

Date: 3/3/25

The undersigned members of Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis (2RP), submit this GLG Petition to the 2RP Session through the Moderator and Clerk of the 2RP Session, Pastor Jerry F [REDACTED] and Clerk Russ P [REDACTED], and request that the 2RP Session transmits this GLG Petition to the Clerk of Presbytery as soon as possible for consideration at the March 6 - 8, 2025 Meeting of the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery.

Summary of Concerns:

The undersigned members submit this GLG Petition to address the 2RP Session's pattern and practice of misusing its authority and engaging in various irregularities in response to lawful actions taken by the undersigned members of 2RP.

Definition of Terms:

- In this document, "GLG Petition" refers to this Petition submitted to the GLG presbytery in March 2025. The use of "petition" refers to the petition submitted to the 2RP session in December 2024. The word "petitioners" refers to the signers of the December 2024 petition.

Background:

On 12/5/24, six families (12 communicant members, including the undersigned) sent a petition to the 2RP Session asking that the

"Session call a special meeting of the congregation of 2RP in January 2025 for the purpose of holding a vote on the following questions:

- 1. Should the congregation of 2RP call Nathan S [REDACTED] as a ruling elder? [This was later clarified to mean that the petition was for calling an election for ruling elder].*
- 2. Which of the men who have preached at 2RP in the past two years would you like to be your pastor if and/or when they are eligible to receive a call to pastoral ministry?"*

On 12/29/2024, the 2RP Session met with most of the petitioners and informed them that the petition was ruled "out of order" and that Nathan S [REDACTED] was "not qualified" to be a ruling elder. However, the petitioners soon learned that the 2RP Session had not formally ruled in constituted court that the petition was out of order and had not formally examined Nathan regarding his qualifications for ruling elder prior to the 12/29/2024 meeting.

The 2RP Session met again with many of the petitioners on 1/8/2025 in constituted court at the regularly-scheduled session meeting. At this meeting, the Session and Nathan discussed the history of Nathan's and the Session's discussion of his "qualifications." The petitioners observed several discrepancies between Nathan's understanding of the events and the understanding of some Session members. These discrepancies were not addressed at that meeting and have not to our knowledge been addressed since. Ultimately, the 2RP Session formally apologized for its 12/29/2024 statements to the petitioners and confirmed that the petition was not out of order

and that Nathan had not been examined or ruled unqualified. On 1/8/2025, the 2RP Session approved the petition. The Session later issued an edict for a special congregational meeting for 1/31/2025 for the purpose of electing one new ruling elder.

Although there were some hiccups along the way, the elder election ultimately occurred. Nathan S█████ received 85% of the vote for ruling elder. On 2/8/2025, Nathan accepted the call. The 2RP Session announced that Nathan's examination was to occur, but no timeline for such examination was communicated to the congregation.

Between the time of 1/8/2025 and 2/8/2025, some members of the 2RP Session made statements inconsistent with their apology. Other members of the 2RP Session repeatedly expressed that they were "hurt" by the petition, that the petition and actions of the petitioners had strained relationships between the 2RP Session and petitioners, and that the petition reflected "imprudence." We have conducted ourselves prayerfully and with care, and we have yet to be told about any sin that we committed in this process.

On 2/9/2025, the session met informally with Nathan (not an examination). On 2/18/2025, Nathan sent a letter to the session resigning from his pastoral internship and asking, in relevant part, that all efforts to make him an elder be ceased. Part of his rationale for his resignation (from his resignation letter) is as follows: "The petitioners continue to be portrayed as ignorant, naïve, and unwise children. Yet their actions were lawful and in order. The use of the tools of Presbyterianism has been deemed to be adversarial. This is not only wrong but abusive. The subordinate standards of the RPCNA are a guide for doing the work of the church. Unwritten rules and expectations of certain members of Session cannot be the basis of relating to one another in the courts of the church."

On 2/19/2025, Nathan S█████ met with two elders. At this meeting, Nathan S█████ indicated a willingness to work through things with the session if the session would propose a path forward. This was witnessed by Adam D█████ and Andrew G█████. On 2/20/2025, the session emailed all the petitioners, stating "In the spirit of unity and love for Christ's church, the session would like to meet with you. Our desire is to listen, understand, and have a gracious and edifying conversation together." The email was accompanied by a link to a Doodle calendar where everyone could indicate their availability. In response to this email, the petitioners stated "We look forward to the meeting" and requested that "Nathan S█████ also be invited to the meeting." 2/26/2025 was included as an option for the meeting in the Doodle calendar. All petitioners indicated that they were available on 2/26/2025, as well as many members of the session. This date had far more participant availability than any other proposed date. As of 3/3/25 at 6am, we have had no follow-up on the invitation to meet with session and no response to our request for Nathan S█████ to be present when such a meeting does occur.

On 2/21/2025, the 2RP Congregation held its annual congregational meeting. Nathan's resignation was discussed at that time. One elder, speaking only on behalf of himself, gave a brief timeline of events that was mostly consistent with what has been described above. This elder also stated that members of the 2RP Session believed that "a shepherding committee,

mediation, or some outside help” was needed “whether it's found in the presbytery or from outside” to address the breach of trust between the 2RP Session and the petitioners. One of the petitioners, Justin O■■■■, also spoke at the 2/21/2025 meeting and expressed gratitude and agreement that outside help was needed and that the petitioners looked forward to further dialogue on how to get that help.

An elder also stated the Session had not yet met to consider or receive Nathan’s resignation letter but that it expected to do so on 3/5/2025. This statement, and the absence of any contrary statement by any other member of the 2RP Session, created the appearance that no action would be taken on Nathan’s resignation until 3/5/2025. Further, the 2/20/2025 email from the session created the expectation that the 2RP Session would meet with the petitioners soon to discuss the matter and engage in dialogue.

On 2/26/2025, the 2RP Session met in constituted court to accept Nathan’s resignation. While the majority of session members were indeed available on that date, they met with each other, instead of meeting with petitioners and S■■■■ as requested and expected. This meeting was not announced to the congregation or any of the petitioners.

In sum, the 2RP Session’s actions and various statements in response to the petition, the petitioners’ actions, and Nathan S■■■■ have shattered trust with the multiple petitioning families as well as other members of the congregation. These actions have the overall effect of resisting and undermining the petitioners’ lawful actions in support of a man who ultimately received 85% of the congregation’s vote to be a ruling elder.

Considerations:

-We believe the elders had good intentions through much of this process. We respect and acknowledge their authority and their many years of faithful service and love for the congregation. We believe that the 2RP Session has acted sincerely to do what they believed is for the good of 2RP.

- Nonetheless, the 2RP Session’s objective actions in response to the petition and the spirit of their response to the petition reflect a fundamental disregard for the law and order of the RPCNA and a preference for informal, unofficial operations that promote secrecy and a lack of accountability. This preference for informality is presented as a more “relational” approach that the 2RP Session says is less adversarial. Unfortunately, as the circumstances described in this GLG Petition demonstrate, the 2RP Session’s operations are consistently irregular, subjective, and unpredictable, leading to confusion, disorder, and distrust.

-We think that different session members bear different levels of responsibility (based on their level of involvement, the nature of their words, etc). We ask that the presbytery take this into consideration.

-Richard B■■■■ was a member of the 2RP session at the time our petition was filed. He retired from the session (as previously planned) on 1/1/25. He wrote a detailed apology to the petitioners on 1/6/25 for his part in the missteps of the session. This relationship has been restored. We are *not* requesting for him to be investigated. He may be a witness that could be called for if/when additional information is needed.

-A word on forgiveness and reconciliation: While we are working to forgive the elders, we think the patterns demonstrated here must be stopped. Forgiveness does not mean turning a blind eye to patterns of behavior that hurt people. We want to be reconciled with our elders, but this will be the next step after the current behaviors are stopped. As harmful behaviors are stopped, we will be able to engage in the work of relational repair that leads to restored trust.

Concerns: The session has a pattern and practice of misusing its authority and engaging in various irregularities in response to lawful actions taken by the undersigned members of 2RP, as reflected in the following actions:

- Misrepresenting Nathan S [REDACTED].
- Demonstration of repeated efforts to thwart the petition.
- Making no visible efforts to address the discrepancy in testimonies shared by an elder and Nathan S [REDACTED] at the 1/8/2025 meeting.
- A member of session informally rebuking Nathan S [REDACTED] for reporting his distress to the session over the situation.
- Demanding trust after trust had been broken.
- Giving an apology "on behalf of the session", then having multiple members of the session seek to retract that apology.
- Not seriously entertaining concerns of members about the irregularities of the process leading up to the elder election.
- Telling inconsistent information to different parties.
- Certain members of Session failing to disclose to other members of the Session material information about Nathan S [REDACTED] and remaining silent when presented with the opportunity to correct known inaccuracies.
- Offering to meet with petitioners and then not following up.
- Not appropriately publicizing the date or location of the session meeting(s).
- Treating members with disdain because they participate in lawful activities of church membership (signing a petition and attending session meetings).

These patterns and practices have had the effect of breaching trust with at least six families in the congregation.

Requests:

- We are requesting that the GLG presbytery commission an investigation of the situation at 2RP.
- We request that all presbyters who already have inside knowledge of the situation recuse themselves from participating in the investigation or advising the investigators. This includes but is not limited to Shawn A [REDACTED], Thomas D [REDACTED], Nathan E [REDACTED], and Joel H [REDACTED].

Potential for Mediation:

- We are open to mediating this matter with the 2RP Session.
- We recognize that the 2RP Session is interested in mediation as well.
- However, we respectfully request that the mediation take place against the backdrop of the Presbytery's authority to ultimately oversee and address the actions of the 2RP Session.

- Often, mediation occurs between two equal parties. In this case involving conflict between leadership and congregants, we believe presbytery oversight is essential.
- Under normal circumstances, the 2RP Session's efforts toward mediation would be commendable and reasonable. We cannot fault any elder for wanting to mediate. However, given the history described above, the undersigned simply cannot begin a mediation process that operates independently from accountability of the 2RP Session by the Presbytery.
- Accordingly, we are willing to mediate, but only at the direction and oversight of Presbytery.

Conclusion

- We do not wish to impugn any elder's motives. Instead, this GLG Petition reflects a fundamental concern about how a Session in the RPCNA is required to conduct its affairs based on the law and order of this denomination.
- We wish to reaffirm our love and respect for our elders. Collectively, they represent over 100 years of faithful service to the Lord, our congregation, and the Kingdom.
- Our desire is for the law and order of the church to be clarified, confirmed, and applied at 2RP, with the hope that unity and trust can be restored, relationships mended, and further kingdom work continued.
- We believe that necessary resolution, whether through mediation or other formal process, is most blessed if all parties are under accountability to the Lord's ordained courts.

Respectfully submitted in Christ,

Adam D [REDACTED]
Heidi D [REDACTED]
Andrew G [REDACTED]
Rachel G [REDACTED]
Jacob L [REDACTED]
Cassi L [REDACTED]
Justin O [REDACTED]
Leah O [REDACTED]
Jake T [REDACTED]
Laurie T [REDACTED]

Attachments:

- Copy of the 12/5/24 petition.
- December 2024 - January 2025 email chain between petitioners and the Session.
- Apology to petitioners and Nathan S [REDACTED] (this was provided verbally at the session meeting on 1/8/2025 and provided in writing on 2/6/2025).

Available Upon Request From Appropriate Presbytery-Appointed Parties:

- Minutes of 1/8/2025 session meeting.
- 2/20/2025 email from the session and petitioners' response on 2/21/25 with a picture of the associated scheduling page.
- Timeline of events.

Potential Witnesses:

- Petitioners
- Members of 2RP Session
- Nathan [REDACTED]
- Rachelle S [REDACTED]
- Richard B [REDACTED]