

This communication is for the Ad Interim Commission of Great Lakes / Gulf Presbytery. Please forward it to the Clerk of the AIC, in keeping with *Directory for Church Government*, Chapter 4.9.

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

We represent three member households of First Reformed Presbyterian Church (Grand Rapids, MI). During the month of December 2021, we (together with one other household) have all found it necessary to begin worshipping elsewhere. We are currently all still members of First RPC; but we do intend eventually to become members of other local congregations. The stated reasons for our departures have centered around our minister, Mr. Craig Scott, and his public ministry among us.

Between the years of 2018 and 2021, Sean McDonald and Will Luke privately brought various concerns to Mr. Scott (3-4 times each), especially pertaining to harsh and uncharitable statements in public and pulpit ministry. Following these private meetings, what we have observed consistently from Mr. Scott is temporary repentance without long-term change.

Mr. Scott and Jake Schwartz (our ruling elder) have also expressed being offended by people who seek respectfully to speak with them about concerns. In December 2020, in the context of someone having addressed concerns to them, they both referred to our congregation as "unsubmissive and disrespectful."

In September 2021, during a men's study for potential elders, Mr. Schwartz mentioned that ministers have more authority than ruling elders. When Sean McDonald sought clarification (on the understanding that ministers and ruling elders are equal in authority), Mr. Schwartz and Mr. Scott both defended the position that ministers have more authority than ruling elders; and used, among other arguments, the argument that ministers are styled "Rev." while ruling elders are not. Mr. Scott furthermore spoke of the inappropriateness of anyone, including ruling elders, to challenge a minister's sermons, since the minister has gone to seminary and studied the passage in question.

In response to our leaving, the Session has called us to meet with them in constituted court in order to hear all our concerns in more detail. Because of the many times we have already brought concerns, having had our trust betrayed in various ways, and believing these issues are far more vast than we have the right or capacity to address individually, we no longer believe it is wise, helpful, or prudent to bring matters to Session.

We humbly request that the Presbytery send a visitation committee to First RPC (Grand Rapids, MI), in order to evaluate the situation as it currently exists in our congregation.

Respectfully,  
Sean McDonald  
Laura McDonald  
Daniel Cross  
Will Luke  
Savannah Luke

Fathers and brothers,

First RP Session received this communication containing accusations against the elders. The communication was then approved to be sent to AIC without endorsement. We do not desire to be defensive; however, God's law requires the defending of one's name when it is unjustly accused (WLC 144). The following is a brief response to the communication, and the pastoral context which is absent.

First, Session desires to receive the communication with humility. The households are not random members, but a very close group of friends. The households departed from First RP in December 2021 without any prior dialogue or communication with any single member of Session, nor with Session as a court. The households departed suddenly, stating they want to leave "as peaceably as possible." Christians in Grand Rapids have since contacted the elders to state that one household has been slandering the elders before other Christians in the city. In response, Session has sought to be humble and hear the concerns. Session has contacted the households by phone, email, and letter, but they have not responded. Session has also invited them to a congregational open forum on January 26 with Stephen Rhoda as moderator. Session also conducted a congregational meeting on December 26 to hear any concerns from the congregation. No concerns have been given to Session.

Secondly, the households are attending the Free Reformed Church seeking to transfer membership. First RP has not opposed this transfer, although two elders of the FRC contacted us to state their concerns over the households' 'divisive' behavior and their personal experience of one household's reputation in Grand Rapids. The elders informed us of their plan to meet with the households and encourage them to return to First RP and reconcile with the Session. The households then sent the communication to the AIC after this meeting.

Third, Session firmly denies the accusation that the elders believe the church to be 'unsubmissive and disrespectful.' The Elders, without a doubt, believe in the *parity* of the eldership, with both TE and RE *equally* receiving the keys of the kingdom with the power of jurisdiction, concluding that no elder has either more or less, but *equal* authority; and the ruling elder has the right and duty to raise any concerns with the preaching of the Word.

Fourth, Sean McDonald did speak to Pastor Scott on three occasions in 2018-19 concerning comments from the pulpit. Two of these were clarifications of content, and one was over uncharitable speech. Pastor Scott clarified the misunderstandings and did sincerely apologize and repent for the uncharitable speech. However, the other meetings were not due to Pastor Scott's speech but concerns over Sean McDonald's long time pattern of behavior noted by brethren within and without the congregation.

Fathers and brothers, this is some of the pastoral context and background of the communication. First RP Session has sought to be humble and seek reconciliation, but the households have refused our communications.

In conclusion, we find it disingenuous and confusing for these individuals and families to announce their intention to transfer their membership away from our congregation while also calling for Presbytery involvement in the very same letter. In the end, we believe that the ministry of Session as a court of the house of Christ is being circumvented and disrespected by this letter and its appeal for Presbytery visitation.

Yours in Christ,  
First RP Session  
Craig Scott  
Jake Schwartz  
Stephen Rhoda