session." More than one described CCRP as "two congregations." In the Saturday series of meetings, the Commission observed one "congregation" in strong support of Session's leadership, and the other "congregation" expressing significant questions concerning Session's overall fitness as elders. Disputes related to this division consume the Session's time and energy in a way that diminishes attention from other important matters like evaluating options for longer-term pulpit supply and investigating other meeting venues knowing the current landlord may sell the property with 60 days' notice. It is indeed a "time of great difficulty for the congregation" and the Commission agrees that "the future existence of the congregation" is at stake.

On the Lord's Day, the Commission members present were encouraged to find that deep divisions observed the preceding day were not evident in morning worship or the informal times before and after the service. There were many encouragements as attending Commission members were warmly welcomed, communed together, and noted the congregation engaging with each other and first-time visitors. Commission members present greatly appreciated Nathan Shaver's skillful preaching and evident shepherd's heart for every member and commend him for his good work. Jonathan Schaefer ended the Commission's visit with a message to the congregation following morning worship expressing gratitude for a warm welcome, describing the Commission's work thus far, explaining our next steps, and bringing encouragement from Philippians 4:2-7.

At the heart of our remit, prompted by GLGP 22-14 requesting our formation, and GLGP 22-15, complaining against a recent action of the CCRP Session is the May 23 letter of counsel from the Session to Mr. Enas. The remainder of this report addresses the appropriateness of that letter and a reply to the complaint about it.

Discussion of the May 23 Letter

The Commission notes the following concerning the May 23 letter:

1. The Commission finds that the May 23 letter is neither a 'dismissal', nor a judicial action. It is a shepherding action. Thus, it does not fall under the category of any of the formal judicial processes of the Book of Discipline. As RP Testimony 30.3 says, "Some

offenses may be resolved by informal counsel by one or more elders.” The Commission finds that the May 23 letter was a gracious attempt to resolve this conflict by informal counsel apart from formal judicial process.

2. Elders take all kinds of actions to shepherd their congregants that are not judicial in nature and are thus not specifically outlined in the Book of Discipline. The fact that their action is not spelled out in the RP Constitution does not mean that it is invalid.

3. The crux of the question regarding the May 23 letter is found in these words: “We [CCRP Session] need to shepherd you to a different congregation.”

The Commission finds that Session’s action is strong counsel to Mr. Enas, but it is counsel nonetheless. The Session will not be transferring Mr. Enas to another congregation against his will. They are asking him to accept this counsel or to work with them so that he can continue to remain a member in good standing of the church, and for the sake of peace in the church.

An analogy would be the case of a member who became convinced of (for example) credo-baptism. In that case, the session would seek to work with the individual, but if over time it became evident that that individual was not going to change their viewpoint, and if there was a disturbance in the congregation as a result of that member’s conviction and actions, the most reasonable course of action would be for the session to seek to shepherd that individual to a different branch of the true church (in this example, to some sort of a Reformed Baptist church), where they would be in tune with the leadership of the church and be able to thrive.

This is uncommon counsel. A session would not want to take this sort of action lightly, but only when it was necessary. The May 23 letter spells out the necessity in this case and lists five examples that demonstrate why they are taking this action.

Specifically, the CCRP Session has indicated that Mr Enas’s actions do not align with his membership vows. They desire Mr. Enas to be able to demonstrate a trust of the Session and a willingness to “submit to the direction and oversight of the CCRP elders”. The Commission finds that these are reasonable, biblical requirements also expressed in the subordinate standards of our RPCNA Constitution:

Hebrews 13:17. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Larger catechism 127 “The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government.”

DCG 7.13 “After the roll has been determined, all the communicant members of the new congregation shall stand and give assent to the Covenant of Communicant Membership and to this additional pledge:

‘Do you solemnly covenant with God and with one another that you will live together in brotherly unity as an organized congregation on the basis of the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; that you will be obedient to the courts that are over you in the Lord; and that you will, by a godly life, seek to promote the purity, peace, and prosperity of the church as a whole?’”

Membership vow 4. “Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the Scriptures and described in substance in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America? Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the authority and discipline of the church?”

The Commission draws distinction between these requirements and Mr. Enas’s actions in the following ways:

1. The Commission observes a push for the purity of the church at the expense of peace and prosperity as a whole. Duties of members include, “...seek to promote the purity, peace, and prosperity of the church as a whole.” (DCG 7.13). This seems to also lift purity above WLC 127’s instruction to be “Bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love”. This prioritization is threatening to devour the entire congregation. We are commended in RPT 25:16 to “pray for and seek the purity and unity of the Church.” While a desire for the purity of the Church is a noble and necessary thing, the Commission is very concerned that in this case it has been to the detriment of church unity.
2. The Commission observes a disrespect for the Session that has grown out of mistrust and suspicion. This is contrary to the vow to, “Respect the authority and discipline of the church.” Mr. Enas maintains his submission to the Session, but by his actions, identified by the Session in the May 23 letter, and in numerous other documented actions, he demonstrates an unwillingness to do so.

Another detail not in the May 23 letter is that there appears to be an increasing level of division and discord within the congregation since the November 2021 communication to Presbytery. It is this Commission’s assessment that since that date, and indeed, since the ending of the Reconciliation Committee’s work in April 2022, that the trouble and sorrow in the congregation has only compounded, and with no end in sight.

The Session has a responsibility “to care for the interest of the congregation and of each member” (DCG 4.7). The Session has God-given authority to shepherd and care for the flock under their care. The Commission affirms that the Session would be remiss if they did not attempt to address this matter in the congregation.

If CCRP Session is concerned about Mr. Enas’ behavior, why are they allowing him to transfer to a different congregation rather than bringing charges and going through a formal judicial process?

Mr. Enas has stated that he lost confidence in the Session regarding the LeFebvre controversy and that despite ongoing efforts of both Session and Presbytery, he has not regained his confidence in the Session. The Session hopes that, in transferring him to a different congregation, he will be able to respect, trust, and submit to his new session and that no further action would need to be taken. This is an application of the wisdom of 1 Thessalonians 5:14, to assess a situation and apply the needed action, with a dose of patience. This demonstrates the Session's graciousness to Mr. Enas in not desiring to impugn his motives but to accept his statements at face value. The Commission sees as prudent the Session having a robust discussion with the session of Mr. Enas's new congregation in order to help them in their task of shepherding.

Regarding the queries and stipulations that the Session gave to Mr. Enas should he desire to stay at CCRP, the Commission finds that these are both appropriate and necessary for the peace of the congregation moving forward.

The Commission notes that both in the complaint of GLG 22-15 and in discussion with the signers of 22-15, the complainants have stated that it would be wrong to trust the Session, because the Bible says "not to trust in man". While it is true that we ought not to put our trust in princes, it is a shocking assertion that we ought not to trust any men, especially those that have been ordained to the office in the manner prescribed by our denominational standards. There is a world of difference between trusting elders, and putting trust in princes.

Without a basic level of trust, there can be nothing but division and quarreling. The absence of trust means suspicion of the Session: suspicion of their motives, of their actions, of their abilities. This open suspicion and lack of trust (which is clearly observable by the Commission) has bred a lack of respect for the elders, which has no place in God's church.

Regarding accepting the Reconciliation Committee's work, Mr. Enas has declared that he is not yet reconciled to the Session, even after a full confession of specific sins by the Session has been made on April 10, and Mr. Enas has offered his forgiveness in writing. BOD 3.3 tells us, "If the sinner confesses and repents, there must be forgiveness and reconciliation, and the matter shall be closed. You have won your brother. Such closure may include counsel or censure appropriate to the circumstances."

The Reconciliation Committee wrote in a March 26 letter, "As the elders are already following the steps of reconciliation, there is no reason why the entire congregation should not be united and reconciled." Mr. Enas, however, has expressed that he does not agree with the Reconciliation Committee on this and other points. The Commission finds Mr. Enas' lack of reconciliation at this point very concerning.

The Bible warns in passages such as 2 Timothy 3:2-3 of those who are "unappeasable" (ESV) or "unforgiving" (NKJV). The intent behind the Greek word here, ἄσπρονδοι, is one who is unwilling or unable to be reconciled – defined as 'admitting of no truce; implacable' or 'Of one who is unwilling to negotiate a solution to a problem involving a second party, irreconcilable.' Mr. Enas appears to have put himself in this position of being "irreconcilable", which is a dangerous place, and the Commission counsels Mr. Enas to give careful thought and prayer to his situation.

The Commission believes that the May 23 letter was a reasonable and wise communication for the good of Mr. Enas, the congregation of CCRP, for the peace, purity and progress of the church.

Response to 22-15

The Commission, responding to communication 22-15 (the complaint signed by Mr. Enas and others against the Session's May 23 Letter), notes the following:

The Commission rejects the 4 points from page 1 of the complaint:

1. Contrary to the claim in 22-15, the Session is not seeking to dismiss Mr. Enas, but to work with him to shepherd him to a congregation where he can hold his membership vows in good conscience.
2. Contrary to the claim in 22-15, the Session is not asking Mr. Enas to give "unqualified" trust to the Session. Though during discussion at the May 23 meeting, one elder used the adjective "unqualified", he retracted the word when he saw his meaning was not being understood. As discussed above, the signers of the complaint have stated that they do not believe it is right to "trust men" whether qualified or not. The Commission finds that the Session's questions to Mr. Enas to be affirmed ("*Do you trust the CCRP Session to shepherd you and your family, and do you have confidence in its ability to shepherd Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian?...*") are reasonable expressions of trust that are necessary and essential to healthy congregational life.
3. Contrary to the claim in 22-15, the Commission rejects the assertion that Mr. Enas was given an "unbiblical ultimatum". The Session has the authority to ask Mr. Enas to fulfill his membership vows, but first they offered a solution that they hoped might solve the problem.
4. Contrary to 22-15, the Commission rejects the claim that the Session's requirements for Mr. Enas, should he decide to stay at CCRP, are "unbiblical and ungodly". Specifically:
 - To be reconciled over a matter that has been settled and forgiveness offered – as discussed above, is a Biblical and confessional requirement.
 - To fulfill membership vow #5 by giving to the Lord's work of the CCRP congregation - "Contribute financially to the work of CCRP" is described by the complainants in 22-15 as a "dangerous requirement". This is not a dangerous requirement; it is a biblical requirement. Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:18. To argue, as was explained to the Commission that membership vow #5 wherein members promise to "give to the Lord's work as he shall prosper [them]" does not mean specifically the local church where they hold their membership is to twist the meaning and intent of those words.
 - To cease recording interactions without consent is a basic courtesy that is within the Session's purview to require.
 - To inform the Session in the future of the source and content of your counsel "from other presbyters if you believe the Session is not responding appropriately" is narrowly focused on who from ("presbyters") and when ("if you believe the Session is not responding appropriately") counsel is received. This requirement is prudent to avoid future occurrences of past contentions and allow Session to exercise Proverbs 18:17 with fellow presbyters.

Given the above reasoning, the Commission does not sustain complaint 22-15.

Final Words

Presbytery has provided a Reconciliation Committee to assist CCRP in the work of reconciliation. Following their work, a Shepherding Committee was appointed to provide ongoing encouragement in the recommendations of the Reconciliation Committee. This Commission has been appointed by Presbytery to take action on communications 22-14 and 22-15, which has been addressed above. The Commission writes this to affirm Presbytery's concern for CCRP and its desire that the congregation now lay aside its grievances, having received Presbytery's decision.

Since a portion of the Commission's remit includes "...any other appropriate and necessary actions to resolve issues raised by communication GLG 22-14", we understand that the Session, the interim pastoral assistant and the congregation may continue to require additional counsel and care as you move past these issues and once again take up the full ministry to members, adherents and your community.

It should be an encouragement to the congregation that your Session is trustworthy and faithfully laboring for your continued spiritual development. They have been growing in knowledge and righteousness and have been working hard to lead this congregation well. As you consider the Commission's findings and counsel, the Commission again charges the congregation to:

- Rejoice in the Lord;
- Let your gentle spirit be known to all men;
- Be anxious for nothing, but pray; and
- Expect the Lord to bring the peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ, and
- While you wait expectantly on the Lord, love the brethren fervently.

Praying with you for the peace of Zion,

The CCRP Commission

Bryan Dage,
Steve Sturm,
Jonathan Schaefer, Moderator

Appendix: Background

Listed below are a sequence of Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery (GLGP) formal communications and actions related to Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian (CCRP) since November 2020.

November 20, 2020 **GLGP Communication 20-12**, Nathan Enas letter to GLGP alleging "...your work of discipline in the case of Dr. LeFebvre remains incomplete..."

2021 GLGP Spring Meeting – Adopted: "That presbytery defer any consideration of GLG 20-12 until all relevant complaints have been adjudicated by the synod."

2021 GLGP Fall Meeting – Adopted: "That presbytery return GLG 20-12 to its author, Mr. Enas, along with a copy of GLG 21-10 to relay the relevant synod decision(s) on the matter raised in his letter."

October 20, 2021 **GLGP Communication 21-11**, Enas and Swan petition to GLGP several allegations are stated including "...the CCRP Session failed to properly shepherd Michael...the CCRP Session neglected to properly shepherd the flock of God at CCRP..." includes a petition that GLGP form a committee "to investigate our concerns, provide counsel to both Session and concerned members of Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian pursuant to reconciliation, and report back with any pertinent recommendations..."

2021 GLG Fall Meeting – Adopted: "That the moderator appoint a three-person committee to hear from the authors of 21-11 and the session to pursue reconciliation, and report back to the Spring meeting."

March 4, 2022 Christ Church Reconciliation Committee (CCRP) reports and communication surrounding the 2022 GLGP Spring Meeting:

February 11, 2022 CCRP Reconciliation Committee Report - original distribution

February 14, 2022 Enas and Swan email re "Follow up to CCRC Report to Presbytery -- response requested"
"...we would like to briefly summarize one hurtful point and ask you to take corrective action..."

February 28, 2022 CCRP Reconciliation Committee Report - revised distribution

2022 GLGP Spring Meeting – Adopted: "That a two-man Shepherding Committee be appointed to meet at least every other month (either in- person, or by phone, Zoom, etc.) until either the next spring meeting of Presbytery or until a Pastor is installed at CCRP (whichever comes first), in order to aid and encourage both parties in following through with reconciliation; That the Presbytery pray for the strength, purity, unity, and peace of Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian — particularly that both the Session and the Enas and Swan families would be humble and find reconciliation through the powerful work of the Gospel in their lives; That this report be received by Presbytery; That this Committee be dismissed."

March 26, 2022 Dissolved Reconciliation Committee writes a letter to the CCRP congregation answering questions about the changes made to the report two days

before the GLGP Spring Meeting. At the end of the report, they state, “As the elders are already following the steps of reconciliation, there is no reason why the entire congregation should not be united and reconciled.” (GLGP 22-15, Appendix D)

April 28, 2022 **GLGP Communication 22-13**, Enas and Swan charges of sin
“Attached you will find charges of sin against a member of your court, Rev. James Faris.”

2022 GLGP Meeting at Synod – Adopted: “That presbytery rule that the evidence presented in GLG 22-13 is insufficient to warrant a trial for a censurable offense”

July 30, 2022 Enas et al submit a complaint re GLGP’s action to Synod
“We, the undersigned, wish to register a complaint regarding the ... action of the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery (GLGP), on June 21, 2022...”

May 23, 2022 CCRP Session delivers a letter of counsel to Nathan Enas in person at a session meeting.

May 28, 2022 **GLGP Communication 22-14**, CCRP Session requests the Ad Interim Commission (AIC) appoint a presbytery commission for outside assistance
“We would like to call on our brethren for assistance in this time of great difficulty for the congregation. This is an urgent matter. We have reached an inflection point in the life of the congregation, and the next steps may determine the future existence of the congregation, and/or whether the Session can continue to serve.”

June 10, 2022 GLGP AIC appoints CCRP Commission
“It was moved, seconded, and passed, to appoint a three-member commission of presbytery
(i) to investigate issues raised by Christ Church RPC (“CCRPC”) by communication GLG 22-14,
(ii) to seek reconciliation, and
(iii) to take any other appropriate and necessary actions to resolve issues raised by communication GLG 22-14.”

June 12, 2022 **GLGP Communication 22-15**, Enas et al complaint against CCRP Session
“We, the undersigned, wish to file a complaint regarding an action of the Session of Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian (CCRP), which occurred on May 23, 2022 at a Session meeting.”

2022 GLGP Meeting at Synod – Adopted: “That presbytery refer GLG 22-15 (Complaint v. CCRP Session) to the Christ Church Commission for adjudication.”

August 5-6, 2022 Commission visits CCRP