

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA
Stated Session Meeting
January 24, 2026

A Stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church on January 24, 2026. Moderator Tom Buchanan welcomed everyone and expressed his disappointment in having to cancel the retreat but felt it was the right call due to impending hazardous weather. He declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Elders present: Bob Brewster, Dennis Calbos, Brian Herndon, Caly DePalma, Kirche Rogers, Karl Barnett, Deb Millwood, Haylee Nunn, and Jack Pannecoucke

Elders present on Zoom: None

Elders absent: Melissa Cobb, Pam Thompson, and Rebecca Silver

Devotional

For his devotional, Tom spoke about Ephesians 2:19-22, which serves as the basis for Covenant's new Vision to build a place where God dwells and neighbors are welcomed, formed, cared for, and sent in Christ's name. He encouraged Session to embrace the Vision throughout the year as we meet, pray, and serve together.

Tom opened the meeting in prayer.

Review of Minutes

The minutes from the December 2, 2025, Stated Session Meeting (combined November/December) were reviewed and accepted by consensus into the record as amended.

The minutes from the January 18 Called Session Meeting were reviewed and accepted by consensus into the record as amended.

Approval of the Agenda

The agenda was accepted by consensus with the addition of the decision to cancel the session retreat and address financial support for Covenant members Valerie Stone and Joan Prittie to attend the Olomouc conference in May.

Approve Kirche Rogers as Clerk of Session and Brian Striggow as Church Treasurer for 2026

Approval of these positions was unanimous.

Clerk's Report

Since Kirche is new to the position of Clerk of Session, replacing Luanne Rigsby, Tom led the discussion of the Clerk's Report.

2025 Church Statistical Report: Tom reviewed the 2025 Church Statistical Report and noted errors in the Membership Statistics, specifically, the absence of number of certificate gains, resulting in an erroneous Ending Active Membership Total. The total should have been 232 instead of 226. Tom will consult with Karen to have the errors corrected. The report was approved with the addition of certificate gains by email.

Kirche reported that she has several items of correspondence, which she will add to the Clerk's Report for the next Stated Session Meeting.

Financial Report

Karl Barnett, chair of the Finance Ministry Team, reported that there is an excess of funds that can be used by ministry teams for expenditures such as special projects. He encouraged ministry teams to spend down their budgets, as funds for needs should be sufficient in current budgets. He reported that there is an estimated \$150,000 in restricted funds that are available.

Karl asked that ministry team chairs begin preparing proposed budgets for next fiscal year (2026-2027) and bring them to the next Stated Session Meeting on February 26. Karl offered that a member of the Finance Ministry Team could attend other MT meetings when budgets are discussed.

He said that he will be putting financial information on a Google Drive that he will share with the Session.

The group briefly discussed the possibility of changing the fiscal year from July 1-June 30 to the calendar year. Tom said he would like the Finance Ministry Team to explore this possibility further.

Set Date and Time for Monthly Stated Session Meetings

Since the previous year's third Tuesday meeting time will not work for some Session members this year, after discussion, the group settled on the fourth Thursdays of the month at 6:15 p.m., with the exception of July and November/December. **Dennis Calbos moved and Caly DePalma seconded that the 2026 Stated Session meetings will be held on the fourth Thursdays of the month, excluding July and November/December, at 6:15 pm.** There was no further discussion, and the **motion carried.**

Session Retreat

Because this year's Retreat was cancelled due to Rock Eagle closing early for impending hazardous weather, the 2026 deposit will be transferrable to the next retreat. Tom proposed two options for selecting a new date – Either cancel altogether and reschedule for next year or hold the retreat at another date this year at Rock Eagle with the same agenda *and* schedule next year's retreat at Rock Eagle (on February 5-6, 2027). The only realistic date this year is March 20-21, 2026, and after discussion, the

group decided to hold an alternative format for the retreat this year and reschedule the Rock Eagle retreat for next year. The format for this year's retreat will be team-building events and a spiritual growth session to be held at Covenant on March 21 from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Deb Millwood has a conflict on that date, but she will try to miss the event.

Karl Barnett moved to hold the 2026 Session Team Building and Spiritual Growth Event at the church on March 21 if Deb can miss her event in lieu of this year's planned Rock Eagle retreat and apply the deposit already paid to Rock Eagle to the 2027 retreat on February 5-6. Jack Pannecoucke seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and there was no further discussion. The motion carried.

Business

NEGA Presbytery Meeting on February 28, 2026 at Covenant

Tom reported that he is now on the Presbytery Coordinating Team for the meeting, so he will be an integral part of the planning process. The event will be held from 9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., including lunch. The commissioners for the meeting will be Jack Pannecoucke, Karl Barnett, Caly DePalma, and Haylee Nunn. Tom will find ushers and elders for communion.

Amy Baer's Departure – Next Steps

Tom expressed appreciation for Amy and all that she accomplished during her time at Covenant. Her last day will be Sunday, February 8, and she will attend worship that day. Tom will do a litany, sending, and blessing on her following the sermon. Caly DePalma announced that a reception with snacks and cookies will be held afterward.

Regarding next steps for her position, Tom said he is working to ensure a smooth transition, where volunteers are coordinating and planning for the outreach efforts of the M&O Team in the interim. He reported that he has met with the Christian Education Team to begin discussing their interest in hiring a part-time director.

Tom said he would like the Personnel, M&O, and CE Teams to discuss future personnel needs for the M&O and CE Teams. A meeting will be set for a later date. He emphasized that the decisions need to be tied to the new Vision and allow for opportunities for growth. Ideally, he would like to have a new CE director by the beginning of the summer.

Worship Ministry Team moves that the Lord's Supper be served the First Sunday of every month, Maundy Thursday, and Christmas Eve.

The Motion does not require a second. **All voted in favor, and the motion carried.**

Tom asked that all elders who are able to attend this Sunday's service (February 1) be available to serve Communion.

Updates from Buildings and Grounds Regarding Cleaning Estimates and Security Questions

Chair of Buildings and Grounds Jack Pannecoucke reported that the team hasn't met this month, but he has met with Carolyn Hatfield, Caly DePalma, Hank Tweedell, and Brian Strigow individually to learn the team's responsibilities and set priorities for the year, which include maintaining the appearance of the campus, maintaining the building (Fellowship Hall and Kitchen, specifically), and Cleaning. Rich Reaves is working to secure a company to strip and rewax the floors and to provide general cleaning services. Bids will be compared, and a contract will be offered to the lowest bidder.

Other priorities include addressing homeless/safety issues on the church campus and writing a manual on the HVAC system to document where the units are located and controlled.

Caly DePalma has spoken with BOS Security regarding installing additional cameras on the property and monitoring the campus. The charge for monitoring remotely is \$200/month, and the police will be called if necessary. Transcend was recommended by BOS as a company to install the cameras. Caly met with a representative from Transcend who walked around the building to assess our needs. The estimate for installing additional cameras is \$9,300.

Tom commended Caly and Jack for their tireless and patient work in finding solutions to these issues, particularly the cleaning needs. The current cleaner, Evelyn, will likely have to be replaced, but Tom said he would like to provide her with a generous amount of notice and a substantial love gift.

Dennis Calbos asked for an update on the solar panel installation, and Tom said that at this point there is no agreement on where the panels would go. The discussion was tabled for now.

Olomouc Conference/Visit Funding

Bob Brewster, co-chair of the Mission and Outreach Team, followed up on Valerie Stone's request for funding to attend the Church Partnership Network Conference with the PC(USA) and ECCB (Czech Republic) in Pittsburg on May 3-7, 2026, which supports connections between American and international churches. In addition to Valerie, Joan Prittie plans to attend. The cost to attend the conference is \$500 per person, and Valerie plans to drive, so there will be no transportation costs for Covenant. Valerie is also looking for help to host Olomouc visitors in Athens after the conference, including meals, transportation, and lodging. Bob said he would like to meet with the Fellowship and Finance MTs to discuss the costs, because there are not enough funds in the M&O Team budget to cover the entire visit.

Karl Barnett, chair of the Finance MT, asked Bob to forward him the conference and visit details and prepare a proposal for Karl to present to the Finance MT. Tom said he was comfortable allowing Bob to tell Valerie that Session would cover two conference registrations.

General Announcements – Ministry Teams

Fellowship – Caly DePalma

The Fellowship Team is planning to make some changes to some of the events this year, hoping that they will attract a broader group of members. For example, the Heart of Covenant dinner will now be named Feast and Fellowship, to avoid the perception that the dinner is for couples only because it is usually held around Valentine's Day. The Team would also like to foster more collaborative efforts between teams, such as working with the Worship Team to revive the coffee gathering between 10:30-11:00 a.m. on Sundays.

Christian Education – Brian Herndon

Brian met with Colleen Cook, a former Covenant member and now associate pastor at Oconee Presbyterian to collaborate on ways to combine Oconee and Covenant's youth groups.

Motion to Adjourn and Closing Prayer

There being no further business, Dennis Calbos moved and Caly DePalma seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Following discussion, motion carried. Tom closed with prayer at 12:08 p.m.

Next Stated Meeting: Thursday, February 27, 2006, at 6:15 p.m. Caly DePalma has the devotional.

Tom Buchanan, Moderator

Kirche Rogers, Clerk