

## **Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA**

### **Called Session Meeting**

**January 13, 2025**

A Called Session Meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held on January 13, 2025. Moderator Tom Buchanan welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order with prayer at 6:06 p.m.

Elders present: Bob Brewster, Caly DePalma, Kathryn Fowler, Carolyn Hatfield, Brian Herndon, Ansley Land, Rebecca Silver, and Pamella Thompson

Elders present on Zoom: Karl Barnett and Warren Combs

Elders absent: Dennis Calbos

Others present: Luanne Rigsby and Tom Buchanan

### **Purpose of the Meeting**

The Moderator stated the purpose of the meeting is to discuss whether or not to enter into a 90-day discernment period concerning the possible purchase of the building next door to the church.

### **Review of Minutes**

The minutes from the December 19, 2024, Called Session meeting were reviewed and accepted as written by consensus.

### **Discussion of whether or not to move forward into a 90-day discernment period concerning the next-door property**

At the previous called Session meeting, Session authorized Jim Newland to contact the property owner's real estate agent, Roby Redwine, to get answers to several questions the Session had concerning the expenses that would be involved in entering into a 90-day period of discernment. Kathryn Fowler, chair of Finance Ministry Team, reported Jim's findings as follows:

1. Five thousand dollars earnest money would be required. The money would be refundable if the church decided not to buy the property up until the end of 90 days. If the church decided to buy the property, the \$5000 would go towards purchase price.
2. Title search would be \$500.00
3. Title insurance would be set by sales price so it is unknown.
4. Attorney Jay Cook would waive his fee for handling the closing.

Ansley Land reported that three quotes on the cost to do a building inspection were \$1000.00, \$1200.00, and \$1500.00. The cost of any repairs or remodeling, if required, is unknown.

In the agenda, Tom Buchanan had summarized the case for and against moving forward with a 90-day discernment period. These points came from feedback he had received, ministry teams, and from the congregation in the past few weeks. He reviewed and Session discussed the points presented in the list.

Concerns expressed by the Session were:

1. That we are reacting to an opportunity but have no long-term strategic plan for using the building or partners interested in using the building or renting space.
2. We don't know of any large donors who have expressed interest in contributing to the purchase of the building. Soliciting donors would take a long and organized campaign. Most donors want to know the plan for the use of their contribution. What could we do in 90 days? How would this affect our stewardship drive?
3. A lender might require us to put up our property as collateral for the loan. Paying this large debt could become our principal concern rather than other missions and could possibly bankrupt the church.
4. Building and nurturing the congregation, especially the older members, were identified as long-term goals in the recent Mission Survey.
5. Long-term planning goals that have been discussed, i.e. purchase of a van for youth and retired members, and hiring of an associate pastor, wouldn't be financially possible if we were to purchase the building.
6. We haven't identified a need for more space and have unused space downstairs.
7. Outreach remains a strong focus for Covenant and hopefully will continue to grow.
8. We need to have a plan for how we would use the building should it ever become available again.

Kathryn Fowler, on behalf of the Finance Ministry Team, **moved that Covenant not pursue a 90-day agreement to further investigate purchase of the building next door and that we pursue our mission outreach goals and other ongoing needs as identified during our planning process.** The motion coming from a Ministry Team needed no second. Following discussion, **motion carried.**

### **Next Steps and Congregational Communication**

Tom will contact Bert Ballard-Myer, former elder who was first contacted by the seller, and inform her of the Session's decision. He will also inform the building's owner, Paula Sartain, and Jim Newland so he can inform the real estate agent and attorney. Tom will draft a letter for *The Covenanter* and send it to Session for their input. He will also announce the decision during announcements at the worship service Sunday.

### **Announcements**

There will be a visitors' luncheon on January 19, 2025, after church and several visitors have expressed interest in coming. Tom encouraged Session members to also attend. Hopefully several people will be joining the church in the next few weeks.

Melissa Cobb will be ordained and installed as Elder on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. during a short worship service after the Covenant Connection meal.

### **Adjournment and Closing Prayer**

There being no further business, Rebecca Silver moved and Karl Barnett seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried and Tom adjourned the meeting with prayer at 7:16 p.m.

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Tom Buchanan, Moderator

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Luanne Rigsby, Clerk