

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

We praise God for the significant time, energy, prayer, and love that the CCRP Reconciliation Committee (the “Committee”) has given to the CCRP Session and the Enas and Swan families. We hope and pray that this labor was not in vain and that the Lord will indeed bless this work.

Notwithstanding its love and good intentions, however, the Committee has erred in two significant ways that cannot be ignored. With the endorsement of the Session of the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis, the undersigned submit this petition to Presbytery to protest the work of the Committee. Specifically, the 1) Committee has improperly exceeded its remit¹ by acting as a judicial commission, and 2) failed to report to the Presbytery all the material facts of its work, which opens itself up to the appearance of irregular influence in its findings and recommendations.

1. The CCRP Reconciliation Committee Has Improperly Acted As A Judicial Commission:

Although the CCRP Reconciliation Committee purports to act as a reconciliation committee, it has effectively assumed a judicial role in 1) adjudicating the sin of the CCRP Session, and 2) calling for a remedy directed at preventing future sins by the CCRP Session.

The undersigned respectfully disagree with the Committee that the distinction between a reconciliation committee and a judicial commission is simply that the latter “look[s] back” and the former “look[s] forward.” (CCRP Reconciliation Committee (Revised) Report (“Rev. Report”) at 1). Rather, the question is whether there will be an “investigat[ion] [into] a situation” and “adjudicat[ion] [of] a case which has come before the presbytery.” (Directory, Ch. 6, Sec. 15). If so, then the Committee is acting as a judicial commission.

Here, the Committee has done more than look forward. It has effectively investigated a complaint filed by the Enas and Swan families against their elders, effectively adjudicated that the elders sinned, recognized the repentance of the elders for sin, effectively committed its decisions to writing for the Presbytery’s review, and now effectively seeks to impose an up-to one-year probationary period supervised by a two-man Shepherding Committee. These actions and recommendations are outside the scope of its remit.

The Committee did not enter “findings” or “rulings” in so many words, but it did so in substance. The Committee stated that it “prepared short-term steps for each of the parties which *should* be followed in pursuit of reconciliation.” (Rev. Report at 2) (emphasis added). The Committee’s Revised Report later stated that “the [CCRP] Session . . . confess[ed] their *sins and infirmities* to the congregation, as well as [laid] out clear and practical steps to grow in their work as undershepherds.” (Rev. Report at 3) (emphasis added). With these and other similar statements, the Committee has informed the Presbytery that the short-term steps it prepared for the CCRP

¹ The action of the GLG Presbytery with respect to the Committee was “That the moderator appoint a three-person committee to hear from the authors of the GLG 21-11 and the session to pursue reconciliation, and report back to the Spring committee.” Minutes of the 2021 Fall Meeting of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery, BUSCOM Item #4 – Petition from Two CCRP Members (GLG 21-11).

Session reflect the standard of care that the Committee expects from RPCNA ruling elders² who find themselves in a situation similar to what the CCRP church has experience.

The Committee now seeks, in its Revised Report, to effectively enforce this standard of care in the case of the CCRP Session by adding a new recommendation to its Revised Report 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 ensure and aid the Session in growing in their active shepherding of CCRP.” (Rev. Report at 6). This up to one-year remedial action is the natural outflow of its effective finding that the CCRP Session has sinned by breaching the standard of care the Committee has described, thereby necessitating ongoing accountability. The Committee is not recommending ongoing shepherding of all parties to facilitate ongoing reconciliation and renewed fellowship. Rather, the Committee is recommending an act that has the appearance of being more punitive toward only one party: effectively, the supervised probation of the CCRP Session.

These are the actions of a judicial commission that has decided a case, not a committee that has been tasked only with “pursu[ing] reconciliation, and report[ing] back to the Spring committee.” Accordingly, the Committee has overstepped its remit.

There are many approaches to this unique situation that the Committee could have chosen. The undersigned lack the understanding of and familiarity with the necessary facts and circumstances to know what other approaches might have been better suited to pursue reconciliation. But what is clear is that the Committee assumed a judicial posture to this case. And that was not warranted.

2. The CCRP Reconciliation Committee Has Not Reported To The Presbytery All The Material Facts Of Its Work. The Committee published its original CCRP Reconciliation Committee Report (“Original Report”)³ on February 11, 2022. It has now published its Revised Report “after further consideration” on February 28, 2022. The basis for “further consideration” is not fully explained in the Revised Report. Yet, the Revised Report makes at least one significant change, namely, the Committee now recommends imposing an up-to one-year supervised probation on the CCRP Session.

This revision begs the following questions:

1. With whom did any member of the CCRP Reconciliation Committee communicate about the substance of the February 11, 2022 Report after it was published to the Presbytery?
2. What was the substance of those communications?
3. How did the substance of those communications impact the Committee’s decision to put forth its new recommendation, which did not appear in the Original Report,

² The standard of care reflected in the Revised Report is a serious and important matter that our Presbytery would do well to consider. However, this substantive question is better discussed, debated, and decided on the floor of Presbytery or in further communications – not decided by a reconciliation committee in response to a unique situation.

³ The Original Report is attached to this Petition.

namely: *“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 ensure and aid the Session in growing in their active shepherding of CCRP.”* (Rev. Report at 6).

4. When was the CCRP Session informed of this new recommendation, and were they given the opportunity for comment and input?

These questions should be addressed on the floor of Presbytery or in further communication from the Committee. These questions are material to the work of the Committee. The Committee provided a detailed timeline of its meetings with the CCRP Session and the Enas and Swan families, starting in December 2021 and then again in January 2022. However, the subtext of the Committee’s Revised Report is that additional meetings and/or conversations were held after publication of the February 11, 2022 Original Report that materially impacted the substance of the Original Report and recommendations. Accordingly, these recent communications and the manner in which they impacted the Committee’s work should, in fairness to all and for the sake of good and decent order, be fully disclosed. Failure to do so would create the appearance of undue influence upon the Committee and would be prejudicial to the reputation of the CCRP Session.

The undersigned, therefore, recommend that the Presbytery

1. disapprove the CCRP Reconciliation Committee (Revised) Report as the work of an improperly constituted judicial commission,
2. require further communication from members of the Committee regarding the circumstances occurring between the February 11, 2022 publication of the original CCRP Reconciliation Committee Report and the February 28, 2022 publication of the Revised Report,
3. continue in prayer for the ongoing reconciliation of all parties involved, and
4. dismiss the Committee.

We pray that the Lord would indeed bring reconciliation and healing to the CCRP Session, the Enas and Swan families, and the CCRP congregation. We trust that Christ will indeed rule and reign in the hearts of His people even now, and forevermore. Amen.

Respectfully Submitted in Christ,

Richard Blankenship	Dave Mauser
Donald Cassell	Justin Olson
Adam Doerr	Jeff Platt
James Faris	David Pulliam
Dean Filson	Russ Pulliam
Terry Magnuson	

**CHRIST CHURCH REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE
REPORT TO GREAT LAKES-GULF PRESBYTERY – MARCH 2022**

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. – John 17:20-21

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. – Colossians 3:12-14

I. THE MANDATE OF THIS COMMITTEE

On November 6, 2021, the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery took the following action:

That the moderator appoint a three-person committee to hear from the authors of the GLG 21-11 and the session to pursue reconciliation, and report back to the Spring meeting.¹

Upon appointment, the CCRP Reconciliation Committee understood reconciliation as outlined in the *Book of Discipline* of the RPCNA:

If a member sins against another person, or if a member sins and this sin becomes known to another member of the church, the person sinned against or aware of the sin should go privately to the sinner and confront him. If the sinner repents, there must be forgiveness and reconciliation, and the matter shall be closed. You have won your brother.²

Accordingly, this Committee understood our mandate to be that of a reconciliation committee, rather than an investigative or judicial committee. Whereas an investigative or judicial committee's primary aim is to look back, a reconciliation committee's primary aim is to look forward. Our tone is, therefore, seeking to be pastoral and practical; our objective, forgiveness and restoration.

II. THE PROCESS OF THIS COMMITTEE'S WORK

Upon our appointment, this Committee communicated multiple times via Zoom in order to ensure we were unified in our understanding of our mandate, to formulate a plan, and to seek the Lord's blessing in prayer. We then communicated with the CCRP Session, as well as the Enas and Swan families, to arrange a time to meet together.

Our process was to meet with each party separately and then altogether on the final night. Before meeting, this Committee communicated to both parties that it was our prayer and aim that each party will have a

¹ *Minutes of the 2021 Fall Meeting of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery*, BUSCOM Item #4 – Petition from Two CCRP Members (GLG 21-11).

² *RPCNA Constitution, Book of Discipline*, Chapter 2 “Dealing with Sin in the Church — Personal Responsibility,” Paragraphs 1-2, p. E-3. Emphasis added.

concrete understanding of what needs to be done for reconciliation to occur, what they personally need to do to accomplish this, and a route of how this will come to fruition. Being formed as a reconciliation committee, we communicated to both parties that our presupposition is that there is alienation between the Session and members of the congregation. In each meeting, therefore, our task was: (a) to pastorally seek to find the main point(s) of alienation whether it be miscommunication, oversight, mistake, or personal sins; (b) to seek necessary confession of said miscommunication, oversight, mistake, or personal sins; (c) to seek and receive forgiveness for miscommunication, oversight, mistake, or personal sins; and, (d) to have a plan of action where each party seeks to heal the relationship and show the necessary fruits of reconciliation.³

The Committee first met with the Session and families in Indianapolis on the evenings of December 7, 2021, through December 9, 2021 – meeting first with the Session, then the families, and then with all parties together. After the first two evenings of our meetings, and in preparation for the third evening, the Committee prepared short-term steps for each of the parties which should be followed in pursuit of reconciliation.⁴

The steps for the Session were as follows:

- A. Confess particular actions and sins regarding the shepherding of Michael Lefebvre and the congregation; the first six which arose in discussion with the Session, with the seventh from the Committee:
 - 1) The need to have brought publications forward to the congregation sooner;
 - 2) The need to have more oversight over Michael's publications, confronting contra-confessional matters;
 - 3) The need to have read the materials more quickly and fully;
 - 4) The need to have interacted with the seminary more diligently;
 - 5) The need to have shared more openly the opposition to Michael's writings;
 - 6) The need to have not heeded problematic counsel which encouraged the keeping private Michael's problematic views regarding the Creation account; and,
 - 7) The need to have engaged the congregation with greater transparency and initiative.
- B. Communicate to the congregation (in some kind of congregational-meeting format) a timeline of the facts of what has transpired from the time of Michael's disclosing to Session his problematic writings through working with the Reconciliation Committee.
- C. Conduct regular family visitations.

The steps for the Enas and Swan families were as follows:

- A. Be ready and desirous to receive the confession of the Session, extending forgiveness and encouragement to the Session in their duties.
- B. Resolve to maintain a charitable framework toward the Session regarding their words and actions.

³ This paragraph was adapted from an email, dated Monday, December 6, 2021, communicating the CCRP Reconciliation Committee's understanding of our remit and approach, sent from this Committee to all the parties involved.

⁴ The following steps were provided during the meeting between both parties, December 9, 2021, and then were sent to all parties via email on December 10, 2021.

- C. Be patient toward the Session, allowing your leaders to lead; likewise, be patient through this process of reconciliation.

Additionally, the following long-term steps were advised for CCRP:

- A. Pursue the option of finding an intentional interim (or at the least regular, stated pulpit supply).
- B. Both parties are to continue to follow-up with this Committee [between the December and January meetings in order to help mediate communication].
- C. It is recommended that CCRP's congregational report to Presbytery should include information on how trust is being built and reconciliation is occurring within the life of the congregation.
- D. Session is to continue to take initiative on cultivating a spirit of transparency within the Session and congregation.

After prayer and discussion, the Session called for an informal congregational meeting after morning worship on Lord's Day, January 23, 2022, during which they verbally confessed these matters to the congregation, provided a clear timeline of the facts pertinent to the Session's oversight of Michael, and communicated clear steps for repentance and ways in which they desire to grow in their shepherding of the congregation. This statement was then provided in writing to the congregation. This Committee gives thanks to God for evidence of His grace and kindness in strengthening the Session to confess their sins and infirmities to the congregation, as well as to lay out clear and practical steps to grow in their work as undershepherds. Also, the Session is pursuing regular, stated pulpit supply.

The Committee met again in Indianapolis with the Session and families the evenings of January 23, 2022, through January 25, 2022 – meeting first with the Session, then the families, and then with all parties together. During these meetings, there were further conversations which were, though at times filled with disagreement, helpful in establishing open communication between the Session and families.

III. FURTHER COUNSEL REGARDING RECONCILIATION AND STRENGTHENING CCRP

It would be naïve on the part of this Committee to believe that the work of reconciling these parties is concluded. But based upon the evaluation of this Committee's interactions with the Session and families, this Committee believes that what is now needed is not the work of a Presbytery Committee, but commitment and follow-through for both parties to have humility and grow in the following ways. For the Session, there are two long-term changes which will help guard against the lack of diligence in shepherding both the members and pastor of the congregation in the future. Likewise for the families, there are two long-term changes which will help guard against a quarrelsome spirit and encourage charity. It is the belief of this Committee that as the Session and families grow in the following ways, by God's grace, reconciliation will occur and the congregation will thrive. In other words, as the leaders lead well, and as those who follow receive shepherding well, the flock of Christ will be well-tended. For each of the following principles, this Committee has provided practical applications for the Session and families.

For the Session:

First, there is a need for the Session to grow in an active approach to shepherding the flock. The most important way in which this can develop, to which the Session has publicly stated their agreement, is by elders conducting regular, intentional visitations in the members' homes. Up to this point, the Session has maintained an informal and less structured manner of pastoral care; but it is the counsel of this Committee that having systematic pastoral visits ensures each family is receiving care, relationships are built between the elders and households of the congregation, and each member is given an opportunity to speak openly but privately with the elders. By regularly engaging each household in their home, asking about their growth under the means of grace and of their walk with the Lord, the elders and members alike will grow in their communication and care. This Committee gives the Lord thanks that the Session has demonstrated great humility before God and love for the Bride of Christ by being eager and desirous to begin this work, as they have reached out further to the members of this Committee to learn more about systematic visitations. To aid the elders in equipping them for such work, in addition to receiving encouragement and counsel from their fellow presbyters, this committee would suggest studying, as a Session, through either David Dickson's *The Elder and His Work*, or Timothy Witmer's *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*. Along this same subject, this Committee would encourage the CCRP Session to grow in their ability and readiness to have direct confrontation. This Committee witnessed among the Session what is perceived to be an unwillingness to have confrontational disagreement. But often the work of the elder requires a readiness to speak directly with clarity and courage regardless, and the lack thereof leads to a lack of communication and perceived lack of transparency. This is an area where, this Committee believes, our brothers need particular prayer and encouragement. But, by God's grace, as these men grow in their active shepherding, the whole congregation of Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian may flourish beyond what we could even desire – such is the work of God's kindness towards His Church. This Committee notes that at our January 25, 2022, meeting, the Session already showed improvement in their willingness to have difficult conversations and confront issues – for which we thank the Lord.

Second, there is a need for the Session to grow in theological discernment and zeal for doctrinal purity. This Committee believes that these men are called by the King of the Church to be the undershepherds of the particular congregation of CCRP. And being called, they are fully equipped for their task through the means God has provided. Regarding Michael Lefebvre's writings, the Session felt unprepared and unqualified to contend against their Pastor's contra-confessional and unbiblical views. This Committee would seek to exhort and encourage these men in their duty as elders to guard the purity of both the doctrine and life of the Church; and, in areas which they are theologically weak, to diligently study as issues arise. This Committee would encourage our brothers from Christ Church RP to reach out to fellow presbyters for help in finding resources on doctrinal matters they may be unfamiliar with, and for fellow presbyters to be quick in aiding our brethren. Furthermore, this Committee would recommend to the Session that they lead the congregation through a study of the Confession using G. I. Williamson's *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*, or through the Larger Catechism using J. G. Vos's *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*. Doing so would be an aid not only to the Session, but to the congregation, that they too would have a greater understanding of and zeal for reformed theology as confessed in the Westminster Standards. This Committee also gives thanks to the Lord for the Session's publicly-stated commitment to review the writings of their future minister, Lord willing, before their publication. Such resolve shows their desire to grow in this area, as well as demonstrates learning from past mistakes.

For the Families:

First, the Enas and Swan families need to grow in their understanding of Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins;” as well as 1 Peter 4:8, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” This Committee and the families, in our communication with one another, clearly are not in agreement with one another on the understanding of these verses. For example, it is the position of this Committee that not all sin must be confessed in order for there to be both forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, we as Christians do not confess every one of our sins against God, often out of mere ignorance of them. Yet, we have the wonderful comfort that “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10). Upon being offended, it is indeed the immediate duty of the offender to seek forgiveness, but it is also the immediate duty of the offended to forgive, even if no forgiveness has been sought. The holiness of God’s mercy and forgiveness of His elect is the standard which we are to follow in our own relationships with others, and particularly with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the position of this Committee that this foundational misunderstanding has contributed to the increase of offense and to the difficulty in achieving reconciliation. This Committee would, therefore, counsel the families to meditate well upon these two passages. To that end, this Committee has included below the following two expositions upon these verses:

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves, v. 8. Here is a noble rule in Christianity. Christians ought to love one another, which implies an affection to their persons, a desire of their welfare, and a hearty endeavour to promote it. This mutual affection must not be cold, but fervent, that is, sincere, strong, and lasting. This sort of earnest affection is recommended above all things, which shows the importance of it, Col. 3:14. It is greater than faith or hope, 1 Cor. 13:13. One excellent effect of it is that it will *cover a multitude of sins*. Learn, (1.) There ought to be in all Christians a more fervent charity towards one another than towards other men: *Have charity among yourselves*. He does not say for pagans, for idolaters, or for apostates, but among yourselves. Let brotherly love continue, Heb. 13:1. There is a special relation between all sincere Christians, and a particular amiableness and good in them, which require special affection. (2.) It is not enough for Christians not to bear malice, nor to have common respect for one another, they must intensely and fervently love each other. (3.) It is the property of true charity to cover a multitude of sins. It inclines people to forgive and forget offences against themselves, to cover and conceal the sins of others, rather than aggravate them and spread them abroad. It teaches us to love those who are but weak, and who have been guilty of many evil things before their conversion; and it prepares for mercy at the hand of God, who hath promised to forgive those that forgive others, Mt. 6:14.⁵

A simple but forcible contrast! *Hatred*, however varnished by smooth pretence, is the selfish principle of man (Titus 3:3). Like a subterraneous fire, it continually stirs up mischief, creates or keeps alive rankling coldness, disgusts, dislikes, “envyings and evil surmisings;” carps at the infirmities of others; aggravates the least slip (Isa. 29:21); or resents the most trifling, or even imaginary, provocation. These *strifes* are kindled (Pr. 15:18, 16:27-28; 28:25, 29:22) to the great dishonor of God, and the marring of the beauty and consistency of the gospel. Is not here abundant matter for prayer, watchfulness, and resistance? Let us study 1 Corinthians 13 in all its detail. Let

⁵ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume VI: Acts to Revelation* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers), 1 Peter 4:8, pp. 1029-1030.

it be the looking-glass for our hearts, and the standard of our profession. *Love covers*, overlooks, speedily forgives and forgets (Pr. 17:9; Gen 45:5-8). Full of candor and inventiveness, it puts the best construction on doubtful matters, searches out any palliation, does not rigidly eye, or wantonly expose (Gen. 9:23) a brother's faults; nor will it uncover them at all, except so far as may be needful for his ultimate good. To refrain from gross slander, while abundant scope is left for needless and unkind detraction, is not covering sin. Nor is the "seven-times forgiveness" the true standard of love (Mt. 18:21), which, like its Divine Author, *covers all sins*. And who does not need the full extent of this *covering*? What is our brother's *all* against us, compared with our *all* against God? And how can we hesitate to blot out a few pence, who look for the *covering* of the debt of ten thousand talents. Oh! Let us "put on the Lord Jesus" in his spirit of forbearing, disinterested, sacrificing love – "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13).⁶

Second, the Enas and Swan families need to grow in their application of "love covereth all sins." Whereas the Session have indeed confessed sins and mistakes, and the families have acknowledged the Session's confession, the families have continued to bring up the same issues that they have against the Session. This is compounded by what this Committee perceives as an argumentative, or quarrelsome, spirit among the families (for example, the families insist upon the use of the particular word "neglect" even though the concept of neglect is clearly conveyed). Another compounding factor is the families' use of generalization in describing complaints against their Session (for example, there is a difference between never being visited by the Session and having been only visited twice). This Committee recommends the families study through *Graciousness: Tempering Truth with Love* by John Crofts in order to aid them in their application of the Lord's command, "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." It is the counsel of this Committee that the families, as our brothers and sisters in Christ, accept the confession of the Session, rejoice in seeing the Lord cause the Session to bear fruits of repentance and growth as their overseers, and resolve to the judgment of charity.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the members of this Committee, as well as the members of the families, have stated to the Session of Christ Church Reformed Presbyterian, we believe that these men are those whom God has called to shepherd the flock of that particular congregation. Likewise, this Committee recognizes that the families who have brought forward this petition have a true love for Christ and the purity of the Church. This Committee submits that what is most needed for reconciliation is humility and patience; commitment to follow through with these steps; as well as the need to build up the relationships between the Session, the Enas and Swan families, and the whole congregation. It is the desire of this Committee that God would be honored through the strengthening of these men in their work as undershepherds, the growth of these families in mercy and grace, and that the whole congregation would thrive in pursuing the chief end for which they were made – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

⁶ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), Proverbs 10:12, pp. 97-98.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) That this report be received by Presbytery.
- 2) 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.
- 3) That this Committee be dismissed.

For the Peace and Good of Zion,
Craig Scott, Chairman
David Kleyn
Drew Poplin