

**Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA**  
**Stated Session Meeting**  
**May 23, 2023**

A stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church and via Zoom on May 23, 2023. Moderator Dana Waters welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. Dana thanked all who worked so hard to make today's Presbytery meeting held at Covenant a success.

Elders present: Clayton Adams, Bert Ballard-Myer, Carolyn Hatfield, Jennifer Frey, Kathryn Fowler, Abby Horvath, Linda Koehler, Valerie Stone, Ansley Tweedell, Donny Whitehead and Dick Zimdars,

Elders absent: Katy Arora

Others present: Pam Knox, Luanne Rigsby and Dana Waters

### **Devotional**

Donny Whitehead presented a devotional by retired Lutheran minister, Paulette Creswell, based on Philippians 3:13-14. He began by asking what is the difference between a job and a calling. As leaders of the church, we are all here not just to do a job but because we are called to work together to proclaim the love and saving power of God in this particular time and place. Paul reminds the church at Philippi of the true goal of the faith-life: Just like in a race where you push on towards the prize, as fellow Christians, we press on towards the "heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." Donny opened the meeting with prayer.

### **Review of Minutes**

The minutes from the April 25, 2023, stated Session meeting were reviewed. Donny Whitehead moved and Valerie Stone seconded that the minutes be accepted as presented. **Motion carried.**

### **Approval of the Agenda**

Two additions were made to the agenda. A motion was made by Jennifer Frey and seconded by Linda Koehler to approve the agenda as amended. **Motion carried.**

### **Financial Report**

Pam Knox, Church Treasurer, reviewed the Financial Summary for April, 2023, as well as the detailed financial report for the month. Pam reported that we have received more pledges and non-pledged income than expected, and spending has been less than anticipated because of unfilled positions. We have spent only 75% of the 2022-2023

budget. Finance Ministry Team is planning to invest some of the extra money in a CD to earn higher interest. Pam also said that in order for all funds to be insured by the FDIC, we will need to move some money to another bank. The Financial Report was accepted into the minutes.

### **Approval of the 2023-2024 Budget**

Pam presented the 2023-2024 proposed budget of \$450,507. It is very similar to the original one presented in the pledge letter with the one change being a recommendation from Finance Ministry Team to place \$12,000 from the 2022-2023 surplus into Capital Reserve. The budget includes 6% salary increases for all personnel as requested by the Personnel Committee, and all ministry teams received the budgets they requested. Pam praised the congregation's response to this year's pledge drive. On behalf of the Finance Ministry Team, co-chair Kathryn Fowler moved the Session approve the proposed 2023-2024 budget as presented. Coming from a Ministry Team the motion does not need a second. Following discussion, **motion carried**.

### **Election of Nominating Committee for the 2026 Class of Elders**

Clayton Adams (Finance MT), Jennifer Frey (Worship MT), Linda Koehler (Congregational Care MT) and Donny Whitehead (Christian Education MT) will be rolling off the Session in December. Donny Whitehead (active) and Julie Bower (inactive elder) have agreed to serve on the Elder Nominating Committee for the 2026 class of elders, if elected. Valerie Stone moved and Jennifer Frey seconded that we elect Donny and Julie as two members of the Elder Nominating Committee. Following discussion, the **motion carried**. Donny and Julie will gather nominees for the 3<sup>rd</sup> member of the committee from the congregation, and that member will be elected at a congregational meeting.

### **Revisiting the Unhoused Neighbor Policy**

At the November 1, 2022, called Session meeting, the Session approved changes in Covenant's Overnight Guest Policy with the plan of assessing the changes in three months. In February, at the request of Building and Grounds Ministry Team, the trial period was extended until May to allow for completion of all the changes that were to be implemented and for assessment of how they were working. Carolyn Hatfield, Building and Grounds co-chair, reported that with the power to the outside receptacles being turned off from sunrise to sunset, fewer homeless people have been lingering around the building during the daytime. The fence around the memorial garden has also made a positive difference. Still, we have homeless sleeping around the building at night, and they have to be vacated in the morning. Dana thanked Valerie Stone for the insightful letter she sent to the Session concerning the situation with homeless neighbors camping on church property. Several elders expressed concern for the safety of people camping on our grounds as well as for church members who come to the building alone. Another concern is the church's liability should something bad happen to someone or to our building as long as we are sanctioning the presence of unsupervised people

camping on our grounds. Donny Whitehead moved that Covenant Presbyterian Church no longer allow individuals to sleep on our campus without prior Session approval and that electricity to all outside electrical outlets be turned off 24h/day. Linda Koehler seconded the motion. Following discussion, the **motion carried**. The port-a-potty, sink and little food pantry will be maintained as is unless they begin to pose a problem. Building and Grounds will replace the current signage with the updated policy. Donny Whitehead will notify the Athens-Clarke Police Department of our new policy and Linda Koehler will inform a local policeman she knows of the change in policy.

Bert Ballard-Myer, Kathryn Fowler, Valerie Stone and Donny Whitehead volunteered to serve as a “brainstorming group” to explore other ways, such as redirecting our resources and efforts toward existing local charities and government advocacy, to help the homeless in our community. Valerie will ask Bruce and Karen Menke for their guidance with the group.

### **Request from Joy Village School**

Prior to the meeting a “Summary Report to the CPC Session regarding Joy Village School” dated May 18, 2023, was sent to the Session. Dana thanked Bert Ballard-Myer, Kathryn Fowler and Abby Horvath for the research they put into the document. Covenant currently is property tax-exempt in Athens-Clarke County due to its status as a Religious Institution under Georgia tax law. However, renting to another organization, which the church does not own or manage, would cause the church to lose its property tax-exempt status. Due to the tax implications, by consensus, the Session decided to deny the request from Joy Village School to rent space in our building for their school.

### **Presbytery Meetings Report**

Bert Ballard-Myer and Kathryn Fowler, commissioners to the NEGA Presbytery meeting on May 23, 2023, gave a summary of the meeting held at Covenant. The Session applauded Building and Grounds Ministry Team and all who have helped spruce up the building and grounds in the past months. Many attendees commented on how nice the facility looked. An excellent sermon on mental health was given by the pastor from Cleveland Presbyterian Church. Two pastors were honorably retired. Amy Baer was welcomed into the NEGA Presbytery as was Steven Barnes, pastor of Oconee Presbyterian Church. Will Norman, pastor at UGA Presbyterian Student Center encouraged churches to help connect high school graduates with campus ministries. A group of ministers shared their trip to Scotland and their visit to the Iona Community.

### **Announcements - Ministry Teams**

**Personnel Committee** - Abby Horvath announced that our pianist, Connor Austell, is moving to South Carolina. His last day will be at the end of June. Personnel will be interviewing a candidate for the music director/pianist job on June 4<sup>th</sup>. Abby asked for prayers that this person will be a good fit for our church.

**Missions Ministry Team** - Bert Ballard-Myer announced that Covenant will be providing a meal for about 30 students at the Presbyterian Student Center the first Tuesday of every month starting Fall Semester. A group from Covenant will be marching in the Pride Parade on June 3<sup>rd</sup> at 2:00 p.m. The group will meet at the church before the parade for pizza. We will have a resource table at the parade from 3-6.

**Congregational Care** - Linda Koehler reported that the May 21<sup>st</sup> reception honoring our two high school graduates went very well.

**Fellowship** - Valerie Stone reported that the Strawberry Festival was a success but that participation in the monthly game nights has dwindled with the warmer weather. Fellowship MT is discussing having "Corn Hole" nights. Valerie has reorganized Fellowship supplies and asked if anyone borrows anything out of the boxes to please let her know.

**Worship** - Jennifer Frey reminded everyone that we will begin our summer schedule of worship at 10:00 a.m. beginning June 4<sup>th</sup>. She encouraged everyone to think about ways to bring "newness" in the fall.

Dana will be taking study leave the week of June 5<sup>th</sup>. Rev. Ron Gilreath will be filling in for him on Sunday, June 11<sup>th</sup>.

### **Motion to Adjourn**

There being no further business, Valerie Stone moved the meeting be adjourned. Jennifer Frey seconded the motion. **Motion carried.** Dana closed with prayer at 8:51 p.m.

***Next Stated Meeting: Tuesday, June 27, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. Clayton Adams will present the devotional.***

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Dana Waters, Moderator

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Luanne Rigsby, Clerk