

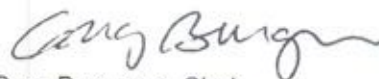
Minutes of the Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC)

Meeting date and location: April 23, 2022 by conference call.

In attendance: Frank Smith (moderator), Greg Burgreen, Drew Poplin

1. Meeting called to order and constituted in prayer by Dr. Smith at 8:37 pm EST.
2. Dr. Smith asked Dr. Burgreen if he would serve as clerk. He agreed to do so.
3. Dr. Smith asked if he could address any questions. The following questions were raised:
 - a. Did the Atlanta TGB formally consider exercising Book of Discipline (BOD) Section 1, Chapter 4, Paragraph 2.a (Certificate of Dismissal) for the Accused?
 - b. Were there any expectations regarding pleas by the Accused?
 - c. Did the Accused fully understand the seriousness of the charges? Did the rest of the Atlanta congregation understand the seriousness of the charges?
 - d. What is the frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper at Atlanta RP?
 - e. Did the Accused understand their rights and opportunity for defense?
 - f. What are the contingencies in case a second summons is required?
 - g. Should Atlanta RP offer child care for the Accused during the upcoming judicial process?
 - h. Do the Accused's children show evidence of interest in the church and spiritual matters?
 - i. When did the Accused join the church as a communing member?
 - k. Did any Selma RP elder agree to serve on the Commission?
4. Dr. Smith emailed the Commission a draft of the summons document. The Commission unanimously agreed that it was a reasonable draft.
5. A discussion about timing of the upcoming judicial process was discussed along with travel plans. A time of May 14, 2022, 11:00 am EST was agreed upon.
6. The next AJC meeting was set for April 28, 2022, 8:30 pm EST.
7. Meeting was adjourned in prayer by Dr. Burgreen at 9:54 pm EST.

Submitted by:



Greg Burgreen, Clerk



Frank Smith, Moderator

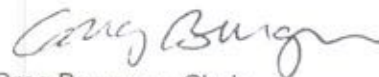
Minutes of the Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC)

Meeting date and location: April 28, 2022 by conference call.

In attendance: Frank Smith (moderator), Greg Burgreen (clerk), Drew Poplin

1. Meeting called to order and constituted in prayer by Dr. Smith at 8:33 pm EST.
2. Discussed meeting minutes of April 23, 2022 and made minor corrections to the document.
3. Commission unanimously approved the minutes of April 23, 2022.
4. Discussed updated travel plans for the May 14, 2022 judicial process.
5. Discussed and made modifications to the Summons document dated April 28, 2022. We changed "church" to "Reformed Presbyterian Church" in the sentence that begins "In these proceedings." Under 2., we changed "meeting minutes" to "draft minutes." Under 7., we changed "and thereby taking this action, the Commission is" to "and, by taking this action, the Commission is hereby". Finally, a paragraph of instruction and reminders was added to elucidate to the Accused how church membership vows and baptismal vows were broken and thus related to Charges 1, 2, and 3.
6. After reviewing the revised Summons document, Commission unanimously agreed to the revised text.
7. A roll call vote for adoption of the Summons document was held, and the document was approved with a 3-0 vote. Thus, the Accused will be summoned, and thereby taking this action, the Commission is setting the date and time for the judicial proceedings. The proceedings will be held in public.
8. The Commission authorized the AJC Moderator and Clerk to sign this and any future Summons.
9. It was preliminarily judged and agreed that no further meetings of the AJC would be needed before the May 14, 2022 judicial proceeding, barring any unexpected circumstances.
10. Meeting was adjourned in prayer by Pastor Poplin at 10:04 pm EST.

Submitted by:



Greg Burgreen, Clerk



Frank Smith, Moderator

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

Atlanta Judicial Commission

April 28, 2022

Miss Tawana Franklin

Dear Miss Franklin:

The Atlanta Temporary Governing Body, which governs Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church, has referred a set of charges against you to Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery. A three-man judicial commission has been appointed to process and adjudicate these charges. The commission consists of Dr. Frank J. Smith, Pastor, Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church; Dr. Greg W. Burgreen, Ruling Elder, Birmingham (Ala.) Reformed Presbyterian Church; and Pastor Drew Poplin, First Reformed Presbyterian Church, Durham, North Carolina.

The charges are as follows:

(1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment): a consistent pattern of not regularly attending church since at least January 2022 until now

EVIDENCE AND WITNESSES: Frank J. Smith; T.J. Pattillo; record of worship attendance

(2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment): as seen by the failure to attend worship on a regular basis

EVIDENCE AND WITNESSES: Frank J. Smith; T.J. Pattillo; record of worship attendance

(3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment): as seen by the fact that your children have many times not attended worship

EVIDENCE AND WITNESSES: Frank J. Smith; T.J. Pattillo; record of worship attendance

(4) Sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment): expressed particularly in phone conversations on February 6, 2022

EVIDENCE AND WITNESSES: Frank J. Smith; T.J. Pattillo; Nancy Pattillo

(5) Lying (against the 9th Commandment): as seen by your having lied recently about why your children were not attending church

EVIDENCE AND WITNESSES: Frank J. Smith; Penelope Smith

Other evidence includes various relevant documents, including the pastoral letter and charges dated November 4, 2020; the letter of admonition dated November 5, 2020; the letter of rebuke dated September 11, 2021; the letters from the Atlanta TGB dated March 17, 2022 and April 14, 2022; and the pastoral letter dated April 14, 2022.

You are hereby summoned to appear before this court, meeting at Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church, 574 Western Avenue NW, Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, May 14, 2022, at 11:00 AM, so that this matter can be handled. You are urged to attend this hearing, at which we will carefully listen to you.

If you do not desire to contest these charges, the court will proceed to render a verdict on each of these charges based upon the facts of the case; and, upon a finding of guilt, also institute any appropriate censure.

If you desire to contest these charges, we will immediately proceed to conduct a formal trial in accordance with the Book of Discipline of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. You will be asked how you plead—"guilty" or "not guilty"—to each of the five charges. If you plead "guilty" to any particular charge, the court would later decide on the censure. If you plead "not guilty" to any particular charge, there would be the taking of testimony from the witnesses on that matter, as well as opportunity for cross-examination. Furthermore, there is the possibility of rebuttal testimony. You may also offer a closing statement, after which the prosecutor may offer a closing statement. Those closing statements must be confined to the evidence and testimony. These proceedings customarily are public. After receiving all of the evidence and testimony, the commission will deliberate in private.

In these proceedings, you may represent yourself or be represented by any member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in good standing. If you desire witnesses to be summoned to testify on your behalf, please let us know, so that we can summon them. If you would like assistance in preparing your defense, we will be happy to direct you to someone who could provide that assistance.

Perhaps you are wondering what the church expects of you. What we expect of you, as we expect of every church member, is to live in accordance with the will of God. Let us remind you of the public vows of membership that every member of the church, including yourself, made "in humble reliance upon His grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day." Specifically, you promised, among other things, that you would "keep the Lord's Day" and "regularly attend the worship services" and "to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in all the relationships of life." As your children were baptized, you publicly promised to train them "to keep the Lord's Day and to understand the nature of the Church" and "the value of its worship and fellowship." The fourth commandment emphasizes the duty of a parent to encourage children that the Sabbath be observed by them, and that all things necessary for soul and body be provided (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q/A 118, Q/A 129).

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us. In the meantime, please be aware that each of us on this commission will be remembering you and this matter in prayer.

Sincerely,



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.
Moderator of the Commission
(770)241-3946



Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D.
Clerk of the Commission
(662)418-0591

Minutes of the Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC)

The Atlanta Judicial Commission was called to order by the Moderator, Dr. Frank J. Smith, at Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church, 574 Western Avenue NW, Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, May 14, 2022, at 11:09 AM. Also in attendance were the other two members of the commission, Dr. Greg W. Burgreen and Pastor Drew Poplin, thus constituting a quorum. Others present were the following: Elder T.J. Pattillo, Mrs. Penelope Smith, and Mrs. Nancy Pattillo, witnesses; and the following observers in person: Johnathan Steele, Amy Work, and Larry Kerr. Listeners by telephone were: Miyoshi Robinson, Stacy Moton, and Kim Brown. Defendant Miss Tawana Franklin was not present in person or by counsel.

The Moderator constituted the court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King. Then, Pastor Poplin read Proverbs 8:1-17.

The Moderator began by reading the following statement, which had met with the approval of all members of the court:

I want to welcome everyone here today. We are glad that you are present—and that for several reasons.

First, it is important for you to know how the church operates. Second, it is essential for you to have confidence in your elders as they exercise rule in the church—and that confidence can occur only if the church leadership is transparent in its dealings. Third, in order for there to be justice, there must be, in the words of an old American Presbyterian book of church order, “the approbation [approval] of an impartial public.” That term “impartial public” certainly includes the members and adherents of a particular congregation, but it includes far more—it means that people from the community should know (or at least have the opportunity to know) what the church is doing and why the church is doing it. We are not a cult—we believe in being open. The church is not a secret society, hiding behind closed doors and refusing to reveal its procedures and actions. Instead, reflecting the fact that the church is the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that she prophetically proclaims the very public message of the gospel and calls upon all men everywhere to submit to King Jesus, the church is a public institution. Christianity is not a mystery religion. It is not a cult. It is the divinely established instrument to disciple men and nations as the world is converted to the One who died on the cross and rose again and ascended into heaven. And therefore, the church should have nothing of which to be ashamed as she evangelizes and worships and also as she exercises discipline. Let me add that this practice of conducting judicial process in public is nothing new, nor is it confined to the Presbyterian Church. A book entitled *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900*, is a case study of Baptist church documents, with a focus on Georgia, and including congregations that largely or exclusively consisted of black membership. The book

demonstrates that the prevailing custom was to conduct church trials in public, at least in part as a way of instructing the congregation as a whole to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Another reason is for the protection of the defendant, in case the elders were to proceed in an arrogant or otherwise inappropriate manner.

Five charges were filed against Tawana Franklin by the Atlanta Commission, which serves as the Temporary Governing Body for Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church. Because of the difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of men to travel from Ohio in order to conduct the hearing or trial, the Atlanta Commission referred this matter to our Presbytery. As a result of this request, a special judicial commission was appointed to process and adjudicate the matter. In addition to myself, there are two other members of the Atlanta Judicial Commission. Dr. Greg Burgreen is a ruling elder who is a member of the Birmingham (Ala.) Reformed Presbyterian Church; he is an associate research professor in the field of engineering at Mississippi State University. Pastor Drew Poplin ministers at First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Durham, North Carolina, where he is slated to be installed next month as the associate pastor. Let me express to these men my thanks, and the thanks of all of us here at Atlanta RPC, for their willingness to travel a long distance to be with us this weekend and to handle this matter.

Let me describe today's procedure. The first thing we did was to constitute the court in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King. We were asking that Jesus would be with us in a special way, in accord with His promise in Matthew 18 that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He will be in their midst.

In a few moments, I will ensure that the accusation has been served, and the witnesses summoned. I will remind all of us who are judges in this case that we must put aside all prejudices. We will ask the defendant if she desires to contest the charges against her. If she says that she wants to contest the charges, she will have opportunity to offer objections to the proceeding, and may also "challenge the right of any member of the court to sit in judgment of the case."

The defendant will be asked whether she pleads "guilty" or "not guilty" to each of the five charges. If she pleads "guilty" to any charge, the court will later discuss and decide what censure to impose. On any charge to which she pleads "not guilty," the trial will proceed. The prosecutor will present the case by calling various witnesses and introducing evidence. The defendant will have opportunity to cross-examine any witness. After the prosecution's case has been presented, then the defendant may introduce any witnesses, and the prosecutor may cross-examine those witnesses. Rebuttal evidence may also be offered. After all testimony has been heard and all evidence entered on the record, the accused will present a closing statement, followed by a closing statement by the prosecutor.

At that point, the commission will recess. The plan is for the commission to reconvene this afternoon and deliberate in private. After reaching a verdict on each of the charges, and preparing a report, we will recess for the night, and then reconvene immediately after the worship service tomorrow in order to announce the decision publicly. In the meantime, we will communicate to the defendant the outcome of the proceedings.

This is a meeting of a church court. Courts, among other things, adjudicate matters, and it is in that judicial role that we are meeting today. But we use the term “court” to describe these meetings of presbyters (elders) since, no matter what the issue is, they do not act like a legislature that makes laws, but rather they declare various decisions based on God’s law. In other words, we don’t make up the rules as we go along—we follow the rule, viz., the Word of God which He has written. Let me also note that the term “court” is appropriate, because of the dignity that is involved in our proceedings. As a matter of fact, if you are wondering why we are going through all this process, including, in this case, establishing a special judicial commission and having men travel hours and across state lines to be here today, one important reason for doing so is because of the respect we desire to show to the accused. We trust that our proceedings will be characterized by respect and dignity. In accord with the principle of respect and dignity, we ask that you refrain from getting refreshments while the court is in session; however, bottles of water are available on a table at the back.

I earlier expressed my appreciation for each of you in being here today. In Acts 15, when a doctrinal dispute was referred to the church court in Jerusalem, it was the apostles and elders who actually decided the issue. Nevertheless, the text is clear that “the multitude” was present and that the decision met with the approval of “the whole church.” During today’s meeting, you should remain quiet—remember, it’s a court. But even though only the members of the court and the parties and witnesses will be allowed to speak during today’s proceedings, your presence is very important, in that, hopefully, you will be able in your heart to say “Amen” to what is decided. If you have any questions, of course, do not hesitate to ask any member of the court afterward.

The Moderator affirmed that he had delivered the charges and the summons to the residence of the defendant on May 1, 2022, and also had summoned the witnesses, all of whom were present.

The Moderator reminded the members of the court of the solemn duty in which they are about to engage, and of their responsibilities in the Lord’s house, and enjoined them to dismiss from their minds all prejudice or personal considerations, and to concern themselves for the spiritual welfare of the accused and of the church. He specifically reminded them that the Lord hates an unjust balance, and that those who rule in the Lord’s house must do so in the fear of God and

without respect of persons. He explained that each of the charges is a sin, being a violation of the law of God, and every sin is serious in that it is an offense against the Judge in heaven and that every sin deserves His eternal wrath in hell, and furthermore that only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from any and every sin. He reminded the court that unrepentant sin is a sign that the sinner is in a dangerous position, and that continuation in that sin may give evidence of a hard heart and a lack of being truly converted to Christ. The Moderator further set forth the purposes of church discipline, viz., the restoration of the offender and his reconciliation to anyone he has offended; the purity and existence of the church; and the honor of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of the church.

To all present and on teleconference, the Moderator stated that the accused has the right to a fair and impartial trial, and that the burden of proof in convicting her rests with the prosecution. She has the right to written charges that are delivered in a timely fashion (at least ten days before a trial/proceedings); to be able to defend herself; to be represented by counsel who is a member in good standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church; to be able to consult with others who are not formal counsel but who could offer her advice; to name witnesses that could be summoned by the court to appear; to offer objections to the proceedings; to cross-examine the prosecution's witnesses; to examine her own witnesses; to offer rebuttal evidence and testimony; to be provided with the full record of the case; and, in case of being found guilty, to appeal the decision. It was stated that she also has various duties, including, participation in this judicial process, conducting herself with proper decorum, and submitting to the decision of the courts of the church.

The Moderator planned to ask if the accused has any objections to the proceedings today. No objections were expressed because the accused was not present in person or by counsel.

The Moderator planned to call upon the accused to answer to each of the charges. No answers were given because the accused was not present in person or by counsel.

(1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment): a consistent pattern of not regularly attending church since at least January 2022 until now

The defendant was not present to answer.

(2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment): as seen by the failure to attend worship on a regular basis

The defendant was not present to answer.

(3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment): as seen by the fact that your children have many times not attended worship

The defendant was not present to answer.

(4) Sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment): expressed particularly in phone conversations on February 6, 2022

The defendant was not present to answer.

(5) Lying (against the 9th Commandment): as seen by your having lied recently about why your children were not attending church

The defendant was not present to answer.

Because the accused was not present, the court proceeded under Section 1 of the Book of Discipline, thus, there was no need of trial or a prosecutor. The court considered evidence and witness testimony only, and later determined a censure based on the charges and evidence.

Because of the absence of the accused, observer Larry Kerr asked the court if she was informed and knowledgeable of the judicial proceedings against her. The Moderator provided an affirmative answer with no additional details and asked that any further questions from observers and listeners would be handled after recess of the court.

The Moderator read and entered into evidence the various documents mentioned in the indictment, which are as follows (and which are appended to these minutes): the pastoral letter and charges dated November 4, 2020; the letter of admonition dated November 5, 2020; the letter of rebuke dated September 11, 2021; the letters from the Atlanta TGB dated March 17, 2022 and April 14, 2022; and the pastoral letter dated April 14, 2022. Elder T.J. Pattillo presented a printout of the congregational attendance record, which was then entered into the record as evidence.

The Moderator then called the witnesses. Each of these witnesses, before giving testimony, was sworn in with right hand upraised and left upon a Bible, using the substance of the oath found in Form 22, Oath of a Witness (Do you swear by the Living God that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as far as you know it, in the case now under trial, as you shall answer to God in the judgment?). Each one responded, "I do." All who were present stood for the swearing in of the witnesses. The following testimony was heard.

Dr. Frank J. Smith

He read and presented a written statement that was entered into the record (see appendix).

Questions from the court, summarized

Pastor Poplin asked if the 4th Commandment had been taught to the Atlanta RPC. Dr. Smith answered in the affirmative.

Dr. Burgreen asked if the accused had any meaningful response to the letters written to her. Dr. Smith answered that she had a limited response accompanied by limited actions.

Dr. Burgreen asked if he thought the content of the letters were fully comprehended by the accused. Dr. Smith answered that they were.

Note the transcribed testimony of Dr. Smith given in response to questions of members of the court is found in the appendix.

During the time that Dr. Smith was in the witness chair, Pastor Poplin assumed the role of Moderator *pro tem*, after which Dr. Smith reassumed the moderatorship.

Due to some telephone connection issues, a recess was called at 12:05 PM. The court was reconvened at 12:08 PM.

Elder T.J. Pattillo

He read and presented a written statement that was entered into the record (see appendix).

Questions from the court, summarized

Dr. Burgreen asked if the defendant was aware of whether her behaviors impacted her family and the congregation, and if she had an understanding of her disobedience. Elder Pattillo answered that he believed that she was aware and had understanding.

Note the transcribed testimony of Elder Pattillo given in response to questions of members of the court is found in the appendix.

Mrs. Nancy Pattillo

She read and presented a written statement that was entered into the record (see appendix).

Questions from the court

None.

Mrs. Penelope Smith

She read and presented a written statement that was entered into the record (see appendix).

Questions from the court

None.

Elder T.J. Pattillo offered a photograph of a text message sent by the accused. The exact content was not revealed nor discussed. The court declined accepting this into the record because it was considered as new evidence.

It was moved, seconded, and carried "that the parties be removed." The court immediately recessed, to be reconvened at the call of the Moderator at 5830 Millstone Drive, Cumming, Georgia, this afternoon. Pastor Poplin offered prayer and the court stood in recess at 12:25 PM.

At the call of the Moderator, the court reconvened at 5:14 PM with prayer by Dr. Smith.

The members of the court briefly discussed each charge of the case. The court voted, by roll call, on each of the charges, as follows:

(1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment): a consistent pattern of not regularly attending church since at least January 2022 until now

Dr. Burgreen, Guilty; Pastor Poplin, Guilty; Dr. Smith, Guilty

(2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment): as seen by the failure to attend worship on a regular basis

Dr. Burgreen, Guilty; Pastor Poplin, Guilty; Dr. Smith, Guilty

(3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment): as seen by the fact that your children have many times not attended worship

Dr. Burgreen, Guilty; Pastor Poplin, Guilty; Dr. Smith, Guilty

(4) Sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment): expressed particularly in phone conversations on February 6, 2022

Dr. Burgreen, Guilty; Pastor Poplin, Guilty; Dr. Smith, Guilty

(5) Lying (against the 9th Commandment): as seen by your having lied recently about why your children were not attending church

Dr. Burgreen, Guilty; Pastor Poplin, Guilty; Dr. Smith, Guilty

The court then voted by roll call to impose the censure of suspension on Miss Franklin.

Dr. Burgreen, Aye; Pastor Poplin, Aye; Dr. Smith, Aye

The court approved by roll call 3-0 a statement which explains the judgment and also how we will proceed going forward, to be read publicly to the congregation tomorrow after the worship service at Atlanta RPC. The statement is found in the appendix.

The court approved 3-0 placing on the record two pastoral letters, one to the defendant and one to the congregation. Both letters are found in the appendix.

The court approved 3-0 a letter conveying to the defendant the verdict in this case. This letter was emailed to the defendant on the evening of May 14, 2022 and is found in the appendix.

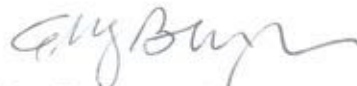
By common consent, the court decided to recess the meeting at 7:18 PM, to eat dinner, make minor amendments to the pastoral and verdict letters, complete the minutes, and to later reconvene for final approval of today's minutes.

At the call of the Moderator, the court reconvened at 11:56 PM with prayer by Dr. Smith. It was agreed by common consent that after the presentation and approval of today's minutes, the court will reconvene immediately after the worship service at Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church tomorrow afternoon, May 15, 2022. It was moved, seconded, and carried that in tomorrow's session, the Moderator will read publicly the statement that explains the judgment in the case and how we will proceed going forward, as well as the two pastoral letters; and then will read the censure of suspension and that, after the reading and approval of the minutes, the court will be adjourned.

The Clerk presented the minutes of today's proceedings. The minutes were approved as presented.

Pastor Poplin then recessed the meeting for the night in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King. The meeting was recessed at 12:00 AM, May 15, 2022.

Submitted by:



Greg Burgreen, Clerk



Frank Smith, Moderator

Minutes of the Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC)


On the Lord's Day, May 15, 2022, at 12:51 PM, the Atlanta Judicial Commission was called to order by the Moderator, Dr. Frank J. Smith, at 5830 Millstone Drive, Cumming, Georgia with prayer by Dr. Smith. In attendance were the other two members of the commission, Dr. Greg W. Burgreen and Pastor Drew Poplin, thus constituting a quorum.


The purpose of this brief meeting was to receive amended testimony from Dr. Smith. The Moderator appointed Pastor Poplin to be Chair *pro tem* while Dr. Smith modified his original testimony. Dr. Smith read a prepared statement that addressed a potential line of defense by the defendant about her absence of attendance. The amended testimony of Dr. Smith is found in the appendix. By common consent, the amended testimony was entered into the record, and it was unanimously agreed that the amended testimony did not materially alter or impact any previous deliberations or the verdict of suspension.

Dr. Smith resumed the Chair. The minutes were read by the Clerk. A motion to adopt the minutes was made, seconded, and adopted by a 3-0 vote.

Dr. Burgreen adjourned the meeting in prayer at 12:58 PM.

Submitted by:


Greg Burgreen, Clerk


Frank Smith, Moderator

Minutes of the Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC)

On the Lord's Day, May 15, 2022, at 5:33 PM, the Moderator, in front of the congregation and with the defendant not being present, reconvened the meeting in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King.

The Moderator read the statement explaining the judgment in the case and the two pastoral letters. He then imposed the censure of suspension by reading the following:

Whereas you, Tawana Lashaun Franklin, have been found guilty by this court of Christ's House, the decision of the court is that you are deserving of the censure of suspension. Now, therefore, for your own spiritual good and for the peace and purity of the Church, receive the pronouncement of this censure.

You, Tawana Lashaun Franklin, have been found guilty of the following sins:

- (1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment): a consistent pattern of not regularly attending church since at least January 2022 until now
- (2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment): as seen by the failure to attend worship on a regular basis
- (3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment): as seen by the fact that your children have many times not attended worship
- (4) Sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment): expressed particularly in phone conversations on February 6, 2022
- (5) Lying (against the 9th Commandment): as seen by your having lied recently about why your children were not attending church

This court, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, sadly and solemnly suspends you from the privileges of church membership, including participation in the sacraments, until you have given satisfactory evidence of true repentance, and have been restored to good standing by this court.

The Clerk read the minutes, which were approved by common consent.

The court stood for prayer and was led in prayer by Pastor Poplin, who called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King, for His blessing upon all these proceedings. The meeting was adjourned by His authority at 5:57 PM.

Submitted by:



Greg Burgreen, Clerk



Frank Smith, Moderator

Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC)
December 1, 2022

The Atlanta Judicial Commission was called to order by the Moderator, Dr. Frank J. Smith, via Zoom teleconference meeting on Thursday, December 1, 2022, at 1:04 PM. Also in attendance were the other two members of the commission, Dr. Greg W. Burgreen and Pastor Drew Poplin, thus constituting a quorum. Miss Tawana Franklin was invited to join the meeting to express herself in this first follow-up meeting after the May 15, 2022 imposition of censure of suspension upon her. However, she did not attend the meeting.

The Moderator constituted the court in prayer, in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King.

1. The meeting began with housekeeping activities to approve the AJC final minutes of the meetings on April 23, 2022 and April 28, 2022. Both sets of minutes were unanimously approved.
2. The purpose of this meeting was to consider whether or not to impose the next level of discipline, excommunication, to Tawana Franklin. Dr. Smith began by reading from The Constitution of the RPCNA, Book of Discipline, Chapter 4, Section 1.e, *Excommunication*.
3. This was followed by recounts of valid past attempts since May 14, 2022 made by each member of the AJC to contact and encourage Miss Franklin toward repentance and faithful living. There has been very little response from Miss Franklin to these efforts.
4. We then considered the duty before us to decide the next step of discipline, which began by a solicitation of questions by the Moderator about this weighty matter.

Pastor Poplin asked if the Atlanta congregation has reached out in any way to Tawana. Dr. Smith responded that Stacy has asked about Tawana, but was unsure if any direct contact had been made by him. Dennis did visit Tawana at some point.

Pastor Poplin noted that after the trial and announcement of censure, there was a sense of fear and trembling in the congregation. He asked if that sense had been maintained. Dr. Smith responded that Larry (who recently passed away from this life) was initially affected by it, but later slipped into his old ways. [Clerk's note: However, the last month of his life, Larry showed real signs of genuine repentance.]

Dr. Burgreen searched for any promising aspects of Tawana's life since the hearing and asked if she had attended church anywhere since the hearing. Dr. Smith responded that she attended (as far as he knew, once) a liberal Baptist church through which Tawana's financial benefactor funnels funds. Tawana's children briefly attended a local church, according to Tawana, not for religious training, but for practical life skills training. Tawana at one point stated

that she was “done with church,” alluding to her apparent realization of the shallowness of other churches compared to the teaching and experiences at Atlanta RP.

Dr. Burgreen asked if Tawana’s daughter, Diamond, had visited Atlanta RP since the hearing. Dr. Smith responded that there were conflicting communications from both Tawana and Diamond about Diamond’s desire and Tawana’s permission to allow her to visit the church. Diamond did call one Lord’s Day (November 13th) to attend and did visit. Miss Amy took Diamond home after church and later contacted her to attend the God’s Girls program, but nothing further worked out.

Pastor Poplin asked for clarification if Tawana had attended Atlanta RP even once since the hearing. Dr. Smith responded no, she had not. Tawana did express an intention to attend. Dr. Smith sent her a letter of guidance meant to protect both Tawana and the congregation. Miss Franklin, however, did not ever follow through on her stated intention to attend Atlanta RPC.

Dr. Burgreen asked if any of the four admonitions written in the charges letter dated April 28, 2022 had been substantively acted upon by Miss Franklin since the hearing. Dr. Smith responded that there has been no such outward evidence. The court concluded that the Lord knows whether or not Miss Franklin has kept in her heart and/or private actions any of the four admonitions, but that we as the AJC were duty bound to make rational judgments based on outward evidences, of which there has been little.

5. Dr. Smith asked if we would like to make any motion with respect to this matter. Pastor Poplin made the following motion: Based upon the obvious lack of repentance from the sins of which she had been found guilty on May 14, 2022, the AJC hereby votes to impose the censure of excommunication upon Tawana Franklin. Dr. Burgreen seconded the motion.

The court voted, by roll call alphabetically, on the motion to impose the censure of excommunication, as follows:

Dr. Burgreen, Aye; Pastor Poplin, Aye; Dr. Smith, Aye. The vote was unanimous (3-0-0).

6. Dr. Smith instructed the court to open a letter that he had drafted about the matter and sent to the court via email, in which we had been instructed not to open it until he made such request.

7. Dr. Smith read the letter to the court. We voted by roll call to include this letter in the minutes, as follows:

Dr. Burgreen, Aye; Pastor Poplin, Aye; Dr. Smith, Aye. The vote was unanimous (3-0-0).

[Clerk’s note: On December 17, 2022, the Commission took action to approve modifications of said letter. The letter as finally adopted is found in that set of minutes.]

8. The court recessed at 2:08 PM until 2:15 PM.

9. The court reconvened at 2:16 PM.

10. The AJC determined to meet in constituted court on December 18, 2022 at Atlanta RPC after the worship service in order for Dr. Smith to publicly read the pastoral letter and impose the ensure of excommunication on Tawana Franklin. Pastor Poplin cannot make the December 18 meeting. Dr. Burgreen can and will arrange further travel details with Dr. Smith.

11. A personal letter was drafted to Miss Franklin dated December 1, 2022 to clarify what these proceedings practically mean for her, to explain the option to appeal this decision, and to encourage her to attend church and repent. The full content of that letter is below.

December 1, 2022

Dear Tawana:

It is my sad duty to inform you that the Atlanta Judicial Commission today, after extensive and careful discussion, voted to impose the censure of excommunication upon you. This censure will be pronounced after the worship service on December 18, 2022.

You will have 30 days from that date in order to appeal this censure. I would be happy to help you with any appeal that you would make, including, directing you to someone who could counsel you in that regard.

Meanwhile, let me again say that you and your children are still welcome to attend the church. As a matter of fact, we would encourage you to do so. This censure means that you are no longer a member of the visible church and implies that your soul is in jeopardy. But our hope and prayer would be that even this censure will be used by God to bring you to genuine faith and repentance.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Smith

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

Pastor, Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

12. The proposed wording for the censure is as follows:

Pronouncement of Judgment
by the Atlanta Judicial Commission
of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

December 18, 2022

You, Tawana Lashun Franklin, have been found guilty of the sins of (1) willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment), (2) refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment), (3) willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment), (4) sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment), and (5) lying (against the 9th Commandment), sins deserving of the extreme penalty of excommunication, yet you continue obstinate and give no evidence of repentance, although efforts have been made to restore you. Now, therefore, this Court, constituted in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and acting under His authority, hereby excommunicates you, removing you from the membership of the Church, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. May God have mercy upon you by awakening you to repentance and bringing you to righteousness, so that you may be among the redeemed in the Day of the Lord Jesus.

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., Moderator

Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D., Clerk

The court voted, by roll call, to accept the censure as written, as follows:

Dr. Burgreen, Aye; Pastor Poplin, Aye; Dr. Smith, Aye. The vote was unanimous (3-0-0).

13. The court voted to accept the personal letter to Tawana as written, as follows:

Dr. Burgreen, Aye; Pastor Poplin, Aye; Dr. Smith, Aye. The vote was unanimous (3-0-0).

14. The court authorized the Clerk and the Moderator to make any needed grammatical updates to these minutes, prior to their final approval on December 18, 2022. (NB: A change was made in the wording of the censure of excommunication to correct the spelling of Miss Franklin's middle name.)

15. The Clerk was authorized to pre-write the general anticipated minutes for the upcoming AJC meeting to be held on December 18, 2022, subject to amendments on that date.

16. Pastor Poplin then adjourned the meeting in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only Head and King. The meeting was adjourned at 2:53 PM.



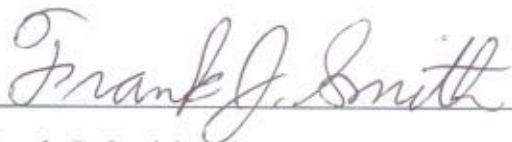
Dr. Frank J. Smith, Moderator



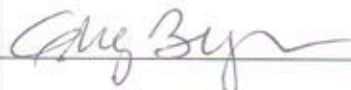
Dr. Greg W. Burgreen, Clerk

Pronouncement of Judgment
by the Atlanta Judicial Commission
of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
December 18, 2022

You, Tawana Lashun Franklin, have been found guilty of the sins of (1) willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment), (2) refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment), (3) willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment), (4) sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment), and (5) lying (against the 9th Commandment), sins deserving of the extreme penalty of excommunication, yet you continue obstinate and give no evidence of repentance, although efforts have been made to restore you. Now, therefore, this Court, constituted in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and acting under His authority, hereby excommunicates you, removing you from the membership of the Church, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. May God have mercy upon you by awakening you to repentance and bringing you to righteousness, so that you may be among the redeemed in the Day of the Lord Jesus.



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., Moderator



Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D., Clerk

Atlanta Judicial Commission
December 17, 2022

The Atlanta Judicial Commission met at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Frank J. Smith, 5830 Millstone Drive, Cumming, Georgia, on Saturday, December 17, 2022. The Moderator, Dr. Smith, called the meeting to order at 6:24 PM and constituted the court in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only King and Head. Also present was Dr. Greg W. Burgreen, thus constituting a quorum. Pastor Drew Poplin could not be present either today or tomorrow and was excused from both meetings.

The minutes for December 1, 2022, were read and were, by common consent, approved.

The Moderator sought to perfect the pastoral letter that had been approved at the previous meeting. Without objection, three sentences in the original were excised ("She said that her mom was not allowing her to come to church today. She also asked on behalf of her mom for financial help. I reminded her that church policy was to help only those in regular church attendance and that her mom certainly had not been attending.") and the following sentence inserted in their place: "We chatted for a few minutes but she did not attend the church service that day (though she did attend the following week)." The final version, which is dated December 18, 2022, is as follows.

Dear Members and Friends of Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church:

One of the most difficult and distressing things I have had to do as a minister is to pronounce the sentence of excommunication. Thankfully, in my 42 years of ordained ministry, I have, up until today, had to make that pronouncement only twice. But today will mark the third time that I will have performed that duty.

Tawana Franklin first started attending the worship services of this congregation in the summer of 2016. In February 2020, she professed her faith and then, along with her children, was baptized in a service of public worship. However, there was an obvious spiritual struggle in her soul. A couple of months after she joined the church, she said to me, with reference to Covid-19, that I was "scariest than the virus." In other words, she realized that unlike other churches which she had attended, we meant business and were very serious about these religious matters. I took her statement as an encouraging one, in that she recognized the spiritual nature of what she had done in committing herself to the church. At the same time, it soon was evident that this inner battle was one in which the wrong side was beginning to prevail.

As many of you know, from the time of her public profession, she became very erratic in her attendance. In November 2020, the elders admonished her. For a few weeks after that censure, she was faithful in coming to church. But then, in early 2021, she became unfaithful again—a pattern that continued throughout the spring and summer. In September 2021, the elders imposed a stronger discipline, that of rebuke. She showed the same pattern as before—a brief period of church attendance, followed by long periods of non-attendance. Finally, in March 2022, the elders preferred charges against her and referred

the matter to the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery, which appointed a special judicial commission.

This special commission, the Atlanta Judicial Commission, scheduled a hearing to which she was summoned. We consulted with her as to when we would schedule that hearing, so as to accommodate her, and she agreed to appear at the set date and time (May 14, 2022 at 11:00 AM) so that she could present her side of the story. We were under the impression that she would show, but she was a no-show.

The Commission proceeded to take testimony and receive evidence on the five charges. She was found guilty of all five charges. The Commission, after careful consideration, decided to impose a censure of suspension upon her—that is, barring her from the Lord's Table until she expressed sorrow and repented. Over a period of weeks, all three members of the Commission reached out to her in order to encourage her and to call her to repentance. There was no repentance.

In late October, I made arrangements to swing by her apartment on October 26th. I brought a pizza with me as a token of friendship. I explained that the Commission was planning to meet on Monday, October 31, 2022, in order to consider her case and what action, if any, to take. I thought that she and I had a good conversation. She volunteered that she wanted to come back to church and indeed that she would come back that next Lord's Day, October 30, 2022. Three days later, I sent her an email. In it, I reminded her of the hurt and pain she had caused at Atlanta RPC, and then stated that, in order for her to come back, she was going to have to make things right with those whom she had offended. Not only must she apologize but she must seek the forgiveness of those whom she had hurt. I stated that she needed to acknowledge the guilt of the sins of which she had been found guilty; and that she needed to participate, cheerfully and responsibly, in the services of the church. And I also said that she must not ask for money. In emphasizing that she should not ask for money, I reminded her that she herself had told me that she was glad to have the financial angle divorced from her participating in the church. I concluded with these words:

If you're serious about your spiritual walk, you will do these things. No one is expecting you to be perfect, Tawana. But we are expecting you to be sincere. Whether you are or not, only time will tell.

You've heard the old saying from baseball, "Three strikes and you're out." Well, you've already had three strikes. You were admonished. Then you were rebuked. And back in May, you were suspended from communion. You've got one more chance. I want you to know that the church is not playing games with you. If you don't show yourself to be genuinely sorry for your sins and sincerely seeking to walk with Christ, then it will be "Four strikes and you're out."

You mentioned during our meeting on Wednesday how lenient I had been with you in the past. Sometimes I have been too lenient and have not shown you what

is called “tough love.” I promise you, Tawana, there’s no more fooling around. This is your last chance.

Tawana, we love you and want only the best for you and your family. We are willing to welcome you back with open arms. But you’ve got to play your part by being faithful with regard to [what I wrote] above.

.....

If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask. Tawana, I am the eternal optimist, always looking at things through rose-colored glasses. Please do not disappoint me. More importantly, please make sure for the sake of your own soul and the good of your children that you do what is right.

Upon reflection, the members of the Atlanta Judicial Commission agreed to postpone its meeting for several weeks, in order to give Tawana more time to express her repentance and to show that she was serious about wanting to come back to church.

Two days after I met with Tawana, she texted me, asking for money. We exchanged text messages on Saturday: she said that she was still coming to church even if I didn’t give her money, and I informed her that, as indicated in my email letter, no, we would not be giving her money. The next morning, Sunday, October 30th, she texted me, saying: “Good morning. I won’t be attending church... I look forward to coming next Sunday tho...” I responded, “Okay.” The following Sunday, November 6th, I texted her at 11:54 AM, saying, “Tawana, I plan to arrive at 2:15. Remember, we gained the hour last night, as we’re now on Eastern Standard Time. Will your children be coming as well?” I received no reply. I arrived around 2:18 PM and knocked on the door of the apartment. There was no answer. I knocked again and waited a few minutes, and just before driving off, Diamond came out. We chatted for a few minutes but she did not attend the church service that day (though she did the following week).

Instead of meeting on October 31st, the Commission had delayed its meeting for about a month in order to give Tawana more time to get right with God. On November 29th and November 30th, I informed her that we would be meeting on December 1st, and that she was welcome to attend via Zoom in order to express repentance or anything else she desired. She did not attend.

At our meeting on December 1, 2022, we, the members of the Atlanta Judicial Commission, voted unanimously to impose the church’s highest censure, excommunication. We did so because of Tawana’s obvious lack of repentance from the sins of which she had been found guilty on May 14, 2022. Of course, there is always a provisional nature to the censures of the church—repentance is always an option, and, in point of fact, one of the reasons for church discipline is to lead people to repentance.

Furthermore, we want to be very clear that the church has no authority to send anyone to hell. It is God alone who sends people to hell. And it is God alone who bestows His grace in order to bring people to salvation. But it is our duty as elders in the church to pronounce

judgments which reflect what God Himself has sovereignly decided and as to how He has judged. When the elders turn the keys of the kingdom, they are reflecting Jesus' words in Matthew 18, by seeking to discern that which has already been determined in heaven and to judge accordingly.

Our action does not determine anyone's eternal destiny. That right belongs only to God. But at the same time, no one should regard the matter of excommunication lightly. Twenty-five years ago, I pronounced excommunication upon a relative of mine who had abandoned the faith. When I read the censure, the congregation was obviously affected—you could have heard a pin drop on the carpet. A few years later, that young man was killed in an automobile accident. God is not mocked. You don't play games with Him or with His gospel. Indeed, dealing with Him is scarier than the virus.

And so, as we come to this moment in the life of our congregation, may each of us examine himself or herself to check for hypocrisy. And let us continue to pray that God would grant Tawana the grace of repentance before it is eternally too late.

With tender regards,

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

Pastor, Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

Without objection, the court approved the Moderator making the following statement just prior to adjournment of tomorrow's meeting:

In a few moments, I will declare the meeting to be adjourned *sine die* accompanied by a rap of the gavel. The term *sine die* is Latin, meaning "without day," and it indicates that the court has concluded its business. However, though there is a finality to the actions of this court, there is always the possibility of change. A higher church court can modify or overturn what we have done. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit could move in Tawana Franklin's heart to bring about repentance so that she can be reconciled to the Lord and to His church. So, although our actions are final, thankfully, they may not be the last word. Let us earnestly pray that they are not.

The court approved the Moderator conveying to Miss Franklin the pastoral letter to the congregation and the censure, along with a cover letter (see attachment).

The minutes for this meeting were read and approved. Dr. Burgreen adjourned the meeting with prayer in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only King and Head. The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 PM.



Dr. Frank J. Smith, Moderator



Dr. Greg W. Burgreen, Clerk

Atlanta Judicial Commission
December 18, 2022

The Atlanta Judicial Commission met at Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church, 574 Western Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia, on the Lord's Day, December 18, 2022. The Moderator, Dr. Smith, rapped the gavel three times and convened the meeting at 4:54 PM in front of the congregation and with the defendant not being present, and constituted the court in the name of and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Zion's only King and Head. Also present was Dr. Greg W. Burgreen, thus constituting a quorum.

The Moderator read the pastoral letter explaining the progression and judgment of the case against Tawana Franklin. He then imposed the censure of excommunication by reading the following:

You, Tawana Lashun Franklin, have been found guilty of the sins of (1) willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment), (2) refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment), (3) willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment), (4) sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment), and (5) lying (against the 9th Commandment), sins deserving of the extreme penalty of excommunication, yet you continue obstinate and give no evidence of repentance, although efforts have been made to restore you. Now, therefore, this Court, constituted in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and acting under His authority, hereby excommunicates you, removing you from the membership of the Church, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. May God have mercy upon you by awakening you to repentance and bringing you to righteousness, so that you may be among the redeemed in the Day of the Lord Jesus.

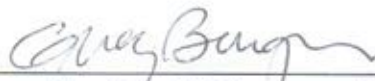
The Clerk read the minutes, which were approved by common consent.

The Moderator read the statement approved yesterday with regard to the finality of our actions.

The court stood for prayer and was led in prayer by Dr. Burgreen, who called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for His blessing upon all these proceedings. The meeting was adjourned by His authority *sine die* at 5:13 PM as the Moderator rapped the gavel once.



Dr. Frank J. Smith, Moderator



Dr. Greg W. Burgreen, Clerk

Appendix to the Minutes of the Atlanta Judicial Commission

Testimony, May 14-15, 2022

Letter to Miss Tawana Franklin, May 14, 2022

Pastoral letter to the Congregation, May 14, 2022

Pastoral letter to Miss Tawana, May 15, 2022

Explanation of Verdict, May 15, 2022

Censure of Suspension, May 15, 2022

Email letter to Miss Tawana Franklin, December 1, 2022

Pastoral letter to the Congregation, December 18, 2022

Email letter to Miss Tawana Franklin, December 18, 2022

Censure of Excommunication, December 18, 2022

Testimony

Testimony of Dr. Frank J. Smith, May 14th, 2022

The record clearly shows that Miss Franklin has not been regular in her attendance over a long period of time. I can personally attest to her lack of attendance since before she was initially disciplined via admonition in November 2020.

She has broken the Sabbath by means of a willful lack of attendance. Indeed, on numerous occasions, she has engaged in inappropriate activities, such as going shopping instead of being in the Lord's house. One example is that she had been shopping with her sister Rakita on February 6th, 2022. On at least one occasion, she was absent from her children overnight without being in touch with them, having been at a party.

I can also attest to the fact that on numerous occasions over the past couple of years, her children have not been in church when she has not been present. Sometimes this has been because she has been absent from the house and therefore they are not prepared to attend the service. Sometimes this has been because of her allowing them to participate in other activities, such as parties or trips.

Her lack of attendance, Sabbath breaking, and not ensuring that her children have regularly been in church is well known throughout the congregation. On numerous occasions, people have asked me where the Franklins were that particular Lord's Day. In other words, her sins in these regards have been a public scandal.

On February 6th, 2022, about 6:30 PM, she called me while I was visiting with Larry Kerr, one of our church members. She was furious and said some very nasty things about Nancy Pattillo and her husband T.J. with respect to how her sons were being disciplined at church that day when she was not there. As had been the case on other occasions, she talked about how she and her kids were never going to come back to church. This conversation was in front of Larry, and, when I was finally able to get a word in edgewise, I told her that I would call her back later (so as to spare her the embarrassment of Larry hearing the tirade). I did call back later that evening, but the call went to voicemail, and she did not return it. The fact of her sinful anger, as evidenced on this occasion as well as others, is generally known in the church.

On February 17th, 2022, on a 39-minute phone call with Miss Franklin, she admitted that she had lied as to why the children weren't able to come to church recently: instead of their being ill, which was the excuse, she said that it was actually because they didn't want to come. My wife Penny overheard this conversation.

On March 19th, 2022, I delivered to her the letter dated March 17th, 2022 from the Atlanta TGB. She got very upset and angry, and yelled at me for a number of minutes. She talked about how she's been suffering from so many physical ailments, as exemplified by her having fallen in the

bathroom and having to go to the hospital to get checked out, and also by her having a neuropathy exam scheduled for July 13th. She pleaded for time to get her life together, especially in terms of her health. She stared at me and vehemently asked, "Do you want to kick me out of the church?" I assured her that our goal was for her repentance. She admitted that she has had a racial animus toward folks like Miss Nancy, not being willing to forgive her and others because they're white. She did acknowledge that she has appreciated Miss Nancy and others being able to try to get Wynter (four year old daughter) under control at church, but resented how they tried to rein in her sons Jonathan and Caeden. She eventually calmed down a bit. At one point, I embraced her and told her that we loved her, and had prayer with her. She said, "I love y'all, too." She had noted that, with Diamond's encouragement, she had sent her children to church the previous week, and also said that not only would they attend church the next day, but that she would also. However, she had been embarrassed about the fact that she didn't have clothes that fit her, as she had lost about 20 pounds recently. But, she was hopeful that her sister Rakita [spelling?] would be coming by soon and would be able to take her to get something to wear that evening. At 12:22 PM on the Sunday, March 20th, she texted, "Kids will be ready at the agreed time but Wynter started back throwing up so I'm feeding the other 4 and I will have them ready...I got the clothes for myself as promised but like I said, Wynter hasn't completely got over the stomach bug..."

And that is my statement, gentlemen.

Question from Pastor Poplin: Dr. Smith, has the teaching on the Lord's Day been a part of kind of instructing Miss Franklin in the faith? That's been a part of instructing her in the faith is what the Lord's Day is, and how to keep it?

Answer: Yes. Yes, I would say so. And even before that, I mean in terms of church membership classes.

Question from Dr. Burgreen: I think, Dr. Smith, you have read several letters that [were] given to Miss Franklin.

Answer: Yes. Correct.

Question from Dr. Burgreen: Did she respond to each letter? Did each letter seem to . . . did she [understand] the content of the letters? What was her responses to each letter?

Answer: Yes. Never formally did she respond. She responded—as I suggested in one of the letters, we were initially hopeful after the admonition. You know, she seemed to be ok with that. She agreed that we could admonish her and rebuke her without process—a summary, like a summary judgment. I made sure that she was ok with that. And so, for a time, I would say, that she tried to do better. But very quickly, it went—you know, within probably a month or two, something like that—she went back to her old ways.

Question from Dr. Burgreen: So, you would say that her understanding of the contents of the letters was sufficient? That she had a full understanding and that none of the words or sentences or concepts were beyond her comprehension?

Answer: That is correct. No, she—I think she understood exactly.

Testimony of Elder T. J. Pattillo, May 14th, 2022

I am a witness to counts (1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd commandment), (2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy (against the 4th commandment), (3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th commandment), and (4) Sinful anger (against the 6th commandment) on February 6th of 2022 against the defendant, Miss Tawana Franklin.

In reference to counts 1, 2, and 3 there have only been two instances where Miss Franklin attended ARPC in the 1st quarter of 2022. Those dates are January 9th and 23rd. January 16th was a “snow day” and we had devotions and prayer in two groups as the roads were unsafe to travel and attendance was not taken. I have been shown many texts between Miss Franklin and Pastor Smith about her “reasons” for not attending church. Some seemed viable as having back trouble or illness in the family, others are unknown as she would not return texts from the staff or answer phone calls and give an explanation, some were results of prioritizing or lack of preparation for the Sabbath as not having clean clothes for the kids. Others were priorities of importance to her; like letting the kids miss church so they could go to Six Flags, or Miss Franklin herself choosing to go to the nail salon on May 1st of 2022 instead of attending worship.

It is frequent in text messages from the Pastor and First Lady, as we’re planning on picking people up for church, that we would get a “No Franklins” text message to let us know they were not attending worship that day. Even though it was common for Pastor Smith to make attending easier for the Franklin family, like making two trips before the service to the Franklin apartment before worship. The first to get the kids, the second to go back and get her to accommodate her demands. Such efforts still yielded little fruit in encouraging Miss Franklin in regular attendance.

As to count 4, I was a witness to the phone call to Nancy Pattillo on February 6th of 2022. Miss Franklin called from a phone number that was not listed under her name (she was not present at church that day) and when Nancy answered the phone, I could immediately hear Miss Franklin screaming at Nancy. I was sitting in the driver’s seat with my and Nancy’s two children buckled in behind me in their seats as we were getting ready to head home with the car running. Nancy was standing up outside the opened passenger door when she answered Miss Franklin’s phone call and I could hear Miss Franklin screaming over the phone from outside the car, over my kids talking, and a car engine running and the inside heat blowing. I could not make out the words that Miss Franklin was saying, but Nancy said they were so foul she didn’t want to repeat

them. Nancy was upset to be spoken to in such a way, but as Miss Franklin continued to scream at her, Nancy was saying "Tawana. Tawana. Stop yelling and talk to me". The phone call ended with a hang-up. Afterward, Nancy walked back to the church to let Pastor Smith know of the phone call, only saying "That woman" as she walked back towards the church. (I found out yesterday that Pastor Smith was not present when she walked back. He was apparently taking people home and visiting Larry; but I thought that was the purpose for her going back.) As Nancy returned, she did mention that Tawana said she no longer wanted to attend ARPC.

The argument was over one of the Franklin children being disrespectful and arguing with Michelle Haag about preparing for worship. It is common for a couple of the Franklin children to be disruptive and disrespectful, so Nancy went over to tell the child that he should be respectful, and she was tired of them being disruptive. The Pastor had given a couple of announcements about everyone needing to be reverent and it seems to not have taken effect with a few of the children. However, though Miss Franklin was not present, and the children's behavior is not different when she is there, there seemed to be a need to handle the child's attitude as a team. Miss Franklin didn't appreciate the fact that Nancy verbally confronted the child about their needing to be respectful to adults and reverent in worship.

Honestly, I was not surprised by Miss Franklin's behavior that day. However, I did wonder how she could be so hateful towards Nancy. There have been several times Tawana would call us before we would leave for worship, asking Nancy to bring personal items and clothes for the kids. Nancy was always sure to be helpful. Only the Lord knows where Miss Franklin's heart and head were that day, that she would turn against someone who had regularly been showing compassion to her in the past.

For the record, I am saddened that we are here at this point. It needs to be said that though there are serious and concerning trends with Miss Franklin, there are also good things that have happened at ARPC with the Franklin family. There have been so many times when my family has prayed for the Franklins during devotions and bedtime to see them return to church and grow His kingdom to include this. Those prayers have been accompanied by the fact that my daughter enjoys a friendship with the oldest and very sweet daughter Diamond. I have seen my son happily playing with Denisha, Caden, and Wynter, as well as being carried by Diamond as he hugs her. Moments like those can only make someone smile and hope that God will use them for building His kingdom with the Franklins. It needs to be said that there have been those moments of joy at ARPC with the Franklin children. A note on this matter: the Pattillo family has no ill will towards Miss Franklin over February 6th, or anyone else in the Franklin household, and we will continue to pray for them. And that's all.

Question from Dr. Burgreen: So, in your testimony, you gave many examples of foul language in some of her interactions. Do you believe Miss Franklin was aware, was she aware, of her outbursts and demands? And what I'm driving at is a sense of understanding. Did she understand her obedience? Does she understand how her family has negatively impacted the church?

Answer: Well, she's been spoken to on several occasions—gently confronted. I've been given excuses such as, You don't understand—this is my time to worship and I don't need to worry about them, I need somebody else to do it. So, she does understand. And it's been to no effect.

Testimony of Mrs. Nancy Pattillo, May 14th, 2022

As a witness to count 4, sinful anger, I, Nancy Pattillo, submit to you details to the best of my recollection regarding an encounter on Sunday, February 6th, 2022, with Tawana Franklin. [Excuse me.] To explain a bit of the background that day, one of the children began responding disrespectfully to Miss Michele Haag, one of the Sunday School teachers, before the worship service was to begin. I then supported Miss Michele in the conversation and attempted to sort the situation in preparation to have a reverent worship service. This was a concern as all but one of the children are often unruly during Sunday School and worship. Tawana called me shortly after the children returned home from church. When I answered the call, she instantly began yelling at me. I asked her to stop yelling and talk to me. She never asked what led to the necessity of the conversation with the child. She only had heard from the child that a conversation occurred and called me out of anger to yell about its occurrence. I [garbled—"said to"?] her during that call that if she had a problem with how the children's problem was being addressed, she should be present to police them herself. I will note that Tawana did not call Miss Michele regarding this situation for which she was livid. At this time, I do not recall additional details regarding this conversation. We have been praying for Tawana and for her children, for open hearts, reverence, attendance, and the Lord's mercy. These prayers . . . [garbled].

Testimony of Mrs. Penelope Smith, May 14th, 2022

I was witness to a phone call between Pastor Smith and Tawana Franklin in which she admitted that she had lied about the reason her children had not attended church recently.

Amended testimony of Dr. Frank J. Smith, May 15th, 2022

During the night, I realized that perhaps I should have mentioned a potential line of defense that Tawana may have pursued had she been present. From time to time, she has mentioned her fear of a couple of the men in the congregation, one in particular, with respect to the safety of her sons. She has no rational basis for this fear, neither in terms of the men themselves nor with regard to the setting, as our building is an open plan with no hidden cubby holes. Nevertheless, she has claimed, as she did during a telephone conversation in mid-April, that her motherly instinct tells her that these men are pedophiles. (I will add that during that phone conversation a

few weeks ago, she drew a distinction between whites and blacks, in that whites trust their kids around anyone and anybody.)

The degree to which to believe her perspective on this matter is difficult to discern. On the one hand, she would often keep eyes on one of the gentlemen, or, if she was not in attendance, delegate that responsibility to her teenage daughter Diamond. On the other hand, her concern for her sons' safety did not stop her from sending her children without her being present, and, on occasion, from sending her children without either she or Diamond being at church. So, it may very well be a real fear of hers, while, at the same time, it is more along the line of an excuse for not coming to church—similar to numerous other excuses that she has offered.

In that same telephone conversation referenced above, she eventually agreed to “come to court,” and expressed that perhaps the men before whom the hearing would be conducted would be able to come up with an answer as to why she hasn't been coming to church—that is, to do something to her so she could get over these feelings about these two men who she finds are creepy.

As you can imagine, I was very concerned if she were to offer this kind of testimony, especially in open court. One of these two men is well aware of her belief that he's a pedophile, and is very offended by that claim. I consulted with Professor Tom Reid, Pastor Phil Pockras, and Elder Scott Hunt as to how to handle her testimony, particularly with regard to what could be inflammatory remarks. Based on my consultation with them, I had determined that we as a court would go into executive session if Tawana were to begin to give this type of testimony. Of course, Tawana was not in attendance to tell her side of the story. And I was therefore facing a dilemma. The allegations that she may have made in making her defense, had not been entered into the record. If they had been via her sworn testimony, they could have been subjected to cross-examination and rebuttal. I was hesitant to mention to the court this perspective of hers, since, as far I can see, it has no rational basis. (Tawana got upset with the one gentleman several years ago when he gave one of her young sons a cookie. As far as I know, there is no other incident that has occurred.) The written testimony I presented had been prepared with the understanding that Tawana would be there in order to present her view, and therefore that material would have been before the court, if at all, through that means.

Please forgive me for amending my testimony in this fashion at this time. However, for the sake of my own conscience and also giving witness to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I thought that I should do so.

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

Atlanta Judicial Commission

May 14, 2022

Miss Tawana Franklin

Dear Miss Franklin:

It is our sad duty to inform you that you have been found guilty of the five charges that were preferred against you, as follows:

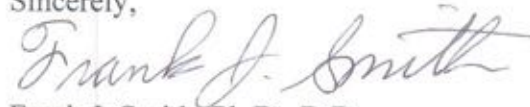
- (1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment): a consistent pattern of not regularly attending church since at least January 2022 until now
- (2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment): as seen by the failure to attend worship on a regular basis
- (3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment): as seen by the fact that your children have many times not attended worship
- (4) Sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment): expressed particularly in phone conversations on February 6, 2022
- (5) Lying (against the 9th Commandment): as seen by your having lied recently about why your children were not attending church

The court voted unanimously (3-0-0) to impose the censure of suspension, which will be pronounced publicly immediately after the worship service of Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church tomorrow afternoon. We will also be presenting an explanation of the judgment and how we will proceed going forward, as well as providing a couple of pastoral letters—one to you and one to the congregation.

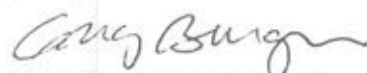
You are entitled to a copy of the minutes and all other records. If you desire to appeal this decision, you have 30 days from tomorrow to do so.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.
Moderator of the Commission
(770)241-3946



Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D.
Clerk of the Commission
(662)418-0591

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

Atlanta Judicial Commission

Pastoral Letter to the Congregation

May 14, 2022

Dear Members and Friends of Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church:

As you know, over the past several weeks, we have been dealing with a judicial matter. Thankfully, we don't have to handle such matters very often. But when we do, it is good to reflect on what has happened and the impact it has had on the congregation.

I know that at least some of you may be concerned about the proceeding and the resulting discipline. First, please be aware that we have been dealing with Tawana for a long time—our action was not hasty in any way. Further, I want to assure you that absence from the Lord's house is not always necessarily a ground for discipline. What Tawana was found guilty of was that she willfully and without valid reason absented herself from worship over an extensive period of time. Not only that but she also refused to attend the judicial proceeding even though she had been summoned, and had agreed to the date and time, and had indicated just a few days ago that she would attend, knowing that she would be able to present her perspective. So please do not worry that you will be charged as Tawana was as long as you have a valid reason for non-attendance, and as long as you do not display a similar pattern of sin including sinful anger and lying. And even if you do sin in these ways, you can avoid judicial process by means of swift and humble repentance. I John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear."

Therefore, in learning from the Lord's providence through the discipline of Christ's Church, there are three themes I would like to develop: pain; war; and love. Pain, war, and love.

First, pain. There is a book that is entitled *PAIN: The Gift Nobody Wants*. The book focuses on the experiences of people in a leprosy colony. As you may be aware, leprosy is a very serious disease, and one of its conditions is that the patient is no longer able to feel pain in his extremities (fingers, hands, feet). Now, we might think that being free from pain is a good thing. However, a leper who can no longer feel pain will often do dangerous things, such as touching a hot stove, without realizing how bad that is. And so, pain can be a valuable thing, as much as we usually don't want it. With regard to this present judicial matter, I know that for many of us, this entire situation has been very painful. And yet, none of the pain which we have experienced has taken our Lord by surprise. Indeed, He has from all eternity ordained it. And He has done so for our good. I have often said that this ministry in inner-city Atlanta will stretch you beyond what you can imagine. But Jesus uses such

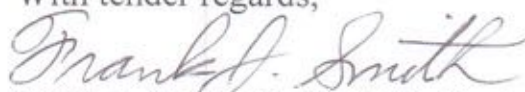
stretching in order to humble us, and also perhaps to address a tendency in us toward self-righteousness. The apostle Paul tells us: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” He goes on to say: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Galatians 6:1-4). Yes, we’ve experienced a lot of pain and turmoil in dealing with this matter. But God has been working in and through this situation, via His word, which is the sword of the Spirit, which has been cutting in all directions in our midst. He has been pruning us as individuals and as a community of believers, preparing us for further service.

Second, war. We are in quite the fight. And when I say that, I don’t mean simply on a local level in dealing with this one particular matter. What we have experienced is one little skirmish in a global war in which the church as a whole is engaged. Nobody likes to fight, but sometimes it is necessary. The church in this world is called the church militant, as it is called upon to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And fighting this spiritual war is a bloody business—not literally, of course, but emotionally and in our souls and spirits, it is a tough, desperate battle. So, as we fight, we should remember that this series of events is just one tiny little piece of the whole war, and yet also an important piece, as we are dealing with souls and with eternal consequences. We fight not in order to destroy sinners; we fight in order that they may be saved.

Third, love. In this spiritual warfare in which we have been engaged, love is the key. Love is the motivation. Love is the method. James, the brother of our Lord, reminds us: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). And so, we must love our erring sister. We must love her better than we love ourselves. We must express to her our love and concern. And we must show love as we humbly and regularly pray for her full restoration.

Friends, let me urge you to embrace the pain; fight the good fight of faith; and show forth your love.

With tender regards,



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., Pastor

Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

Atlanta Judicial Commission

May 15, 2022

Dear Tawana:

Firstly, I want you to know how much our hearts go out to you. You have had a hard life, and the struggles you have faced have had a lot to do with how you react sometimes.

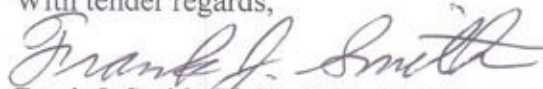
Secondly, however, your circumstances should not dictate how you respond to adversity. You are still responsible for acting in a proper, God-honoring way, no matter what the situation may be.

Thirdly, let me counsel you with regard to something you said to me a few weeks ago. In speaking of your relationship to the church, at one point, you cried, "I *tried!* I *tried!*" Tawana, I am sure that you did. I am sure that there were times when you did try to live up to what you regarded as the church's expectations. But at this point, what I want to say to you is, "Stop trying!" Stop trying—that is to say, stop trying in your own strength. If you try to live a life of obedience by means of your goodness or strength, you will fall flat on your face every time. You will forever face failure and frustration—you will never, ever, be happy. No, you must learn to look to Jesus and lean on Him and trust Him with your life. In this regard, please note that love and obedience go together.

Your doing what is right is not simply a matter of checking a particular box and figuring that you've done your duty. No, Jesus is clear: He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). In the epistle of First John, we read, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk just as He walked" (I John 2:3-6). "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (I John 5:3).

Trying to work enough on our own strength to please God and man is a temptation with which we all wrestle. And my prayer is that you would learn to lean upon Christ and look to Him, even in your struggles with sin.

With tender regards,



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., Pastor

Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

Atlanta Judicial Commission

Explanation of Verdict

May 15, 2022

The three members of the judicial commission emailed Tawana Franklin last night to communicate to her our judgment in the matter. By a vote of 3-0, we unanimously found her guilty of the five charges, and also voted to impose a censure of suspension from the Lord's Table.

In reaching these conclusions, we took into account a number of factors. First, we were aware that it is always best, if possible, to use the least amount of censure in any given situation. Second, we were also aware, on the other hand, that this latest judicial action was not the first attempt, but the third attempt, over a period of a year and a half, to call Miss Franklin back to a faithful walk with Christ. We therefore felt compelled not only to take stronger measures than the admonition and the rebuke that had been employed in the past, but also to ensure that this matter remains under judicial review so as to ensure that Tawana is able to demonstrate her repentance over a period of time.

Tawana's actions and attitudes have not only caused hurt to herself, but also have caused hurt to many in the congregation. We know that Tawana is hurting, and as elders who care for sheep, our hearts go out to her. She has been under a lot of stress. In many ways, she has lived a hard life and experienced pain and brokenness. At the same time, her actions and attitudes have not been pleasing to the Lord. And though the church has been extraordinarily patient with her, there comes a point at which the church must exercise discipline—which is why we conducted the proceeding yesterday. Indeed, Tawana herself has acknowledged that she has had problems with sinful anger, at least in part because of racial bias. Part of the healing process that we trust will take place through this discipline is to counsel her as she works through these matters. There is no magic pill that she can take; we offer no hocus pocus. However, there is an answer to these hurts and pains, which is found in Jesus. The question is, Will Tawana receive the answer? This time of probation will tell.

For the moment, then, Tawana is **not** excommunicated. Rather, her privilege of coming to the sacrament of communion has been suspended until such time as she is able to be fully reconciled with the congregation and also able to be a joyful participant in the life of the church.

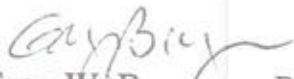
All three of us on the judicial commission have been praying for this entire situation, and we will continue to do so. We anticipate that we will gather again in three to four months in order to assess where Tawana is at, and how to proceed. Will things be about the same? Or, will they be worse? Or, will she have totally and thoroughly repented and given such evidence that everyone is able to see it? That last outcome, of course, is the one which we

will they be worse? Or, will she have totally and thoroughly repented and given such evidence that everyone is able to see it? That last outcome, of course, is the one which we very much desire, as does everyone in the congregation. In the meantime, we, the members of this judicial panel, will be communicating with Tawana on a regular basis, perhaps every week or two, to see how she is doing and how we can help her in her spiritual life. We are not her enemies. We desire nothing but the best for her and her family. We know that discipline is not a pleasant thing. But discipline is not designed to destroy someone but to restore him or her. And it is our intention to help her to heal.

Sincerely,



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.
Moderator of the Commission



Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D.
Clerk of the Commission



Drew Poplin, M.Div.
Member of the Commission

Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery

Atlanta Judicial Commission

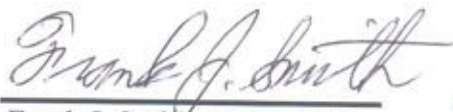
May 15, 2022

Whereas you, Tawana Lashaun Franklin, have been found guilty by this court of Christ's House, the decision of the court is that you are deserving of the censure of suspension. Now, therefore, for your own spiritual good and for the peace and purity of the Church, receive the pronouncement of this censure.

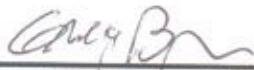
You, Tawana Lashaun Franklin, have been found guilty of the following sins:

- (1) Willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment): a consistent pattern of not regularly attending church since at least January 2022 until now
- (2) Refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment): as seen by the failure to attend worship on a regular basis
- (3) Willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment): as seen by the fact that your children have many times not attended worship
- (4) Sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment): expressed particularly in phone conversations on February 6, 2022
- (5) Lying (against the 9th Commandment): as seen by your having lied recently about why your children were not attending church

This court, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, sadly and solemnly suspends you from the privileges of church membership, including participation in the sacraments, until you have given satisfactory evidence of true repentance, and have been restored to good standing by this court.



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.
Moderator of the Commission



Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D.
Clerk of the Commission



Drew Poplin, M.Div.
Member of the Commission

December 1, 2022

Dear Tawana:

It is my sad duty to inform you that the Atlanta Judicial Commission today, after extensive and careful discussion, voted to impose the censure of excommunication upon you. This censure will be pronounced after the worship service on December 18, 2022.

You will have 30 days from that date in order to appeal this censure. I would be happy to help you with any appeal that you would make, including, directing you to someone who could counsel you in that regard.

Meanwhile, let me again say that you and your children are still welcome to attend the church. As a matter of fact, we would encourage you to do so. This censure would mean that you would no longer be a member of the visible church and would imply that your soul is in jeopardy. But our hope and prayer would be that even this censure will be used by God to bring you to genuine faith and repentance.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Smith

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

Pastor, Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

December 18, 2022

Dear Members and Friends of Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church:

One of the most difficult and distressing things I have had to do as a minister is to pronounce the sentence of excommunication. Thankfully, in my 42 years of ordained ministry, I have, up until today, had to make that pronouncement only twice. But today will mark the third time that I will have performed that duty.

Tawana Franklin first started attending the worship services of this congregation in the summer of 2016. In February 2020, she professed her faith and then, along with her children, was baptized in a service of public worship. However, there was an obvious spiritual struggle in her soul. A couple of months after she joined the church, she said to me, with reference to Covid-19, that I was “scariest than the virus.” In other words, she realized that unlike other churches which she had attended, we meant business and were very serious about these religious matters. I took her statement as an encouraging one, in that she recognized the Spiritual nature of what she had done in committing herself to the church. At the same time, it soon was evident that this inner battle was one in which the wrong side was beginning to prevail.

As many of you know, from the time of her public profession, she became very erratic in her attendance. In November 2020, the elders admonished her. For a few weeks after that censure, she was faithful in coming to church. But then, in early 2021, she became unfaithful again—a pattern that continued throughout the spring and summer. In September 2021, the elders imposed a stronger discipline, that of rebuke. She showed the same pattern as before—a brief period of church attendance, followed by long periods of non-attendance. Finally, in March 2022, the elders preferred charges against her and referred the matter to the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery, which appointed a special judicial commission.

This special commission, the Atlanta Judicial Commission, scheduled a hearing to which she was summoned. We consulted with her as to when we would schedule that hearing, so as to accommodate her, and she agreed to appear at the set date and time (May 14, 2022 at 11:00 AM) so that she could present her side of the story. We were under the impression that she would show, but she was a no-show.

574 Western Avenue NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30314
Telephone: 770-241-3946 Email: franksmith76@gmail.com

The Commission proceeded to take testimony and receive evidence on the five charges. She was found guilty of all five charges. The Commission, after careful consideration, decided to impose a censure of suspension upon her—that is, barring her from the Lord’s Table until she expressed sorrow and repented. Over a period of weeks, all three members of the Commission reached out to her in order to encourage her and to call her to repentance. There was no repentance.

In late October, I made arrangements to swing by her apartment on October 26th. I brought a pizza with me as a token of friendship. I explained that the Commission was planning to meet on Monday, October 31, 2022, in order to consider her case and what action, if any, to take. I thought that she and I had a good conversation. She volunteered that she wanted to come back to church and indeed that she would come back that next Lord’s Day, October 30, 2022. Three days later, I sent her an email. In it, I reminded her of the hurt and pain she had caused at Atlanta RPC, and then stated that, in order for her to come back, she was going to have make things right with those whom she had offended. Not only must she apologize but she must seek the forgiveness of those whom she had hurt. I stated that she needed to acknowledge the guilt of the sins of which she had been found guilty; and that she needed to participate, cheerfully and responsibly, in the services of the church. And I also said that she must not ask for money. In emphasizing that she should not ask for money, I reminded her that she herself had told me that she was glad to have the financial angle divorced from her participating in the church. I concluded with these words:

If you’re serious about your spiritual walk, you will do these things. No one is expecting you to be perfect, Tawana. But we are expecting you to be sincere. Whether you are or not, only time will tell.

You’ve heard the old saying from baseball, “Three strikes and you’re out.” Well, you’ve already had three strikes. You were admonished. Then you were rebuked. And back in May, you were suspended from communion. You’ve got one more chance. I want you to know that the church is not playing games with you. If you don’t show yourself to be genuinely sorry for your sins and sincerely seeking to walk with Christ, then it will be “Four strikes and you’re out.”

You mentioned during our meeting on Wednesday how lenient I had been with you in the past. Sometimes I have been too lenient and have not shown you what is called “tough love.” I promise you, Tawana, there’s no more fooling around. This is your last chance.

Tawana, we love you and want only the best for you and your family. We are willing to welcome you back with open arms. But you’ve got to play your part by being faithful with regard to [what I wrote] above.

.....

If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask. Tawana, I am the eternal optimist, always looking at things through rose-colored glasses. Please do not disappoint me. More importantly, please make sure for the sake of your own soul and the good of your children that you do what is right.

Upon reflection, the members of the Atlanta Judicial Commission agreed to postpone its meeting for several weeks, in order to give Tawana more time to express her repentance and to show that she was serious about wanting to come back to church.

Two days after I met with Tawana, she texted me, asking for money. We exchanged text messages on Saturday: she said that she was still coming to church even if I didn’t give her money, and I informed her that, as indicated in my email letter, no, we would not be giving her money. The next morning, Sunday, October 30th, she texted me, saying: “Good morning. I won’t be attending church... I look forward to coming next Sunday tho....” I responded, “Okay.” The following Sunday, November 6th, I texted her at 11:54 AM, saying, “Tawana, I plan to arrive at 2:15. Remember, we gained the hour last night, as we’re now on Eastern Standard Time. Will your children be coming as well?” I received no reply. I arrived around 2:18 PM and knocked on the door of the apartment. There was no answer. I knocked again and waited a few minutes, and just before driving off, Diamond came out. We chatted for a few minutes but she did not attend the church service that day (though she did attend the following week).

Instead of meeting on October 31st, the Commission had delayed its meeting for about a month in order to give Tawana more time to get right with God. On November 29th and November 30th, I informed her that we would be meeting on December 1st, and that she was welcome to attend via Zoom in order to express repentance or anything else she desired. She did not attend.

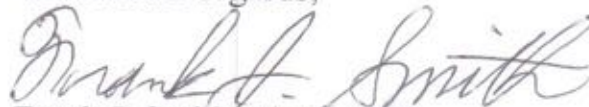
At our meeting on December 1, 2022, we, the members of the Atlanta Judicial Commission, voted unanimously to impose the church's highest censure, excommunication. We did so because of Tawana's obvious lack of repentance from the sins of which she had been found guilty on May 14, 2022. Of course, there is always a provisional nature to the censures of the church—repentance is always an option, and, in point of fact, one of the reasons for church discipline is to lead people to repentance.

Furthermore, we want to be very clear that the church has no authority to send anyone to hell. It is God alone who sends people to hell. And it is God alone who bestows His grace in order to bring people to salvation. But it is our duty as elders in the church to pronounce judgments which reflect what God Himself has sovereignly decided and as to how He has judged. When the elders turn the keys of the kingdom, they are reflecting Jesus' words in Matthew 18, by seeking to discern that which has already been determined in heaven and to judge accordingly.

Our action does not determine anyone's eternal destiny. That right belongs only to God. But at the same time, no one should regard the matter of excommunication lightly. Twenty-five years ago, I pronounced excommunication upon a relative of mine who had abandoned the faith. When I read the censure, the congregation was obviously affected—you could have heard a pin drop on the carpet. A few years later, that young man was killed in an automobile accident. God is not mocked. You don't play games with Him or with His gospel. Indeed, dealing with Him is scarier than the virus.

And so, as we come to this moment in the life of our congregation, may each of us examine himself or herself to check for hypocrisy. And let us continue to pray that God would grant Tawana the grace of repentance before it is eternally too late.

With tender regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank J. Smith". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid, with some overlapping letters.

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

Pastor, Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

December 18, 2022

Dear Tawana:

It is my sad duty to inform you that the Atlanta Judicial Commission today imposed upon you the censure of excommunication.

You have 30 days from when you are informed of this action in order to file a notice of appeal with regard to this censure, including at least a brief statement of the reasons for the appeal. You would have at least 60 days in order to file a full statement of your reasons for why you believe this judgment to be unjust or inappropriate. As I mentioned previously, I am very willing to help you by directing you to someone who could advise you and assist you with your appeal.

Tawana, nobody in the congregation is happy with your having been excommunicated. Everyone continues to pray that you would repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to His church.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Smith

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

Pastor, Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church

**Pronouncement of Judgment
by the Atlanta Judicial Commission
of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
December 18, 2022**

You, Tawana Lashun Franklin, have been found guilty of the sins of (1) willful neglect of attending worship (against the 2nd Commandment), (2) refusing to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (against the 4th Commandment), (3) willful failure to ensure that your children are attending worship (against the 5th Commandment), (4) sinful anger (against the 6th Commandment), and (5) lying (against the 9th Commandment), sins deserving of the extreme penalty of excommunication, yet you continue obstinate and give no evidence of repentance, although efforts have been made to restore you. Now, therefore, this Court, constituted in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and acting under His authority, hereby excommunicates you, removing you from the membership of the Church, outside of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. May God have mercy upon you by awakening you to repentance and bringing you to righteousness, so that you may be among the redeemed in the Day of the Lord Jesus.



Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., Moderator



Greg W. Burgreen, Ph.D., Clerk