



# A REPORT

## FROM THE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

June 23, 2024

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COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ATHENS GA

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PASTOR CANDIDATE:  
REVEREND JOEL THOMAS BUCHANAN JR.

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# A Statement from the PNC

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Dear Covenant Presbyterian Church Congregation,

It is with pleasure that the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) announces that we have found a candidate we feel will be a strong pastor for Covenant Presbyterian Church! After meeting 35 times to review 81 candidates, conducting 14 interviews, checking references, and watching multiple sermons, we are pleased to present Reverend Joel Thomas Buchanan Jr. for your consideration.

Little did we know when we began this search process that our final selection would be from Athens. Our search went as far as California and New York; yet God sent us someone who was literally in our backyard! Many of you already know Tom

Buchanan via community activities at Friendship Presbyterian Church (where he currently serves as pastor), his involvement with various Northeast Georgia Presbytery committees, the classes he has taught at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), etc. Tom is also quite familiar with our church, having interacted with us many times over the years.

Tom is passionate about preaching/teaching and pastoral care, the top two traits important to Covenant as mentioned in the Mission Study Task Force report. He has a strong background in Christian Education and Youth Ministry, he is excited about Covenant's community outreach programs, and he is eager and enthusiastic about this position.

We would like to share Tom's response to one of the questions on the pastor's personal discernment profile, a document that all candidates must submit. In answer to the



question “How do your particular gifts, experiences, and training help you in the ministry setting you believe God is calling you?”, Tom gave the following response.

“I believe that at the right time I will be led to a new congregation that is marked by inspiring worship, warm fellowship, spiritual authenticity, intellectual integrity, and an active commitment to mission and social justice witness. To such a setting, I would bring almost three decades of ministry experience (for the last eight years as a solo pastor and head of program staff), enthusiastic gifts for teaching and preaching, team-building leadership, and attentive pastoral care rooted in non-anxious presence. I’m a passionate scholar at heart who loves people and brings them together around our shared faith in Christ and his claim on our lives to make a difference, energized by an imaginative entrepreneurial spirit which loves to explore new ideas for outreach and community-building. A position in which I can share these gifts and draw from my rich ministry background would feel just like home.”

Thank you for entrusting us with the critical task of identifying Covenant’s next pastor. We strongly, and unanimously, urge you to extend a call to Reverend Joel Thomas Buchanan Jr.

Sincerely,

Your Pastor Nominating Committee

Karen Foutz (co-chair), Kathryn Fowler, Wyatt Herndon, Rose Kisaalita,  
Bill Rigsby, Linda Rogers (co-chair), Brian Stone

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## Tom’s Journey

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Tom Buchanan was born a 7<sup>th</sup>-generation Alabamian and grew up in Montgomery, in a loving family devoted to God, their Presbyterian Church, and (by no fault of his own) the Auburn Tigers. At 17, he left home to attend Vanderbilt University, graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1989 with a degree in Anthropology.

Pursuing a strong sense of call stemming from the renewal of his faith in his senior year, Tom then traveled north of the Mason-Dixon line (for the

first time in his life!), to enroll at Princeton Theological Seminary and graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in 1993. He was ordained to the Ministry of Word & Sacrament by the Presbytery of Newton [NJ] in the fall of that year, to serve with joy as Associate Pastor for Christian Education & Youth Ministry at the First Presbyterian Church of New Vernon, New Jersey.

But feeling the itch after several years to enjoy sweet iced tea again, Tom moved to Georgia in 1997, and over the next 19 years served churches in Marietta, Johns Creek, and Atlanta. In 2016, he became a Head of Staff for the first time, serving Carrollton Presbyterian Church as Interim Pastor for two years, before becoming Interim Pastor at Friendship Presbyterian Church here in Athens in the spring of 2018, and then Friendship's Pastor the following year.

Over all his years in ministry, Tom has brought enthusiastic gifts for teaching and preaching, team-building leadership, and attentive pastoral care. A passionate scholar at heart who loves bringing people together around a biblically centered vision of discipleship and justice, he is also energized by an imaginative entrepreneurial spirit which embraces new ideas for outreach and community-building.

Tom is married to Lisa Buchanan, his best friend and love of his life. They met under wildly improbable circumstances on a group tour of Turkey in 2005 and married at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Atlanta in 2006, exactly one year to the day after they met. An avid musician, chorister, and handbell ringer, Lisa is a paralegal and case manager for a local law firm, and is also a professionally-trained chef and event planner who understands the unifying power of good food served with love. Together, they are the proud parents of a prodigiously expressive Bengal/Tabby cat named "Bug" who never fails to entertain.





With a penchant for corny jokes, obscure Lord of the Rings trivia, and all-around nerd-dom, Tom loves reading, writing, teaching, and long walks, and together with Lisa, enjoys day-tripping, UGA concerts and events, and engaging in benign soccer hooliganism in support of Atlanta United FC.

Making Athens their home over five years ago, Tom and Lisa deeply love their life here and are wholeheartedly committed to this beautiful, vibrant college town. It is with great gratitude and an abiding hope that they welcome this opportunity to walk this new journey of faith with the people of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

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## Statement of Faith

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I trust in God, the creative Source of all that is, who spoke creation into existence and is the Eternal Ground of its beauty and mystery.

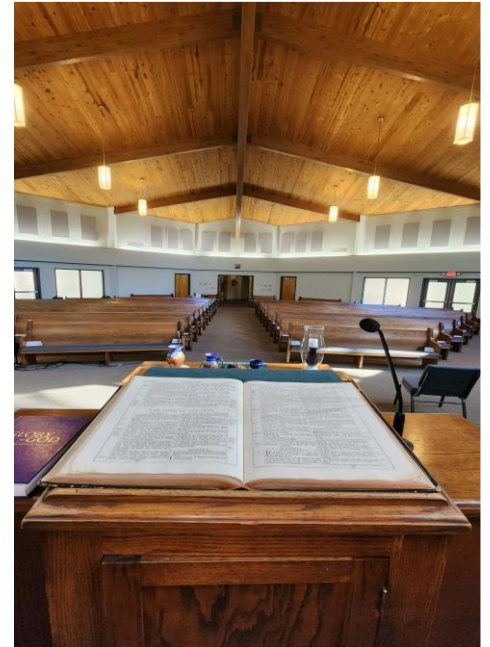


I trust that the deepest meaning and purpose of Being is Love, as embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, who proclaimed the reality of the Reign of God, in which the brokenhearted are healed, the oppressed are set free, and the powers of this world to hate, hurt, and destroy are broken.

For his words and deeds, he was opposed by the political and religious authorities, unjustly condemned, and put to death. Overwhelmed by grief and fear, Jesus' first disciples ran away in despair, their hopes dashed. There was a cruel finality to it. The story seemed over.

And yet, it wasn't. In the days and weeks following Jesus' death, his disciples discovered something that they would not have dared to dream. As they came together in support of one another, as they broke bread together in remembrance, their eyes were opened. They saw with their own eyes and knew in their hearts that Jesus was not dead - that he was alive and present in their midst. They came to know that their lives were being caught up into something radically new, by a strength not their own. In communion with the living Christ, their lives would ever after proclaim a joyful message: He is risen! The Reign of God has the final word in reality.

Our world knows so much pain, and I confess that I have often struggled with living in this kind of resurrection hope. Like so many others, when I answered God's call, I set out on a journey - one in which I didn't know where I was going and didn't know what "arriving" would look like. And today, I am very much yet to arrive. But in my heart, I believe that we all are somehow part of a much greater Story. I trust that this great Story - the "old, old story of Jesus and his love" - is really true, and that we may boldly live into this hope in the power of God's spirit.



And so, I trust in the Holy Spirit, which in all things is at work to bring God's peace to all creation. Ever on the move, the Spirit is the drawing out, the luring, the driving, the stirring up, and the bringing together at the deep heart of all that is. In the freedom of love, the Spirit calls us together into communities of faith to seek God's Word, to gather around the Table of the Lord, to baptize and guide one another in the path of Jesus, and to live out in our life together the reality of God's reign - working for peace; seeking truth with openness, pursuing justice with courage, speaking the truth in love; forgiving as we are forgiven; loving as we are loved.

In the midst of questions, doubts, and fears, I trust that the God in whom we live and move and have our being remains faithful to the end. And so, I confess my trust that to the end of time, and beyond, nothing can separate us from the love of God which we know in Jesus Christ our Lord.