

Report of the Columbus Visitation Committee  
October 2019

Fathers and Brothers of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery,

Your committee visited the Columbus congregation on October 19-20, 2019. We met with the elders (Jeff Jones, Andy McCracken, Gary McNamee, and Ed Schisler) on Saturday afternoon and again on the Lord's Day afternoon. We enjoyed fellowship with the congregation with a hot dog roast at the fire pit on the church grounds on Saturday evening. On the Lord's Day, we attended the adult Bible school class, morning worship, and evening worship. The congregation hosted us warmly, and we are grateful.

In summary, we found a "decent-and-in-order" congregation and rejoice in the good work of the Lord.

The Lord has blessed the congregation with faithful worship services full of good preaching, strong singing, earnest prayers, and robust fellowship of the saints. By choosing the current adult Sabbath School class using Peacemakers materials, the session is wisely and intentionally choosing material to deal with pressing needs (see more below). We noted the many professions of faith among the young people as recounted in the minutes of the session and observed healthy zeal among the young people. Andy McCracken has committed himself to the youth for many years, and others have faithfully taught them too. Much energy has been given by members of the congregation to the Paideia homeschool group, and the return on investment has been strong. We are encouraged by the men the church has sent and is seeking to send into ordained ministry. The funds from the Home Mission Board Resident-In-Training program that support Gary McNamee are obviously being well-invested. The Lord has given the church members of a wide range of ages. Partially due to the healthy economy of Columbus, the church has a steady stream of visitors. The deacons are well organized. They have led the congregation to care for the building well and have invested many hours in restoring the entrance of the building after a car struck the building a few years ago. The church is well positioned in the community. The church is deeply invested in the church planting work in Louisville, and though not many people in Columbus are actively involved in the work, it is clear that the congregation supports the work. The session is grateful for the good working relationship they have among themselves and they are thankful for many committed members of the church. The many substantial prayer requests in the evening service the week we attended afforded a quick look into the heart of the congregation, and we were thankful to see the Lord at work in their midst.

The congregation has faced a number of challenges over the last few years that have not been easy. The building suffered significant damage when it was struck by a car a few years ago. George and Danielle Gregory's family faced many health challenges, and their departure was not easy. One discipline case has been particularly challenging. A number of families have departed in the last year, some as a result of moving away, but others have left for a variety of

reasons while remaining local. Long-time elder Butch Shoop's resignation and departure have been difficult for all parties involved. The visitation team took time to wrestle through these challenging topics with the elders and give encouragement and counsel as able. We praise God for the progress he has given in these areas and pray that he will yet give more grace as necessary.

In addition to these past and present challenges, it is evident that there are still more challenges facing the congregation and session. Andy McCracken may well leave for Australia soon, depending on the granting of a work visa by the Australian government. Gary McNamee is considering where the Lord would have him serve as he helps in Louisville and considers other options. The Lord has blessed the congregation financially, but, humanly speaking, it very well may not be possible to continue all of the current commitments to the present staff. New elders need to be raised up in the not-too-distant future. There is also some concern for those who are on the fringe of the congregation who need to be drawn in and take a greater sense of responsibility for the congregation. The session desires that the congregation would become more naturally adept at ministering across socio-economic barriers and that the congregation would grow in its warmth and ability to enfold new members through hospitality and other forms of ministry.

Your committee is thankful for what we see the Lord doing in Columbus and we were glad to be able to come along-side the elders to "shepherd the shepherds" as we rejoiced in the blessings God has given and wrestled with the elders regarding the challenges they and the congregation face. In addition to encouraging you to "excel still more," we offer the following words of counsel and encouragement to the elders in conclusion:

1. Keep your eyes on Jesus and lead the congregation first of all to grow in being what God wants you to be more than doing what God wants you to do.
2. You have acknowledged that sometimes you as elders can perhaps be too directive. We encourage you to reach out to those who may still be feeling some tension and ask how you might build trust with them in fresh ways.
3. Focus on training and raising up new leaders in the congregation.

Respectfully Submitted,

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