

## REQUEST FOR SHEPHERDING COMMITTEE

### Request:

The Session of the Second Reformed Presbyterian Church requests the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery to create a three-member Shepherding Committee for the following purposes:

1. Addressing conflict and broken relationships between Session and disaffected members of 2RP,
2. Addressing concerns raised by disaffected 2RP members in their communication to presbytery.
3. Addressing conflict and broken relationships between Session and Nathan [REDACTED]
4. Overseeing mediation either through the committee or by engaging third-party mediator(s) trained in Christian reconciliation

### Rationale for Request

To aid the presbytery in crafting an appropriate solution, the Session provides below a brief synopsis of the tension between the Session, certain 2RP members, and Nathan [REDACTED]. The Session also explains the efforts it was making to start the mediation process prior to making this petition.

#### *Relationship between Session and disaffected members of the Congregation*

In their communication to presbytery, five 2RP families describe “shattered trust” between themselves and Session. The Session is greatly grieved by this. While the reasons for this significant mistrust are multi-faceted, the origin of the present conflict can be traced back to a December 29, 2024 meeting with these families to address a Petition they filed. The families were greatly offended by statements made by the Session in communicating that we did not plan to move forward with their request for a ruling elder election. The Session subsequently reversed course, apologizing to the families and agreeing to move forward with the ruling elder election. The Session hoped that taking these steps would start building trust between them and the families. Unfortunately, the hurt caused by that meeting was not resolved and the distrust between Session and the families continued to fester. The families have described in their letter why they continue to feel hurt and mistrustful of the Session’s actions.

The Session’s response to their concerns can be saved for a later time. Rather, the Session wants to emphasize our deep love for these families. They are among the most passionate and faithful members of the congregation and are a strong core of families with young children. We earnestly desire to see the relationship between these families and the Session restored. However, we have been unable to make any progress towards reconciliation. Therefore, we need outside assistance and welcome the wisdom and guidance offered by the presbytery.

### *Relationship between Session and Nathan [REDACTED]*

Since the fall of 2023, Nathan [REDACTED] has provided an invaluable service to 2RP as an intern, preaching twice a month in the evening and ministering to the needs of the congregation. He is beloved by the congregation and respected by the Session. In response to positive feedback from the congregation, the Session explored with Nathan in the summer of 2024 whether he would be interested in pursuing the office of a ruling elder. In the fall, the discussion shifted to whether he might increase his internship load with the goal of becoming a full-time teaching elder at 2RP. However, for various reasons, the time was not right for Nathan to pursue either of those options.

Unfortunately, the relationship between Nathan and the Session later deteriorated in part due to the manner in which the Session responded to the Petition filed by the 2RP families. The Session later apologized directly to Nathan for communications that were hurtful. Underlying tension remained, however and resolution was not achieved. After the congregation elected Nathan as a ruling elder, the Session scheduled his examination for its next session meeting. However, Nathan submitted a resignation letter, asking the Session to cease all steps towards examining him as an elder and resigning from his internship. The letter and a subsequent meeting with Nathan and a few elders made it clear that Nathan felt hurt in various ways by the Session. It also became clear that outside intervention would be necessary to move the reconciliation process forward.

The Session deeply cares for Nathan and his family. We are grieved by the breakdown in the relationship and are committed to investing ourselves in the reconciliation process. Nathan has indicated that he is willing to pursue reconciliation with third-party mediation. His family at this time remain as members of 2RP.

### *The Session's Mediation discussions*

After Nathan [REDACTED]'s resignation, the Session recognized that it needed the help of a third-party to reconcile relationships between Nathan and also the disaffected families of 2RP. The Session had begun having discussions with Jonathan Parnell, a ruling elder from the Topeka Reformed Presbyterian Church, who is a Christian Conciliator certified by the Institute for Christian Conciliation. We have great respect for Jonathan Parnell and his thoughtful approach to peacemaking. It appears that he is respected by the 2RP families as well.

We had considered working with Jonathan and a mutually agreed-upon team of elders to mediate the disputes outlined above. However, the Petition filed by the 2RP families made it clear that any mediation would need to occur under the oversight of presbytery. However, we still believe that Jonathan Parnell could play a valuable role in this process and we would encourage any committee formed by the presbytery to consider using Jonathan to assist with the reconciliation process.