

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA
Stated Session Meeting
March 21, 2026

A Stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church on March 21, 2026. Moderator Tom Buchanan declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 1:09 p.m.

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

Elders absent: Melissa Cobb and Rebecca Silver

Devotional

For his devotional, Brian Herndon related how the twelve positions on Session and the twelve apostles are similar. Peter struggled with faith and denial; Andrew was a missionary, humble, and approachable; James (son of Zebedee) was fiery and passionate; Philip was practical and thoughtful; Bartholomew was open, without deceit, and trustworthy; Matthew, a tax collector, was despised; Thomas was doubting; James (son of Alphaeus) was quietly faithful and embodied humility and consistent, steadfast dedication to Jesus; Simon was like a political activist; Judas was a treasurer and administrator; Matthias, who replaced Judas, was humble, steadfast, and dedicated to service; and Jude was a passionate and courageous preacher.

Brian opened the meeting in prayer.

Review of Minutes

The minutes from the February 26 Stated Session Meeting were reviewed and accepted by consensus into the record as amended.

Approval of the Agenda

The Agenda was reviewed and accepted by consensus into the record as amended.

Clerk's Report

Nothing to report.

Business

Challenge Budget Presentation

Discussion was held regarding the proposed Challenge Budget to be presented to the congregation. It was agreed that the budget would be shared in a narrative format,

accompanied by spreadsheet figures showing estimated percentages of each donated dollar allocated to ministry teams and items such as pastoral care. The budget is intended to reflect the church's priorities and values. A line-item version will also be made available upon request.

It was noted that selected budget items, including the Christian Education Director and Assistant Music Director positions, would be addressed during the stewardship campaign.

Treasurer's Report – Brian Striggow

Treasurer Brian Striggow reviewed proposed budget changes, including:

- A 2.8% cost-of-living adjustment for the pastor and staff.
- Addition of an Assistant Music Director position budgeted at \$9,000 with reduced hours, later revised to \$11,000 at the request of the Worship Ministry Team to remove the vacation compensation in the original \$9,000 budget and reallocate the amount to the base salary.
- Addition of a Christian Education position.
- Increase for David Boardman of \$2,000 in recognition of workload, rather than the COLA 2.8% increase.
- Removal of Evelyn's custodial position (\$13,000), ending in June, along with a love gift.
- New cleaning contractors to begin July 1.

Additional notes:

- Administration budget remains unchanged.
- The Buildings and Grounds Ministry Team budget increased to absorb Evelyn's former budget and provide \$23,000 for contracted custodial services.
- The Mission and Outreach Ministry Team budget includes \$12,000 for the Food Pantry, reflecting increased food costs and increased need, with those served rising from 168 to 192.
- Church utilities are projected to increase by \$10,000.

Staffing and Personnel Discussion

Tom reported:

- Salaries include a 2.8% increase, in part to offset higher health insurance costs.
- The Assistant Music Director role is still being finalized. Director of Music Aaron Enyi-Carter has requested reduced hours initially to work on a grant, which may create temporary surplus funds. There is nothing to approve at this time, but there may be a final position description to vote on at the next meeting.

- The Coordinator of Christian Education and Youth and Family Ministries position remains a placeholder while duties are redefined.

Discussion included feedback from a recent parents' meeting led by Christian Education Ministry Team Co-chairs Hayley Nunn and Brian Herndon, which highlighted needs for stronger ministry coordination and family support.

Brian Herndon raised concerns regarding recruitment challenges due to a smaller number of children currently participating. It was noted that the role could serve as a central point of contact rather than routing all responsibilities through Tom.

The projected "true cost" of the position is estimated at \$55,000, including possible pension and insurance costs should an ordained candidate be hired. Depending on the outcome of the Stewardship Campaign, the budget might not support a 30-hour per week position. In that case, some duties might be removed from the job description.

Vehicle and Capital Needs Discussion

Chair of the Mission and Outreach Ministry Team Bob Brewster raised the possibility of purchasing a church van and emphasized the need to begin planning and setting aside funds.

Discussion included:

- Restricted funds may be available for a down payment.
- Leasing vehicles as needed may be more cost-effective than purchasing.
- A clear ministry vision and usage plan would be needed to justify ownership.
- Questions were raised about priorities for current surplus funds.

Solar Panel Discussion

Buildings and Grounds Ministry Team Chair Jack Pannecoucke reported that he has gathered information from Hannah with Georgia Interfaith Power. Solar panels may be available through a lease arrangement in which a company installs and maintains the system. Approximately \$25,000 has already been set aside. Any future action would involve a congregation-wide discussion.

Stewardship Campaign Timeline

Tom reported that the Finance Ministry Team has reviewed the Challenge Budget and is cautiously optimistic.

Planned timeline:

- Stewardship campaign begins immediately.
- Campaign letters, pledge cards, and narrative budget to be distributed next week. Karl Barnett will give a "Minute for Stewardship" update at the following Sunday's worship service.
- Easter Sunday is excluded from campaign emphasis.

- Campaign resumes April 19 and continues the following week.
- April 26 is designated as Pledge Sunday.
- Pledges will be tabulated in early May with follow-up to non-respondents.
- Session expects to have clearer budget projections by the May meeting.

Motion to Approve Challenge Budget

Karl moved that Session approve the Challenge Budget for the purpose of presenting it to the congregation. Dennis seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, and the **motion carried.**

Pastor's Report

Pastor Tom reported a heavy pastoral season, noting the loss of Jim Whitney. Also, Tom and Lisa planned to attend the memorial service for their friend Lydia Lee at Friendship Church, where Tom would speak.

Ministry Team Reports

Buildings & Grounds

- Cleaning specifications completed and bids received, coming in \$7,000 under the budgeted \$23,000.
- Brian Striggo was given approval to proceed with hiring Cesar Hernandez to make stucco repairs.
- Pressure washing was completed near the portico, steps leading into church, and the memorial garden.
- Shrubbery between Greencrest and the basketball court is to be removed.
- Discussion on landscaping improvements and grass planting around the basketball court is ongoing.
- New signage is planned along Greencrest to identify the church.
- Interior room signs are planned (Journey Room, etc.).
- Focus remains on improving curb appeal.
- Bob Brewster asked about cameras and lighting. Jack reported that the discussion is ongoing.

Christian Education

- Candy purchased for Easter egg hunt.
- Youth will assist with the event.
- Flyers advertising the egg hunt may be placed in Food Pantry bags.
- Tom has prepared promotional graphics.

Fellowship

Plans for Easter include:

- Potluck breakfast between sunrise service and Sunday School.
- Church to provide drinks and coffee.

For Pentecost:

- Strawberry Festival will be combined into a Pentecost luncheon.
- A red dessert contest is planned.

Coffee House:

- A date needs to be determined.

Finance

No report.

Mission & Outreach

- Next event is Guns to Gardens on March 28 with The Table. Volunteer sign-up to be distributed. Tom will serve as a chaplain at the event.
- Another meeting to be scheduled before fiscal year-end.

Tom commended Mission and Outreach Team Co-chairs Deb Millwood and Bob Brewster for their work during Amy's departure and afterward.

Personnel

The Personnel Ministry Team will assist with administration of the Christian Education and Assistant Director of Music positions.

Worship

- Worship attendance has exceeded 100 regularly.
- 178 attended the Gullah service.
- Easter worship planning underway.
- Tom presented memorial service protocols to the Worship Team.

Motion to Adjourn and Closing Prayer

There being no further business, Caly DePalma moved and Dennis Calbos seconded that the meeting be adjourned. Following discussion, the motion carried. Tom closed with prayer at 2:30 p.m.

Next Stated Meeting: Sunday, April 26, 2026, at Noon. Jack Pannecoucke has the devotional.

Tom Buchanan, Moderator

Kirche Rogers, Clerk