

**Petition to the 2024 Synod of the RPCNA Concerning the RP Women's Association  
From the Orlando Session**

Fathers and Brothers,

At the conclusion of Synod 2023, we had hoped the matter of the RPWA and Rev. Jim Wright had been placed behind us. The synod admonished the RP Home for sinning against Jim Wright by suing him in a court of law and urged them to repent of this sin and to make it right through a letter of repentance. Before proceeding, note that the Power of Attorney has given written permission for the Orlando Session and this Synod of the RPCNA to discuss this matter.

Following synod, weeks passed and weeks became months with no acknowledgment of sin; no repentance; no submitting to the instruction of the synod.

On December 20, 2023, Rev. Eshelman communicated to the RP Home and the board of the RPWA reminding them of the instruction that synod provided. The president of the board, Marilyn Roll, responded with an acknowledgement of reception. On December 27, 2023, Marilyn Roll and Bill Weir responded with a letter defending their position and upholding that they did not do anything wrong. They stated:

**“We need to state that, given the whole history of your financial interactions with the RP Home from the date of your admission on December 31, 2014 until your discharge on June 12, 2021 and beyond, we do not believe that we have neglected our duty or have sin to confess. We truly wish that your attention to these details earlier, including the monthly billing statements in the latter half of 2021 ,could have eliminated the need to file suit on October 6, 2022.”**

Their letter concludes with:

**“If we have unknowingly erred in our treatment of you, Stephanie, or Steven, we offer our apology.”**

Fathers and brothers, it is our sincere belief that the RP Home's letter would be determined woefully deficient in the context of a session requiring repentance and apology. The difference though is that this admonishment for sin and urging to repent is between this synod—the highest court of our church—and an agency of our church.

Since this matter has yet to be made right, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Withhold all RPM&M funding from the RP Home until they have repented of their sin against Rev. Jim Wright. The fruit of repentance will be demonstrated in a sincere letter asking for forgiveness for their sin and seeking reconciliation with our brother. The moderator of synod, along with a moderator appointed committee, will determine the sufficiency of the repentance and reconciliation. This committee ought to interact with Steve and Stephanie Garrow concerning their concerns related to this matter as well.
2. Synod form a seven man committee to investigate the RP Home's current ministry status in relationship to:
  - A. The home's historical purpose as a home for aged and poor Reformed Presbyterians with a historical emphasis on ministers and missionaries.
  - B. The care specifically provided to Reformed Presbyterians.
  - C. The spiritual care as distinctively Reformed Presbyterian (worship, chapel, ministry).

D. Whether the RP Home ought to continue as a ministry of the RPCNA.

3. That the full contents of this petition and supporting documents (10 pages), along with the actions, be published in the Minutes of Synod.

Humbly Submitted,  
The Orlando Reformed Presbyterian Church Session  
Nathan Eshelman, moderator  
Jonathan Schaefer, clerk  
Kevin Duffey  
Mark Goerner  
Jim Pennington (emeritus)  
Alejandro Ramirez  
Joe Worsham

\* \* \*

Supporting documents beginning with most recent:

**December 27, 2023 Letter from the RPWA/RP Home:**

December 27, 2023

Rev. James Wright  
9813 White Road  
Ocoee, FL 34761

Dear Jim,

As we have just celebrated the birth of our savior Jesus over 2,000 years ago, we are thankful to God for his immeasurable gift to us as our Lord became a human being and then sacrificed his only son on the cross to allow those who believe in his name to enjoy eternal life with Him. What hope and a blessing we have to look forward to!

Jim, we hope that your medical needs and patient care have been adequately supplied for you in the Florida health care facility where you reside. In bits and pieces of information gathered and from your earlier phone conversations with Bill and others, we understand this is the case. This is important to us. The aging process can certainly bring significant challenges for all of us.

We are writing on behalf of the RP Woman's Association. This has been a difficult letter to write since the conclusion of our most recent Synod meeting in June, 2023. Attempts to write began and then stopped. With the close of the year coming quickly we have attempted again to handle Synod's recommendation.

You are aware that the Orlando Session filed a complaint in the church courts against the RP Woman's Association for filing suit in the Allegheny County Common Pleas Court for your unpaid account of over \$11,000. A Judicial Committee for the week of Synod brought back

three recommendations which Synod approved. They included an admonishment of the RPWA for its actions along with two recommendations, one of which reads "We also recommend that Synod urge the RPWA to communicate with Rev. Wright and Steve and Stephanie Garrow, confessing their neglect of duty, with a request for their forgiveness and expressing their commitment to prevent this neglect in the future."

As we stated in our response to Synod on May 20, 2023, we regret that your very personal matter was made public without due consideration to biblical principles, government regulations, and policies that the RP Home must operate under.

We are extremely thankful, Jim, that during the months of February and March, 2023 you made three payments to settle the amount due to RP Home and bring your account to \$0.

We need to state that, given the whole history of your financial interactions with the RP Home from the date of your admission on December 31, 2014 until your discharge on June 12, 2021 and beyond, **we do not believe that we have neglected our duty or have sin to confess. We truly wish that your attention to these details earlier, including the monthly billing statements in the latter half of 2021 ,could have eliminated the need to file suit on October 6, 2022.**

As we explained to members of the Judicial Committee, the regulations demanded by the federal HIPPA laws for health care facilities dictated that we were by law unable to communicate with any outside body or individual — other than your known attorney-in-fact - regarding your finances and personal business. This includes the Orlando Session. In retrospect, if we could have sought better ways to communicate with you, Jim, and your daughter Stephanie, perhaps filing suit could have been avoided. We apologize to you for not having striven further.

We recognize that once Steve and Stephanie contacted the Orlando Session following the October 6 filing date, our communication was set back on track and your account was settled by March 27, 2023 when the Home's legal representative filed a Praecipe to settle, discontinue, and satisfy the matter. Stephanie's providing a copy of Jim's updated July 8, 2021 power of attorney document to Mr. Buchanan on December 31, 2022 was key.

Jim, you have stated numerous times how thankful you were for the many individuals who helped you over the 6 1/2 years that you lived in various units of the RP Home. The Covenant Fellowship Deacons, led by Faith Martin, and Bill Weir transporting you to many medical appointments — including the nine months of bi-weekly trips to the Wound Clinic at Allegheny General Hospital — provided you with the vast support system that you needed. We were most willing to provide this support for you. All of us had to live through the difficult months of the COVID virus, and our records show that you spent two weeks in the Nursing Unit soon after the Pennsylvania Department of Health placed many restrictions on visitation during the heightened COVID months. We are certain that was a very difficult time for you and your family at a distance. Nursing facilities and hospitals over the whole nation had to endure that time. The Chairman of the Board's Finance Committee continues to review our internal collection policies with the Home's Administration to determine how best to improve our policies. Jim, you have served Christ and His church over many years, and we love you and your cheerful disposition. **If we have unknowingly erred in our treatment of you, Stephanie, or Steven, we offer our apology.** We pray that any "cloud" over our relationship will be removed. We know one thing — that in the new heavens we will enjoy the presence of our Lord — together!

Sincerely,

Marilyn Roll, president  
Bill Weir, board treasurer

**Email from Marilyn Roll: December 20, 2023:**

Acknowledging receipt of your email.

**Email to the Board: December 20, 2023:**

Dear Reformed Presbyterian Women's Association (officers of synod on cc),

Greetings and please receive the following information with great humility as I understand that sometimes things fall through the proverbial cracks:

The synod of the RPCNA adjourned nearly six months ago and the following instruction from synod has still not occurred (please see p158 of the MOS):

Recommendation 1: Synod humbly admonishes the RPWA for the sin connected with these communications.

Recommendation 2: Synod urges the RPWA to communicate with Rev. Wright and with Steve and Stephanie Garrow, confessing their neglect of duty, with a request for their forgiveness and expressing their commitment to prevent this neglect in the future.

The synod had admonished the RPWA for sin against a retired minister of the gospel, Rev. Jim Wright. The RPWA has also been instructed to request forgiveness from the Garrows and Rev. Wright. Rev. Wright is in poor health and without urgency on this matter, it is very likely that he could die before this sin has been made right. Again, six months has passed, enough time for your board to meet, write a letter of repentance, ask for forgiveness and move on.

I followed up with the Garrows and they have not heard anything from the Home following synod. Nothing. Sin ought to be swiftly repented of, especially in the light of seeking God's favor.

I request that this repentance and restoration occur as soon as possible, preferably by the end of the year. I am willing to write to bring this to our synod again if needed. Please make this right with this minister and his family, especially knowing that Mr. Wright's health is declining quickly. Candidly, if he dies before this matter is resolved, that is much for a conscience to bear.

Let me know if there's anything I can do to help out.

Warmly in Christ,

Nathan Eshelman

**2023 Minutes of Synod, pages 158-159:** Synod's Judicial Committee of the Day (tasked with reviewing Communication #23-07 GLG re. Orlando & RPWA re. Lawsuits AND Communication

#23-07 RPWA Response to Orlando presented its report). Chairman Alan Noell stood to present this report and he read it aloud, in full. Deliberation ensued.

The Court enjoyed a refreshment break from 10:15-10:30 a.m., resuming its business with the singing of Psalm 16D. Deliberation on the Judicial Committee Report continued.

Recommendation 1 carried, so Synod humbly admonishes the RPWA for the sin connected with these communications. Recommendation 2 carried, so Synod urges the RPWA to communicate with Rev. Wright and with Steve and Stephanie Garrow, confessing their neglect of duty, with a request for their forgiveness and expressing their commitment to prevent this neglect in the future. Recommendation 3 carried, so Synod heartily commends RPWA for their earnest commitment to develop and implement policies/procedures that will prevent lawsuits vs. Christians in the future and that will involve a delinquent party's overseers before a lawsuit becomes necessary.

It was moved, seconded, and carried to approve the report. It was also moved, seconded, and carried to NOT print in our Minutes or Appendix the two communications behind this Report.

### **Report of the Judicial Committee of the Day #23-07 Orlando Petition v. RPWA, MOS 159-160.**

Fathers and Brothers:

Your judicial committee of the day met twice on June 20 and thrice on June 21. We met with representatives from both parties (the RPWA and the Orlando RP Session). As is indicated in the petition from the ORP Session, the relationship between the RP Home and Jim Wright and the Garrows has been heavily strained for many years due to multiple circumstances, including ongoing financial disputes and a history of communication difficulties. The buildup of these historical circumstances undoubtedly has impacted the handling (likely, by both RPWA and the Wright/Garrow family) of the specific financial dispute that brought about this communication from the ORP Session. Nevertheless, we believe that the remit of our committee to be limited to the lawfulness of the lawsuit in question and any associated paths forward.

The RP Home identifies itself on its website as “a Christian, non-profit organization open to all faiths, dedicated to providing quality of care and offering a supportive living environment to older adults.” Their mission reads: “The Reformed Presbyterian Home, guided by the Reformed Presbyterian Woman’s Association, is a charitable, nonprofit organization that provides quality care and a supportive living environment to older adults in a manner consistent with the affection, honor, and care that the Bible teaches us to give our parents.”

The Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 that believers should be competent judges of matters pertaining to this life, such that grievances between believers should not be laid before unbelievers. The introduction of our Book of Discipline expounds our understanding of this principle: “The appropriate church court should take notice of behavior that may lead to civil lawsuits. In particular, one member shall not go to law against another member until the case has been referred to the appropriate court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). The court may employ mediation, arbitration, or another alternate dispute resolution process.”

This committee recognizes that the RP Home was following its established policy and procedures and complying with federal HIPAA laws when it, by action of its executive director,

filed the lawsuit in question. We affirm that the healthcare industry is rife with both state and federal regulations that require strict oversight, and we believe that the RP Home is to be commended for seeking to be thorough and above reproach with respect to such regulations. Nevertheless, policy which ensures compliance with God's Law is to be the norm for Christian organizations and any policy that, even unintentionally, conflicts with God's Law reveals a neglect of a Christian's primary duty.

We were glad to hear that the RP Home, to the knowledge of its president and despite its present policies and procedures, had no previous history of suing believers. Furthermore, we are glad to hear that, without suggestion from our committee, RPWA representatives have volunteered that the policies and procedures which led to this lawsuit will be reviewed and improved following this incident. We look forward to hearing from the RPWA on this matter in their 2024 report.

Even so, when communication was opened between the Orlando RP session and the RPWA (at least between pastor and president), the organization persisted in its course of legal action, despite the session's urging toward a course consistent with 1 Corinthians 6. Finally, we also believe courses of action were available that would have maintained compliance with both healthcare regulations and the Law of God, and also would have preserved a greater bond of peace between all parties.

We therefore recommend the following: We judge that, though there were very significant mitigating circumstances with Rev. Wright and the Garrows, the RPWA was guilty of neglect of duty in allowing a lawsuit to be initiated and continued against a Christian (1 Cor. 6:1-8) without the prior involvement of their elders. Therefore, we recommend that Synod humbly admonish the RPWA for this sin. Passing this recommendation is the beginning and end of the admonition.

We also recommend that this Synod urge the RPWA to communicate with Rev. Wright and Steve and Stephanie Garrow, confessing their neglect of duty, with a request for their forgiveness and expressing their commitment to prevent this neglect in the future.

Finally, we recommend that Synod heartily commend the RPWA for their earnest commitment to develop and implement policies and procedures that will aim to prevent lawsuits against Christians in the future and that will involve a delinquent party's overseers before a lawsuit becomes necessary.

Judicial Committee of the Day—  
Joe Allyn (clerk)  
Luke O'Neill  
Alan Noell (chm.)  
Jonathan Bucher  
Kit Swartz

### **2023 Communication #23-07 B GLG re. Orlando & RPWA re. Lawsuits:**

Fathers and brothers of the Synod of the RPCNA,

The Reformed Presbyterian Home (under the board of the RP Women's Association) was set up to provide age-related care to the orphans, widows, and servants of the church. For over 125 years the Home has provided care for servants of the RPCNA (pastors, missionaries, etc), men and women who have served the church well.

Rev. Jim Wright is one such servant. Rev. Wright moved into the RP Home on December 30, 2014, and was removed from the RP Home, by his family, on June 13, 2021. He was brought back to Florida, to live near his son-in-law and daughter, Steve and Stephanie Garrow, in Ocoee, FL. Currently he is a Rehabilitation Center receiving high quality care. The reasons for Rev. Wright being removed from the RP Home are not germane to this communication; although there is a very different perspective from the RP Home than the Garrow family. When Rev. Wright left the RP Home, he left an unpaid bill of over \$11,000.

In November of 2022, the Reformed Presbyterian Woman's Association, the synod appointed organization which oversees the RP Home, sued Steve and Stephanie Garrow, along with Jim Wright, communicant members of the RPCNA. The lawsuit requesting over \$11,000 was filed without once contacting their elders that have oversight over them.

The elders of the Orlando Reformed Presbyterian Church sent the following communication to the Reformed Presbyterian Women's Association asking them to cease from suing members of our church and to work with the elders to rectify any outstanding debt between the family and the the RP Home. The letter reads:

Dear RP Woman's Association,

The Apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 6, "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!"

In the beginning of November, communicant members of the Orlando congregation of the RPCNA, Steve and Stephanie (Wright) Garrow, received a suit of civil action concerning Rev. Jim Wright's previous living arrangements at the RP Home. According to the civil lawsuit, \$11,443.19 is owed to the RP Home for living arrangements and medical care.

The Garrow family and Rev. Wright were sued—by an agency of the church. Sued.

"Brother goes to law against brother?" The Apostle Paul says this to our shame. Negotiating what is owed for healthcare services from an agency of the church is something that could have been done with their session aiding in the negotiation rather than bringing shame and judgment upon them from the civil courts. Christians suing Christians brings shame on our denomination and upon Jesus Christ. It fosters distrust between the church and RP Home.

As this case has been discussed with the Garrow family over the past two years, the decision to bring Rev. Wright home to Florida was in his best interest following disappointment with aspects of his care and financial pressures from the RP Home. When Rev. Wright was brought back to FL, Mr. Steve Garrow claims that he attempted to negotiate a monthly payment to the RP Home for the care provided and that offer was rejected. We believe that since the Apostle Paul forbids civil suits among Christians (I Corinthians 6) and and since you, as an agency of this church, have not sought to resolve this matter in a biblical way (Matthew 18); the removal of this lawsuit is required according to the Scriptures.

Please desist from suing Rev. Jim Wright, a pastor of 27 years; one left with a very

small pension from his service to the RPCNA. Please desist from suing Mr. and Mrs. Steve Garrow, faithful communicant members of the RPCNA.

This matter ought to be resolved in another way; a better way.

Mr. and Mrs. Garrow have stated their willingness to make monthly payments on a negotiated amount of money owed. Please bring this matter “in house” and allow us, their session, to aid in resolving it in a way that glorifies God. We are committed to assisting in finding a way that brings honor to Christ.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

The Session of the Orlando Reformed Presbyterian Church,  
Nathan Eshelman, moderator  
Jonathan Schaefer, clerk  
Kevin Duffey  
Mark Goerner  
Jim Pennington (emeritus)  
Alejandro Ramirez  
Joe Worsham

Despite several attempts by the moderator of the Orlando Session, the lawsuit did not stop “till you have paid the last penny.” Besides a lawsuit against members of the church without session involvement, this is also an abuse of the funds given to the RPWA by this synod. Last year the RPWA received \$150,000 from this synod, 29% of all RPM&M distributions for the year. I wonder what percentage of that paid for this lawsuit which could have been settled between the board and the appointed shepherds of the church?

The following timeline shows the requests from Orlando to stop the lawsuit against communicant members of the RPCNA by an agency of the church:

### **Timeline**

November 14, 2022: ORPC Session asked RPWA to stop suing our members and to work with the session to resolve this conflict.

November 17, 2022: Marilyn Roll, president of RPWA, responded: “Thank you for the opportunity to reply to your query. We are working on gathering information so we can give a full and complete response.”

December 1, 2022: RPWA responded with their reasons for the lawsuit and did not drop the lawsuit against ORPC members. Several of the “facts” in this letter are disputable, but the point of this communication to synod is not whether money was owed to the RP Home (it was), but whether it was appropriate to sue a communicant member of the church without session involvement.

December 1, 2022: Eshelman and Roll spoke on the phone. The lawsuit was again requested to be dropped. Eshelman emailed the board again noting, “In some ways, I think the response misses the point as this should never have reached lawyer involvement as the session was never brought in (deacons are not elders). This should never happen in our churches, especially when the Bible is clear on this. Again, we will make sure that Rev. Wright’s bill gets paid, but for future reference, please do not send lawyers first, talk to the elders that have oversight.”

December 13, 2022: RPWA home continued civil action again ORPC members and presents the session with a letter explaining that they are continuing the civil lawsuit against ORPC



members.

December 19, 2022: Marilyn Roll continued with the lawsuit against the Garrow family. By this time all communication with the Garrow family is cc'd also to Rev. Eshelman. Roll communicated, "Dear Mrs. Garrow, Attached for your information is a copy of the email to Orlando RPC's Session. To facilitate the process please provide William Buchanan (email address available above) with either a Power of Attorney executed by Rev. Wright or confirmation that he is able to acknowledge this agreement on his own. Have a blessed Christmas season."

January 30, 2023: Downpayment was made on the money owed.

February 10, 2023: A forbearance agreement was sent to the Garrows stating, "Forbearance Agreement, Acceptance of Service and Consent Judgment that are needed to formally withdraw the existing litigation." This litigation was being withdrawn only because of the payment plan, not because ORPC session requested that the RPWA work with us. The lawsuit itself remained "on the books" but it was only in forbearance contingent upon the Garrow's paying Rev. Wright's bill.

February 24, 2023: Marilyn Roll communicated to Garrows and Eshelman, "Attorney Buchanan has confirmed that the Consent Judgment has been filed with Court which should remove us from the arbitration hearing scheduled for 2/28. Further he states that when all the payments have been made we will need to satisfy the judgment in Court."

March 9, 2023: The last payment for the outstanding bill was sent to the RPWA. Marilyn Roll responded with, "Thank you for this welcome news. We saw before that it takes several days for the check to work through the bank's system. Once it's received I will ask Attorney Buchanan and Ms Todhunter if there is anything else." Again, only removing the civil suit because the bill was paid.

### **Conclusion**

This communication to synod, our highest court, is not about the details of Rev. Wright's time in the RP Home. It is not a communication about whether money was owed (it was), the level of care provided, or whether Rev. Wright "felt" he was cared-for during his time there. This communication is also not a request to investigate the relationship between the synod and the RP Home. This communication to synod is about the Synod's RPWA suing communicant members of the RPCNA without session involvement.

Since it is against the clear teaching of the New Testament for Christians to sue other Christians when there is another way of arbitration, the ORPC Session requests that the Synod affirm the following motions:

1. The Synod of the RPCNA admonish the RPWA for suing a retired minister and his family rather than seeking to use God-ordained church leadership to resolve the conflict.
2. The Synod instruct the RPWA to repent of suing Rev. Wright and the Garrows, and issue them a letter of apology for this sin against members of the RPCNA.
3. The Synod instruct the RPWA to cease from suing members of the RPCNA without first working through the courts of the church (sessions, presbyteries, synod) in an attempt to resolve conflict more biblically.

Humbly Submitted,  
The Orlando Reformed Presbyterian Church Session

Nathan Eshelman, moderator  
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