

1 GEORGIA FOOTHILLS PRESBYTERY

2 REPORT OF COMMITTEE

3 January 5, 2017

4 JESSICA FORE

5 v.

6 GEORGIA FOOTHILLS PRESBYTERY

7
8 **SUMMARY OF THE CASE**

9 Jessica Fore filed a Complaint with the Moderator of Georgia Foothills Presbytery on or
10 about May 18, 2016. Ms. Fore alleged that the Presbytery erred in failing to find that its Stated
11 Clerk engaged in a “base and flagitious sin” of “reviling” her in a telephone conversation. She
12 also alleged that the Presbytery erred in failing to impose definite suspension or depose the Clerk
13 from the ministry as a result of the same telephone call. The committee finds that the Complaint
14 judicially out of order, that it cannot be put in order, and recommends that Presbytery dismiss the
15 case.

16 **SUMMARY OF THE FACTS**

17 Spring 2015 Jessica Fore, a member of Faith Presbyterian Church in Watkinsville raised
18 complaints against the Session of Faith related to her membership and interaction
19 with the church.
20

21 August 2015 Ms. Fore and Stated Clerk conducted a telephone call regarding the status of her
22 issues with her church and the Presbytery. In the course of a two hour
23 conversation, the Stated Clerk urged Ms. Fore to withdraw her complaints. Ms.
24 Fore contends that the Clerk “reviled” her during the course of the conversation.
25 The Clerk contends he was attempting to rebuke Ms. Fore regarding her litigious
26 conduct. Ms. Fore recorded the telephone conversation.
27

28 10/6/15 The Clerk issued a written apology to Ms. Fore for his comments in the August
29 conversation and requested her forgiveness.
30

- 1 January 2016 Ms. Fore shared her recording of the conversation with a professor of linguistics.
2 The professor wrote a synopsis and evaluation of the recorded telephone
3 conversation. Ms. Fore sent copies of the professor's letter to some members of
4 Presbytery.
5
- 6 4/21/16 Ms. Fore attended the stated meeting of Georgia Foothills Presbytery and held a
7 sign for presbyters to read regarding her complaints against Faith and its Session.
8 The Presbytery appointed a judicial commission to hear Ms. Fore's complaints.
9
- 10 5/18/2016 Ms. Fore wrote an e-mail to the Moderator complaining that Presbytery failed to
11 act regarding the Clerk's August 2015 conversation with her. Ms. Fore alleged
12 that the Clerk's conversation constituted "reviling" and his statements required
13 the imposition of definite suspension or deposition. *BCO* 34-7.
14
- 15 9/20/16 At the next stated meeting of Presbytery, the Moderator appointed the
16 undersigned committee to investigate Ms. Fore's complaint regarding the Clerk's
17 actions.
18
- 19 10/18/16 The committee met by phone to review the complaint and related materials and
20 options for responding to it. The committee began drafting its written report.
21
- 22 12/8/16 The committee reviewed and revised its report by e-mail.
23
- 24 1/5/2017 The committee conferred and completed its written report and recommendations
25 to Presbytery.
26

27 **STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE**

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29 Is the May 18, 2016 Complaint presented by Jessica Fore judicially in order?
30

31 **JUDGMENT**

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33 No. The case is judicially out of order, and it cannot be put in order for the reasons
34 specified below.
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37 **REASONING**

38 The Complainant has alleged that the Clerk made statements in a telephone conversation
39 she initiated that constituted "reviling." The Clerk disagreed and noted that he intended his
40 comments to be a rebuke. The Clerk apologized for his comments in writing in an e-mail to Ms.
41 Fore dated October 6, 2016. The Clerk wrote:

1 “Lee Lovett communicated with me that you were feeling strongly offended by our
2 conversation a few weeks back when you called for advice about your concerns with
3 Faith Presbyterian’s session. I wasn’t shocked by that, since I had spoken so sharply and
4 directly that day. My intention and hope was to offer a rebuke that would persuade you to
5 change course, but it sounds like I only offended, and didn’t persuade at all. I obviously
6 chose wrongly how to approach you and didn’t help you. I’m sorry I offended you—that
7 does no one any good. Would you please forgive me?
8

9 I continue to pray for you and for your church session to find peace.”

10
11 The committee is persuaded that this written apology should have resolved the matter as of that
12 date. Matthew 18:15. Instead of accepting the Clerk’s apology, the Complainant chose to
13 publish the her recording of the August conversation with the Clerk to a third party, in violation
14 of the spirit of Matthew 18:15-16 and, subsequently attempted to circularize the Presbytery by
15 sending the third party’s “analysis” of the matter to some members of the Court. (Complaint,
16 page 2).

17 The BCO provision relied upon by the Complainant (*BCO* 34-7) does not apply to her
18 claims as they are presently before the Presbytery. *BCO* 34-7 applies to a minister pending trial
19 who confesses a “base and flagitious” sin. In this situation, no trial is pending, and there is no
20 confession. It would be a gross violation of proper process for Presbytery to attempt to impose
21 any sanction under *BCO* 34-7 when no charges, trial or confession are pending. For these
22 reasons, *BCO* 34-7 simply does not apply to the situation currently before the Court. The
23 Complainant has no proper grounds to complain that Presbytery has failed to act under provision
24 which has no application in this matter. The Presbytery has no authority to impose the sanctions
25 outlined in *BCO* 34-7 at this time.

26 We further find that the Clerk attempted to rebuke Ms. Fore for what he perceived to be
27 her litigiousness and refusal to be reconciled with her church and its officers. We find the
28 Clerk’s conversation to constitute an attempt at rebuke, rather than “reviling.” We find that the

1 allegations do not raise a strong presumption of guilt.

2 The committee is also guided by *BCO* 34-2 and 34-3, which provide:

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34-2. As no minister ought, on account of his office, to be screened in his sin, or slightly censured, so scandalous charges ought not to be received against him on slight grounds.

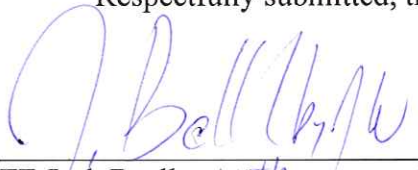
34-3. If any one knows a minister to be guilty of a private offense, he should warn him in private. But if the offense be persisted in, or become public, he should bring the case to the attention of some other minister of the Presbytery.

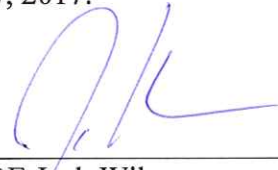
11 Applying these principles to this case, we are persuaded that the grounds proffered in the
12 Complaint are slight at best, and that the alleged offense (giving the Complainant the benefit of
13 any doubt as to whether an actual offense existed) was a private one which should have been
14 resolved privately.

15 CONCLUSION

16 The committee concludes that the case is judicially out of order and cannot be put it order
17 because the sanction sought by the Complainant (*BCO* 34-7) has no application in the absence of
18 formal charges, an indictment, and a confession pending trial. The Clerk’s conduct does not
19 constitute “reviling” as identified in 1 Corinthians 5:11. The Clerk’s apology should have been
20 sufficient to resolve any perceived offense. The Complainant failed to follow Matthew 18:15-16
21 and *BCO* 34-3. The grounds proffered in support of the Complaint are too slight to proceed.
22 *BCO* 34-2. The committee recommends that the Presbytery, in the exercise of its discretion and
23 judgment, find the Complaint judicially out of order and dismiss it.

24 Respectfully submitted, this 5th day of January, 2017.

25 
26 _____
27 TE Jack Beall (with
28 express
29 permission)

25 
26 _____
27 RE Jack Wilson