

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA
Stated Session Meeting
August 26, 2025

A Stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church on August 26, 2025. Moderator Tom Buchanan welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 6:17 p.m.

Elders present: Bob Brewster, Melissa Cobb, Dennis Calbos, Caly DePalma, Brian Herndon, Ansley Tweedell Land, Rich Reaves, Rebecca Silver, and Pam Thompson

Elders present on Zoom: Karl Barnett, Warren Combs, Kathryn Fowler

Others present: Tom Buchanan and Luanne Rigsby

Devotional

Bob Brewster read Psalm 27:4 and opened the meeting with prayer. His devotion was inspired by a recent cruise down the Danube River during which he saw and visited many beautiful and historic cathedrals, churches and abbeys. Bob shared photos of many of them. Seeing the historic cathedrals and the beauty of the landscape along the river inspired Bob to be thankful for the beauty of the natural world and for God's enduring presence through the ages.

Review of Minutes

The minutes from the July 22, 2025, Stated Session Meeting and the July 27, 2025, Called Congregational Meeting were reviewed. Caly DePalma moved and Brian Herndon seconded that the minutes be approved as written. Following discussion, the motion carried.

Approval of the Agenda

Dennis Calbos moved and Caly DePalma seconded that the agenda be approved as amended to show that the next communion will be celebrated on September 7th rather than August 31st. Following discussion, motion carried.

Clerk's Report

Luanne Rigsby reported that Covenant had received thank you letters from Thornwell for our gift of \$250.00, Presbyterian Homes of Georgia for our gift of \$700.00 for the Caring Hands Fund, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for our gift in the first half of the year.

Financial Report

Kathryn Fowler, co-chair of Finance Ministry Team, reviewed the Financial Summary and detailed financial report for July. We are one month into the new fiscal year.

Pledges are coming in steadily and expenses last month were less than expected, so we're in good shape. The Financial Report was accepted into the official record.

Business:

Church Security Assessment Report – Brian Herndon

On August 6th Tom Buchanan, Caly DePalma, Brian Striggow and Brian Herndon met with Brett Iley, facilities director of Athens First United Methodist Church, for a security assessment walk-through. The question is how the church can have open arms but not wide-open doors. Ideas for making the campus more secure were:

- 1) A good camera system at all entrances
- 2) Better lighting – possibly with motion sensors – so people on cameras can be identified
- 3) Cutting back landscaping for better access for cameras and to make areas more visible at night
- 4) Locking the nursery hallway at the beginning of the worship service
- 5) Placing a fence with lockable gates around the playground area
- 6) Cutting off electricity to outside outlets in the back of the building where homeless individuals charge their phones

Brian noted that Brett provided a contact for an estimate to install a camera system and that there are competitive grants from the Department of Homeland Security for places of worship. The matter was referred to B&G Ministry Team to find out what would be required and the cost.

Dennis Calbos moved and Caly DePalma seconded that we cut electricity off to outside outlets 24h/day as long as it can be easily turned back on as needed for maintenance jobs. Following discussion, the motion was tabled in order to get more information on whether it is possible to cut the electricity to all outside outlets except for one. That would enable us to leave one outlet in a visible location available with multiple charging wires for people to charge phones.

Session Visioning – Priorities & Feedback / Synthesis & Next Steps

The Session received two documents prepared by Tom Buchanan prior to meeting. The documents were entitled “A New Beginning: Towards a Vision for Covenant Presbyterian Church Summer 2025 Part I: Session & Ministry Team Visioning Exercises, with Full Notes” and “Part II: Analysis & Synthesis of Feedback from Visioning Exercises”. Tom explained that Part I is mainly for use as a reference. Part II recapitulates six key priorities and why they matter. It suggests actions for each ministry team as well as areas of attention or things to keep in mind.

Session approved by consensus that before the September 23rd Stated meeting, Session will present the visioning documents to each ministry team asking them to

consider and prioritize the suggestions made within their teams and give their ideas and a list of resources needed for their priorities. This will help refine the final version of the report to present to the congregation. For now, Tom will inform the congregation that Session has been working on visioning and will share the six priorities.

Congregational Care/Worship Ministry Teams - Visitors – Ansley Tweedell Land

Ansley reported that Worship MT and Congregational Care MT are working together to determine the point at which visitor information is transferred from visitor cards collected by Worship to Congregational Care so that the visitor luncheon won't be the first time Congregational Care has met frequent visitors. They are designing a new visitor card with added information such as hobbies/interests, # children in the family, desire for a pastor visit, etc. There is a Google Docs Excel document where all visitors' information will be stored. We have begun giving 1st time visitors a colorful welcome bag with information about Covenant and its programs and opportunities for service.

Communion Servers for September 7th

Elders Dennis Calbos, Cally DePalma, Ansley Land, and Pam Thompson will serve communion on September 7th, meeting in the narthex at 10:45 a.m. Bob Brewster and Warren Comb will serve as alternates. Tom encouraged any elders who can be at the service to come to the front and be available to serve if needed.

Nominating Team Report – Warren Combs

Warren reported that the Elder Nominating Committee may have a full slate of four nominees to present to the congregation, pending an answer from the 4th person.

Warren Combs moved that the Session waive the current policy on couples not serving on Session together. The policy, which states “Couples will not serve on Session together, and the service of partners in a couple must be separated by one year. Exceptions to this policy must be considered by Session on a case-by-case basis.” was passed as a motion at the September 24, 2024, Stated Session meeting and was to have been included in the Session Manual. Waiving the policy will allow the nominating team to proceed with their slate of nominees. **Rich Reaves seconded the motion.** Following discussion, **the motion carried.** At some time in the future the Session will revisit the policy and decide whether to revise or eliminate it.

Announcements - Ministry Teams

Worship - Warren Combs

- The document Warren emailed to Session prior to the meeting is an example of what Worship MT will be presenting during the 4-week spotlight on Worship MT during the worship service. Other ministry teams can use this as a model for their spotlight months.

- Warren solicited help in baking breads for the table display for October 5th World Communion Sunday.

Fellowship – Rebecca Silver

- Fellowship and Worship Ministry Teams need to work together on World Communion Sunday this year to avoid confusion.
- Saturday October 4th – Blessing of the animals event
- There will be no fall picnic this year.

Building & Grounds – Caly DePalma

- The redo of the tile flooring in the Fellowship Hall has been completed.
- We are now having a waterproof epoxy floor installed in the downstairs area.

Christian Education – Brian Herndon

- On October 19th there will be Child Protection Training at the Cottage for all who work with children.

Congregational Care – Ansley Land

- Due to problems with the original company, Congregational Care is having to find a new company for the church directory. To be continued...

Pastor's Report

- Tom reported that the Presbytery Leadership Event in Madison on August 16th went well. Tom taught a course on Christian Nationalism that was well received.
- The March for Immigrants, which is sponsored by the Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition, will be held on September 21, 2025.

Motion to Adjourn & Closing Prayer

There being no further business, Rich Reaves moved and Ansley Land seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Following discussion, motion carried. Tom closed with prayer at 8:58 p.m.

Next Stated Meeting: Tuesday, September 23, 2025, at 6:15 p.m. Caly DePalma has the devotional.

Tom Buchanan, Moderator

Luanne Rigsby, Clerk