

**Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA**

**Stated Session Meeting**

**May 27, 2025**

A Stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church on May 27, 2025. Moderator Tom Buchanan welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Elders present: Karl Barnett, Bob Brewster, Melissa Cobb, Warren Combs, Caly DePalma, Kathryn Fowler (zoom), Brian Herndon, Ansley Tweedell Land, Rebecca Silver, and Pam Thompson

Elders absent: Dennis Calbos, Rich Reaves

Others present: Tom Buchanan

**Devotional**

Rebecca Silver presented a devotional on the importance of friendship.

John 13:34-35, Matthew 26:36-48

What is the role of the church in creating friendships?

As adults, fostering and maintaining friendships can be a difficult thing to prioritize.

Research suggests that it takes ~70hrs contact to form a friendship and ~200hrs for a close friendship. Friendship is built on 3 pillars - Proximity, Timing/ stage of life, Energy- what is your focus.

As a church, we can create and offer opportunities for connection

Rebecca opened the meeting with prayer.

**Review of Minutes**

The minutes from the April 22, 2025, Stated Session Meeting and the May 1, 2025, Email vote were reviewed. It was moved that both sets of minutes be approved as written. Following discussion, the motion carried.

**Approval of the Agenda**

It was moved that the agenda be approved as presented. Following discussion, the motion carried.

**Clerk's Report**

Tom reported (for Luanne) that Covenant had received a thank you letter from Columbia Theological Seminary for our gift of \$500.00 in support of Meet the Call.

**Financial Report**

Kathryn Fowler, co-chair of the Finance Ministry Team, reviewed the Financial Summary and the detailed financial report for April.

Task - go through budgets with your teams and see where we are lapsing.

The Financial Report was accepted into the official record.

### Business:

#### **Stewardship Campaign Update / Approval of 2025-2026 Budget**

Kathryn reported that pledges are coming in better than they were last year. It was requested that mission teams review restricted funds that may be used so that budget requests can be scaled back, as well as look at 2024-2025 YTD and assess if budget requests can be lowered. Finance has a handle on the shortfall (\$35,705) and a plan for how to work with it, but any cuts that can be made would be helpful since we don't want to pass an unbalanced budget. Finance is also still looking into simplifying restricted funds. We plan to keep the improvements to staff compensation to maintain longevity of staff. We could also get a check for the interest earned on accounts this year to lower the gap to around \$20,000. The goal is to know in advance where we may find this money. Warren asked how many giving units we had last year - We are down about 6 units (likely deaths and moving to assisted living). Outreach has been made to everyone we have not yet received pledges from.

#### **New Flooring Update**

Caly DePalma reported that

- fellowship hall, kitchen, and breezeway are being refloored. Lewis Floor will move furniture, but we have to clear out the other things.
- Ellen Stoneburner gave permission to use the infant room to store things for the next few weeks.
- They will finish the flooring June 13th and then we will need to move things BACK.
- The cement under the tiles has collected some water over time. The following is the process for June 2-13: (1) Pull up tile, (2) Let the floor dry, (3) Do a waterproof sealer and let it dry 24 hrs (the only time people will not have access to that space), and (4) Tile the floor.
- Nothing will have to be cancelled during this flooring process - the food pantry will be run from the breezeway and Campus Kitchen will cook at 1st Pres.
- After it is put in, the tile will get its first cleaning and waxing.
- We need to consider increasing the budget to maintain the flooring. Lewis Floor can maintain the flooring for ~\$250 per spray buff and ~\$2000 per strip and wax (definitely need to get other quotes).
- Coffee House will be the first big event on the new floor.

#### **Reducing Trash on the Property**

Brian Herndon reported the information he got on having a security assessment done:

- Brett Iley is the head of security at First Methodist. Their church received a \$150k grant from the Department of Homeland Security. He does consulting for different religious buildings and is willing to do a walkthrough and give some advice.
- One action would be to set the precedent that we are willing to pursue charges for vandalism so that word gets out not to mess up the church grounds.

### **1075 Gaines School Road Property Update**

- Caly reported that it's in limbo. There is no set buyer or set plan. The developer requesting the re-zoning is in due diligence.
- The commission and community gave pushback that they can't approve a change in zoning without knowing what the plans are. There is not enough information from the developer to give approval. If re-zoned for drive through, food or retail, the traffic and parking would be problematic with a potential for things like delivery trucks to cut through our lot. The re-zone also opens the possibility of a larger, taller building and less vegetation.

### **Session Manual Update**

- Tom reports that it is in the works - there are parts being rewritten. Karen and Tom have completed an initial assessment of what we have vs what we need. Some didn't yet exist as electronic files, so are being digitized, etc.
- Plans for 2nd week of June for Tom, Warren, and Caly to meet to plan next steps.
- Create a reference available as hard copies and on the church's Google Drive.

### **Discussion: Ideas for highlighting the "middle generation" - Caly De Palma**

- (very much relates to devotional)
- Are there opportunities to meet and interact for members that are not retired? Not really - PW is at 9am, etc. So what about something once a month in the evenings - potluck, book club, BRAS (Building Relationships and Support), restaurant road trips/ dinner group, 20s & 30s, 40s & 50s, small group, mother's morning out, etc.
- Intergenerational Community is vital, but some things are better accomplished when you are with people in a similar life stage as you.

### **Elder Nominating Committee – (Selection of chairperson and non-active elder by Session).**

- Active Elder - Warren Combs volunteered to be chair of committee
- Inactive Elder - Marie Ballard-Meyer?
- Church Member - Deb Millwood?
- We need 4 new elders to replace Ansley Tweedell Land, Warren Combs, Rich Reeves, and Kathryn Fowler, who all rotate off Session at the end of this calendar year.

## **Report from Stated Presbytery Meeting**

Karl Barnett served as Covenant's commissioner to the NEGA Stated Presbytery meeting at First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, GA, on Tuesday, May 20, 2025. Highlights of the meeting were:

- Tom rode with Karl to the meeting. Karl shared that at First Pres Greensboro it was mostly regular business. Presbytery did approve its Anti-Racism Policy, in the works for over a year - that document is now available, The Table (Pres Student Center) was offered \$1MIL loan from Presbytery to look into housing - that option was non-viable, but Andy Cook moved that they keep \$250k for repairs to the existing building. As a frequenter of The Table, Melissa Cobb was enthusiastic about this opportunity for improvement to the building.

## **Communion Servers for June 1st**

Elders: Ansley Tweedell Land, Pam Thompson, Melissa Cobb, Caly DePalma, and Brian Herndon will serve communion on June 1st, meeting in the narthex at 9:40 a.m.

## **General Announcements - Ministry Teams**

Building and Grounds – How to store less stuff in the fellowship hall once the floor is done - better storage for food pantry - brainstorm.

Christian Education – Sunday School for children will not take place during the summer.

Congregational Care – figure out how to make the sign-up for bringing meals to the homebound more accessible to congregation.

Fellowship – Rebecca shared that the Strawberry Festival was a success and Owen Barnett & Claire Bruner served as dessert judges

- Upcoming events: Pentecost, Coffee House 7/9, Rally Day Breakfast 8/17

Mission & Outreach - Meeting July 16th

Personnel – n/a

Worship – June 1 - have an elder with Tom to take visitor cards at end of service

- Pam made a motion for worship to return to 11am worship time on 8/17. Motion carried.
- Warren requested that June 1 have youth group members carry in communion elements (they'll be there anyway to get commissioned before leaving for Montreat).

## Pastor's Report

Tom is excited to go to Montreat. DeLynda and Hank Tweedell will be the other chaperones. 6 youth and 2 adults from the Presbyterian Church in Milledgeville will be co-housing at Bowden Villa - total of 12 youth 4 adults. There will be a commissioning for the youth and adults going to Montreat at church on June 1.

Tom also appreciated the approval of his vacation time in Savannah.

## Motion to Adjourn & Closing Prayer

There being no further business, Bob Brewster moved and Brian Herndon seconded that the meeting be adjourned, and the motion carried. Tom closed with prayer at 8:06 p.m.

***Next Stated Meeting: Tuesday, June 24, 2025, at 6:15 p.m. Pam Thompson will present the devotional. Visioning activity and small group discussion will take place. Then we can come to the church by Labor Day with a vision and game plan for the church moving forward. Perhaps we can make more of a space for middle generations, make this a more welcoming space for people within our community - neighborhood church vibes - serve AND invite.***

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Tom Buchanan, Moderator

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Ansley Land, Acting Clerk