

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, Ga.

Stated Session Meeting

August 23, 2022

A stated session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church and via Zoom on August 23, 2022. Moderator Dana Waters welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Elders present: Clayton Adams, Bert Ballard-Myer, Kay Brooks, Jennifer Frey, Abby Horvath, Linda Koehler, Brian Striggow, Valerie Stone and Chris Wilson.

Elders on Zoom: Katy Arora, Don Bower

Elders absent: Kathy Boardman

Others present: Pam Knox, Luanne Rigsby, baby Arora, and Dana Waters

Devotional

Don Bower presented a devotional on the podcast, "A Matter of Faith: A Presby Podcast," where the hosts interviewed Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker of Atlanta on his thoughts about how congregations can face conflict and disagreements and work to resolve them with new insights. Don opened the meeting with prayer for wisdom and vision.

Review of Minutes

The minutes from the July 26, 2022, stated meeting were reviewed. Jennifer Frey moved and Clayton Adams seconded that the minutes be accepted as written. **Motion passed.**

Approval of the Agenda

A motion was made by Katy Arora and seconded by Chris Wilson to approve the agenda as presented. **Motion passed.**

Clerk's Report

Luanne Rigsby read a letter to the Session from Kathy Boardman in which she resigned from the Session of Covenant Church. The Session received this letter and offered our gratitude to Kathy for her one and a half years of service on the Session. Dana encouraged everyone to reach out to Kathy and offer her our support and thanks. Katy Arora will be left as the only chair of Christian Education Ministry Team. She asked for Session support in the startup of Covenant Connection in the fall.

Financial Report

Pam Knox reviewed the financial summary for July 2022, as well as the detailed financial report for the month of July. She reminded us that for the month of July, we were temporarily operating under the budget for 2021-2022. Pledges are coming in as expected with very few expenses during the summer, so we are running a surplus. The Financial Report was accepted into the minutes.

Motion to Approve 2022-2023 Budget

The proposed budget for the 2022-2023 fiscal year was sent out to the Session in the pre-meeting packet. The total proposed budget is \$402,437. Finance Ministry Team requested \$23,600 in additional funds from Session to be taken from unspent funds from the 2021 -2022 fiscal year, which totaled \$58,997.49, for the purpose of funding the 3-month transition salary and health care for the Technical Director, capital reserve, an intern for Christian Ed, the pastor's contingency fund and an external financial audit. This would bring the total budget expenditures, including the Session additions, to \$426,037. Finance Ministry Team Chair, Clayton Adams, thanked Pam for her work on the new budget and commended her "Plain Language Summary" which clearly explains the budget and how Finance Ministry Team was able to arrive at it. Pam thanked Personnel Committee for their work on future staffing priorities, based on the Holy Cow congregational survey, which enabled Finance MT to get the budget finalized. On behalf of the Finance Ministry Team, Clayton moved to approve the 2022-2023 Budget as it was presented. Coming from a committee, no second was needed. Following discussion, the **motion passed**. Pam will place her plain language summary in "The Covenanter", and the entire budget spreadsheet will be available in the church office.

Pastoral Feedback for the Session

Rev. Dana Waters shared with the Session that Covenant's policy of allowing homeless persons to camp out on our premises, as long as they and their belongings are removed by morning, has become a divisive issue for the congregation. He reported that he has had many people, including staff and church members, tell him that they do not feel safe coming to the church because of the individuals hanging around the campus and has had to call the police numerous times to remove disruptive persons. Another ongoing problem is the litter and trash left on our property, including drug paraphernalia. Dana shared that we are at a fork in the road and that it is up to the Session to reassess our policy. He encouraged the Session not to wait for the new pastor to decide what our policy will be and also does not recommend that the Neighborhood Ministry Coordinator be responsible for one-on-one interactions with homeless persons on our campus until the issue is resolved. He gave two examples of how Atlanta churches had chosen to address similar issues. Dana suggested that we must decide if we want our mission to be sheltering homeless persons directly or whether we can partner with organizations who provide resources to the homeless.

There will be a special called Session meeting to begin discussion of the issue on Sunday, September 11, 2022, at 2:00 p.m. To provide background for the meeting, Dana will bring the minutes from the Homeless Task Force meetings. Katy Arora will check with Athens First Presbyterian on their homeless policy and what has worked.

Kay Brooks will do the same with Athens First Methodist and Clayton will check with Oconee Street Methodist and Green Acres Baptist Church. Clayton will ask Grace Adams to share data on changes that have occurred on the eastside of Athens in the time since Covid-19. The Session was asked to volunteer on the grounds clean-up crew to see what they are facing every week. Session was also asked to think about all of our neighbors, i.e., youth served by the Cave, nearby schools, Green Acres neighborhood, youth playing on our basketball court, Jubilee Partners, UGA college students, and ways we've served them in the past.

Motion from Personnel Committee

Prior to the meeting, the Personnel Committee sent the Session the job description for the position of Coordinator of Neighborhood Ministries and Christian Education. Don Bower, on behalf of the Personnel Committee, moved that the job description and advertisement be approved by the Session as written. Coming from a committee, no second was needed. Following discussion, the **motion passed**,

Report from Commissioners to the Northeast Georgia Presbytery Meeting

Clayton Adams, Chris Wilson, Jennifer Frey and Linda Koehler served as Covenant's commissioners to the Northeast Georgia Presbytery Meeting at the First Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA, on August 20, 2022. Jennifer provided a written report of the meeting to the Session. Highlights included the message presented by Dr. Victor Aloyo, President of Columbia Theological Seminary, Rev. Otis A. Smith's report from the Black Presbyterian Caucus, the 2020 Vision Committee report, and a request for special support of "Next 80", the UGA Student Center Fund Drive to raise \$500,000.

Discussion of interior food/drink policy during Covid-19

Jennifer Frey moved and Abby Horvath seconded that with recent changing guidance and relaxed restrictions from the CDC, Covenant's Covid-19 food and drink restrictions be lifted to allow food and drink to be served inside with masking optional. After discussion, the **motion carried**. Attendees to events are encouraged to follow their own comfort levels with masking. Accommodations such as distanced seating and outdoor options will be available.

Announcements

Missions Ministry Team

Bert Ballard-Myer reminded everyone of the information she sent out last month describing the "Thriving Congregations" program and encouraged everyone to go to the Montreat website to learn more about it. Further discussion will be held at a later meeting.

Fellowship Ministry Team

Prior to the meeting, the Fellowship Ministry Team sent Session a report on upcoming fellowship opportunities including Game Night on August 26th, hot dog lunch after Rally Day, Fall Picnic in September and coffee fellowship time after church services in the near future.

Motion to Adjourn

There being no further business, Katy Arora moved and Clayton Adams seconded the meeting be adjourned. **Motion passed.** Dana closed with prayer at 9:04 p.m.

NEXT STATED MEETING: September 27, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. Jennifer Frey presents devotional.

Dana Waters, Moderator

Luanne Rigsby, Clerk