

# DIGEST

June 30, 2021  
First Presbyterian Church  
Hampton, Virginia

**Moderator:** the Reverend Dr. **Wilbur C. Douglass, III**  
**Vice Moderator:** Ruling Elder (RE) **Dianne F. Schoonover (Yorkminster)**  
**Stated Clerk:** Ruling Elder (RE) **Q. John Tamm (1<sup>st</sup> VAB)**  
**Journal Clerk:** Mr. **Raymond Rodrigues**

## MODERATORS

- The Rev. Dr. **W. C. Douglass, III** was the Moderator. RE **Dianne F. Schoonover** was Vice Moderator.

Dr. Douglass opened the meeting with prayer.

## STATED CLERK

Call of the meeting  
The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia, (Presbytery) at the direction of the Presbytery Council and request of the Commission on Ministry (COM) calls a special meeting as defined by the Book of Order, G-3.0304. The special meeting will occur on June 30, 2021, at 10:00 am at the First Presbyterian Church, 514 S. Armistead Avenue, Hampton, VA. The three ministers of the Word and Sacrament requesting the meeting are the Reverends Jeffrey S. Bell, Martha E. Mitchell, and Helen Louise "Lou" Ventura. The ruling elders requesting the meeting are Bonnie B. Condrey, (First Church, Hampton), Gail C. Pittman, (First Church, Portsmouth), and Larry H. Hull, (Second Church, Norfolk). The purpose of the special meeting is to consider the following business:  
1. That an administrative commission be established for the congregation of Great Bridge Presbyterian Church, Chesapeake that is reported to be affected with disorder and inquire into and settle the difficulties therein.  
2. That the Presbytery declare that the refusal of the co-pastors of Great Bridge Presbyterian Church, Chesapeake to meet, or have the Session

## SPECIAL MEETING JUNE 30, 2021

meet, with representatives of the presbytery is "a work disapproved by the Presbytery," as defined by the Book of Order, G-2.0904

## PRESBYTERY COUNCIL (PC)

The Reverend Dr. **Helen Louise C. "Lou" Ventura**, moderator.

## TIME LIMITS ON DEBATE AT THE SPECIAL MEETING

**MOTION:** On the behalf of the Presbytery Council of the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (Presbytery) the following motion is made for the conduct of debate at the Special Meeting of June 30, 2021. THAT, debate be limited for motions 1 and 2 as published to the Presbytery, to a total of 40 minutes per motion. The time will begin immediately after the completion of the report of the Commission on Ministry to the Presbytery has been delivered. The time will include any debate on subsidiary motions often referred to as "amendments." Time may be extended on motion of the Moderator.

**Motion Made**   X   **Approved**   X    
**Disapproved**           

## COMMISSION ON MINISTRY (COM)

Report to Presbytery  
The Reverend Dr. Jeffrey S. Bell, vice-moderator

The following motions were made by Dr. Bell on behalf of the COM:

## RESOLUTION FOR THE FORMATION OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION

### FOR THE GREAT BRIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**1.MOTION:** WHEREAS the Commission on Ministry (COM) of the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (Presbytery) received a letter, dated October 26, 2020, from 32 members ("Concerned Congregants") of the Great Bridge Presbyterian Church, Chesapeake (GBPC) requesting assistance

from the Session and Presbytery in addressing a range of concerns and expressing a desire for reconciliation;

WHEREAS the COM appointed a team to work with GBPC Session and members and the Session declined both the initial recommendation of the COM to use the services of an outside consultant and a proposal for involving the congregation in a listening process;

WHEREAS the COM members led a modified process of three listening groups, via zoom, for the "Concerned Congregants" to share concerns with Session elders and COM presented a summary report to the co-pastors and to the Session, and worked with ruling elders on potential next steps;

WHEREAS three elders resigned during 2021 and at least two other ruling elders have resigned within the two years since the co-pastors began ministry at GBPC;

WHEREAS in April 2021 the Session refused to meet with representatives of COM, prompting the full COM to warn the Session that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Constitution requires sessions to receive presbytery representatives (Constitution G-3.0202 d.), and following that warning the Session decided to hold an in-person meeting with four members of COM and the General Presbyter on May 18, 2021, to discuss the situation;

WHEREAS within ten days after that meeting, the Session sent a letter to the "Concerned Congregants" and COM representatives, which stated the goals of a care plan they had developed for the church. The letter further said if members did not appreciate their approach or were not able to find opportunities for community and deepening their relationship with Christ at GBPC, that they "connect with a place that enriches your faith." It ended by saying "this concludes our response to your expressed concerns in the letter of October 26, 2020".

WHEREAS after months of working with the Session and pastors, the COM continues to receive

complaints about intimidation of members and abusive behavior, members being encouraged or required to give up long-standing ministry roles, unwillingness to provide full financial reports to the congregation, and irregularities in following Presbyterian polity;

WHEREAS the co-pastors sent an email message on June 2, 2021, refusing to meet with the General Presbyter and two COM members, and stating they would only communicate with presbytery representatives in writing;

WHEREAS some GBPC members are asking the Presbytery for urgent, strong action;

THEREFORE, the Commission on Ministry and Presbytery Council requests that the Presbytery:

Appoint an Administrative Commission to inquire into continuing difficulties and discord at the Great Bridge Presbyterian Church and, given the range of issues reported to the Presbytery and COM, that the Administrative Commission be given the following powers, to use as necessary, to enable a thorough investigation for the health and healing of the congregation and for the sake of the Gospel. (G-3.0109 b., G-3.0301 c.):

- To call meetings of the session and congregation.
- Inquire about the Session's perspective and what actions they have taken to resolve differences.
- Consult with the congregation, using whatever means seem best.
- Review COM records of listening groups, communications to and from Session, co-pastors, and members, etc.
- Review church records, including but not limited to: Session Minutes, Rolls and Registers, financial reports and records, communications to members of the congregation, the call and covenant of the co-pastors, etc.
- Interview the co-pastors, members of the congregation, former ruling elders, and church staff as needed and practicable.
- Engage professional services (accounting, legal, etc.), consultants, or assistance with pastoral care, consulting with the Presbytery Council before incurring any costs.

• Seek the counsel of the Presbytery attorney on legal matters as appropriate and act on any recommendations with the consent of the officers of the Presbytery.

• In accordance with the Constitution (G-3.0303e), if after investigation it determines that the session is unable or unwilling to wisely manage its affairs, the administrative commission may assume original jurisdiction with the full powers of the session.

• After reviewing the records of the COM investigation and after consulting with the co pastors, session and congregation, the administrative commission shall have the authority of the Presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship if it determines that the church's mission under the Word imperatively demands it. (G-2.0904)

• May conclude that the co-pastors have renounced the jurisdiction of the church if the pastors persist in disapproved work after the co-pastors have been provided opportunity for consultation and written notice of work disapproved by the presbytery (G-2.0509).

• Recommend further actions of Presbytery as it deems necessary.

• Provide updates on their work to the Presbytery Council and may share information with the Commission on Ministry. The final report of the actions of the Administrative Commission shall be submitted to the Presbytery upon completion of its work.

The following ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament are appointed to the Administrative Commission, with additional members to be appointed by the Moderator of the Presbytery.

Ruling Elders: **James Cales**, Green Acres Presbyterian Church; **Natt Gantt**, First Presbyterian Church

(Norfolk), and **Charity Houghton**, Wythe Presbyterian Church, and **Joyce Melvin-Jones**, Carver Memorial Church, Newport News

Ministers of Word and Sacrament: The Revs. **Brian Harroff**, **Elizabeth Hilkerbaumer**, and **David Rollins**.

Motion Made   X   Approved   X    
Disapproved       

**DISAPPROVAL OF WORK**

**2. MOTION:** That the Presbytery of Eastern Virginia (Presbytery) declares that the refusal of the Reverends Kelly Anne and Michael A. Nieto, co-pastors of Great Bridge Presbyterian Church, to meet, or have the Session meet, for any reason, with representatives of the Presbytery is "a work disapproved by the Presbytery" whether the representatives are members of the Commission on Ministry, an administrative commission, officers of the Presbytery, or other representatives. (Constitution G-2.0502, G-3.0202d)

The Moderator of the Commission on Ministry and the General Presbyter are instructed to consult with Reverends Kelly Anne and Michael A. Nieto. Thereafter, the Stated Clerk shall convey the action of the Presbytery to them in writing, to inform them that if they persist in refusing to meet or have the Session refuse to meet with Presbytery representatives, then the Presbytery may conclude that the Reverend Kelly Anne Nieto and Reverend Michael A. Nieto have renounced the jurisdiction of the church (G-2.0509), effectively ending their membership, ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the exercise of ministry at Great Bridge Presbyterian Church or elsewhere in the P.C.(U.S.A.)

**Motion Made**   X   **Approved**   X    
**Disapproved**       

Dr. Douglass closed the meeting with prayer.

**ENROLLMENT REPORT**

42	Ministers
52	Ruling Elders
94	Total voting members
126	Visitors
220	Total Registered

**NEXT MEETING**

- Tuesday, July 20, 2021, at 10:00 am, **Bethany Presbyterian Church**, Zuni. This will be a Zoom meeting.