

**The Atlanta Commission/TGB for
Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church**
Report to Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery
March 2023

The Atlanta Commission/TGB for Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church met nine times since the stated meeting of the Presbytery in March 2022.

Membership

In 2022, we received two new communicant members and at one point during the year had a total membership of 21 (thirteen communicants and eight non-communicants). However, towards the end of the year, in the space of a month, we lost a third of our membership, through death and discipline. At the end of 2022, our membership was 14 (twelve communicants and two non-communicants).

Contacts and Prospects

We come across a lot of people in our ministry, some of whom remain anonymous to us. However, we keep track of those whose names we are able to learn and for whom we are able to glean contact information for possible follow-up. In 2022, we made a total of 142 contacts. Some of these are not necessarily prospects for church membership (examples would include out-of-towners whom we might happen to meet); nevertheless, we try to place such people on the Penny's Pen email list. Others, though, can be considered potential recruits for Atlanta RPC.

Attendance and Visitors

In 2020, the average attendance (for the 45 weeks we met for public worship) was 24.56. (The figure for 2020 includes folks who joined the service by telephone. If those attending remotely are not included, then the average attendance would have been 23.11.) In 2021, the average attendance was 26.73. (If those attending via telephone were not included, the figure would have been 23.12.) In 2022, the average attendance was 19.84 (or 16.62 if those attending via telephone were not included). This past year, we met for worship a total of 50 times. No service was held on January 16th (due to inclement weather) nor on May 29th (due to widespread illness).

In 2022, there were no fewer than 43 first-time visitors in attendance at a worship service.

Worship

Customarily, in the worship service, we sing five psalm selections (including a doxology after the benediction). In 2022, we observed the sacrament of communion four times. Our ongoing goal is to have the Lord's Supper on a quarterly basis.

In 2022, the pastor offered messages from a variety of texts. Up through April, he preached on Revelation 4-7. He did a three-part series on church discipline (its purpose, procedure, and power) from Matthew 18:15-20. Other series were on the three lost things (sheep, coin, and son) in Luke 15; and the books of Joel and Obadiah. He has been preaching a series on Ezra, taking a break from it between chapters 4 and 5 in order to consider Haggai. Standalone messages have included “Reverence vs. Hardness” (Proverbs 28:14); “Fear of Man, Trust in God” (Proverbs 29:25); “New Creation in Christ” (II Corinthians 5:17); “Bible Meditation” (Psalm 119:15); and, on the last Lord’s Day of the year (December 25th), “Majestic Kingship” (Psalm 93). The four communion messages were as follows: “Over the Brook Kidron” (John 18:1-9); “Fencing of the Table” (Ezekiel 43); “The Egyptian Hallel: Exodus” (Psalm 114); and “The Egyptian Hallel: Humility” (Psalm 115).

Four others have also filled the pulpit this past year: Pastor Drew Poplin; Elder T.J. Pattillo; Elder Ben Stahl of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; and a member of our church, Daiyaan Winston, who read a Spurgeon sermon on June 5th, a Sabbath when no one else was available.

Sunday School

Currently, we offer three classes: adult (taught by Elder T.J. Pattillo), older children (taught by Miss Amy Work), and younger children (taught by Mrs. Michele Haag).

Church Life

Every Lord’s Day, we experience warm and sincere fellowship. There is a genuine sense of *koinonia* amongst our people, and a real caring for one another. In numerous informal ways, folks maintain contact with each other during the week.

Discipline Matters

Due to the difficulty the Atlanta TGB would have had in obtaining a quorum that could meet in person for the conduct of a judicial matter, Presbytery’s Ad Interim Commission established a special Atlanta Judicial Commission (AJC). On May 15th, after a judicial hearing, the AJC suspended Tawana Franklin from the sacraments. There being a lack of repentance by Miss Franklin, the AJC imposed the censure of excommunication on December 18th. Her being erased from the roll resulted in the removal of her five covenant children as well.

Discipline of a different sort—not ecclesiastical but administrative—was meted out by the Atlanta TGB with respect to a fellow whose presence had become disruptive. By barring him from being on the property, not only he but his girlfriend and two of her sons no longer attended—another factor in lower attendance figures in 2022 in comparison to 2021.

A Death in the Family

For the fourth time in five years, our little flock experienced a death in 2022. Larry Wayne Kerr, who had been suffering from congestive heart failure, passed away on November 23rd at the age

of 66. A memorial service was held in conjunction with the regular worship service on December 11th. The message, “The Preciousness of God’s Law,” based on Psalm 119:71-72, reflected his great love for and eating up of Scripture the last month or so of his life.

Staff Workers

We are blessed with a wonderful cadre of staff workers. For a number of years, we have benefited from the hard work and insight of Miss Amy Work, Mrs. Michele Haag, Elder T.J. Pattillo, Mrs. Nancy Pattillo, and Mrs. Penny Smith. In early 2023, one of our new members, Jonathan Steele, was designated as a staffer. We remain grateful for the faithfulness of these servants.

This past year, the staff has met every few months in order to discuss the ministry and make plans. At a staff meeting in January 2023, a mission statement was approved and then adopted by the Commission.

Ministerial Intern

Since September 2019, Elder T.J. Pattillo has faithfully served as a ministerial intern. In addition to teaching adult Sunday School and helping to pick up people for church, he has shown a lot of initiative. He received his B.Th. from Metro Atlanta Seminary in May 2022 and is presently a full-time student at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Leadership Development

One of our goals for 2023 is the development of other leadership, not only for the meeting of present needs, but also in anticipation of eventual organization of the mission church as a congregation.

In the meantime, we could really, really use a deacon! (Any volunteers want to move to Georgia?)

Pastoral Activity

In 2022, the pastor engaged in at least 302 counseling occasions. Sometimes this counseling might last only a few minutes; other times, it took hours. He has counseled many people in the congregation, but also has counseled others who do not attend ARPC, and still others from across the RPCNA and in other branches of the church on a wide variety of topics, including ecclesiastical matters.

Among his academic pursuits was an article, “Robert Lewis Dabney’s War on Sensualism,” which is slated to be published in the upcoming edition of *The Confessional Presbyterian*. He is very close to finishing a biography of his father entitled, *God’s Man From Brooklyn: The Life and Times of a Twentieth-Century Minister*. Another pending project, which is more practical than academic, is a booklet, *’Til Death Us Do Part: Meditations on Courtship and Marriage*.

Outreach

The pastor's wife continues to write Penny's Pen, with a new article about three or four times per year. There are almost 800 names on the email list.

The weekly pulpit messages are placed on SermonAudio.

We are still trying to find ways to establish an effective "presence" in our neighborhood. Among the ideas broached is setting up a prayer table in the park two blocks away.

Meanwhile, most of our new attenders have come through the most effective means, viz., as a result of word-of-mouth.

Renovating a Building

We have been trying for some time to have renovations done to the building. Twice in 2022 (June and September), a volunteer crew from Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC), Buford, Georgia, under the leadership of Sam Trupiano, has come in order to do demolition work. Taking down a ceiling and non-loadbearing walls has revealed the necessity for jack posts to be installed in order to shore up some beams. The most critical need is repair of the roof, which is leaking. A roof inspector has determined that a full replacement of the roof is not necessary. Other renovations will focus on the area we plan to use as the new sanctuary, including the replacement of cross beams, installing a new ceiling and lights, and putting in a mini-split HVAC unit.

Finances

Even though we have several thousand dollars less in our general fund at the end of 2022 in comparison to 2021, our finances remain strong.

In January 2023, we placed moneys from both the general account and the building fund into 11-month CDs earning about 4% interest. Our plan is to pay off the 20-year mortgage by 2025—that is, fifteen years early.

The financial statement for 2022 and the budget for 2023 are attached.

Reflecting on 2022

This past year has been extraordinarily challenging. Even the five-week sabbatical for the pastor and his wife turned into a bit of a disaster, with numerous difficulties that interrupted what was to be a time of rest and recuperation. Furthermore, we have been disappointed by the necessary exercise of discipline, and the resultant decrease in attendance. Nevertheless, we look forward to what the Lord is going to do in 2023.

Mission Statement

The following mission statement was adopted by the Atlanta Commission on January 19, 2023.

Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church aims to be a faithful church, in doctrine, worship, personal piety, church life, fellowship, outreach, and hospitality, with specific focus on downtown Atlanta, demonstrating the love of Jesus to all people, and seeking to impact the Atlanta metro area by modeling a covenantal Christ-like community and by the multiplying of other Reformed Presbyterian congregations.

Planning for the Future

Our goal is that Atlanta RPC be formally organized in the next year or two—that is, by 2025 at the latest. The year 2025 will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the beginning of this ministry, and the sixth anniversary of it being established as a mission church. Already, in 2022, we began paying the Synod assessment (in our case, \$1,604)—a sign that we are beginning to shoulder our share of denominational responsibility. We look forward to taking our place among the other organized congregations in the RPCNA constellation.

Prayer Requests

1. For a deacon, who could bring expertise in helping us to discern and to meet diaconal needs.
2. For the raising up of leadership, so we can be prepared for formal organization.
3. For strength and stamina for the leadership, that they might not be discouraged or lose heart.
4. For courage and boldness in the gospel, so the church would be a faithful witness for King Jesus.
5. For the building renovation, so that the building might be not only attractive but also useful in presenting a visible witness of the kingdom.

Recommendations

1. That Presbytery grant \$4,000.00 for the work of Atlanta RPC for 2023.
2. That Presbytery provide \$2,000.00 for the expenses of the Atlanta Commission.
3. That the membership of the Atlanta Commission consist of the current members.
4. That the report of the Atlanta Commission be approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank J. Smith

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