

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA

Stated Session Meeting

March 25, 2025

A Stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church on March 25, 2025. Moderator Tom Buchanan welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 6:18 p.m.

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

Elders absent: Karl Barnett and Kathryn Fowler

Others present: Tom Buchanan and Luanne Rigsby

Devotional

Brian Herndon presented a devotional based on a Presbytery-sponsored mission trip he participated in in 2006, Constructores Para Christo. The mission team built houses for people in need, and Brian said that you could see dignity being reestablished in the recipients of the homes. When the youth recently visited Jubilee Partners and heard about their work with abused women, Brian realized that those women were also having their lost dignity restored. You have to have self-dignity in order to give it to others. In today's world, we see dignity being taken away from immigrants and others. We pray that we can be a part of helping to restore dignity to those in the world who have lost it.

Review of Minutes

The minutes from the February 25, 2025, Stated Session meeting and the March 14, 2025, Email Vote were reviewed. Dennis Calbos moved and Rebecca Silver seconded that both sets of minutes be approved as written. Following discussion, motion carried.

Approval of the Agenda

Warren Combs moved and Caly DePalma seconded that the agenda be approved as amended to include two additional items in the Clerk's report. Following discussion, motion carried.

Clerk's Report – Luanne Rigsby

We have reserved Founders' Lodge at Rock Eagle Conference Center in Eatonton, GA, for the 2026 Session Retreat on January 23-24, 2026, with a signed contract and a \$300.00 deposit. The lodge wasn't available for the January 30-31, 2026, date.

Katy Terry will serve as acting clerk for the March 30th Called Congregational Meeting.

Covenant received two thank you letters from PCUSA Ministry Engagement and Support for contributions of \$436.00 to the Peace & Global Witness Offering, \$1290.00 for the Christmas Joy Offering and \$90.00 for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

Financial Report

Tom Buchanan reviewed the Financial Summary for February, 2025, as well as the detailed financial report for the month with the Session. He noted that the reports were reviewed at the Finance Ministry Team meeting with no concerns expressed. Pledges received so far this year are about \$8000 ahead of anticipated pledges. The Financial Report was accepted into the official record.

Business

Follow up to Session Visioning Retreat

Worship Ministry Team has requested that each ministry team select a month to highlight the opportunities to belong, grow, and share through their team. This may be done as a combination of Minutes for Mission in worship, a part of time with the children, or something outside of worship. Tom encouraged the chairs of each ministry team to spend 20-25 minutes at their next meeting with an intentional visioning exercise as to what the ministry team does now, what it would like to do, and how it can improve, getting input from each member of the team. (Warren provided Session with a sample visioning exercise used by Worship MT.) Two goals of the exercise are: To prepare for the month that the ministry team will be highlighted, and to create a more accurate and precise description of each ministry team's work to be included in the revised Session Manual. Bob Brewster noted that this will help the Nominating Committee when they recruit new elders. Tom will send each MT chair a copy of the description of their team as is written in the 2019 version of the Session Manual. Ministry Teams are asked to select their highlight month by the April Session meeting. Finance MT already has chosen March and Christian Ed. MT requested August.

Next Steps on Session and Church Policies; Review of Session Manual

As noted, the most recent version of the Session Manual was done in February, 2019, so it is time for an update. Tom and Karen Wetherington will take stock of what is in the 2019 Session Manual and what procedures and policies have already been revised but are not included that version. Dennis Calbos, Warren Combs, and Caly DePalma volunteered to help Tom and Karen update the Session Manual. The goal is to complete the revision by the end of June.

Stewardship Campaign Update & Approval of 2025-2026 Challenge Budget

Tom reviewed the "challenge budget", which is not the final budget but one that will be sent to the congregation in the stewardship packet. The total budget is \$482,023, a \$17,000 increase over the 2024-2025 budget. The budget includes a 2.5% cost of living for personnel with the exception of the new technical director. Ansley said that account #5732 needs to be increased to \$180 to cover the current cost of sheet cakes for receptions. **Warren Combs moved that Session accept the challenge budget for the purpose of sending it out in the stewardship packet.** Ansley Land seconded the

motion. Following discussion, **motion carried**. The stewardship packet with a letter from Tom, the challenge budget, a narrative budget, which explains how money is allocated to support functions of ministry, and pledge cards will be mailed out this week.

Communion Servers for April 6th

Elders Warren Combs, Pam Thompson, Bob Brewster, Karl Barnett, Brian Herndon and Rebecca Silver will serve communion on April 6th. They will meet in the narthex at 10:40 a.m. to go over the procedure.

Announcements - Ministry Teams

Building and Grounds - Caly DePalma reported that B&G's 1st priority of wrapping the basketball posts for safety has been completed. The next priority is replacing the tile floor in the fellowship hall, kitchen, and hall in front of the food pantry. It is 60 years old. B&G has received two bids of \$24,135.68 and \$26,847.44 to replace the tile but was not sure of how to finance it. There were also questions on whether to replace with tile or some other type of flooring. It must hold up to the lift that the food bank uses to deliver food. The subject was tabled until further input from Finance Ministry Team.

Covenant received a notice from Athens Clarke County Planning Department of a public hearing on April 3, 2025, to consider a request to rezone 1075 Gaines School Rd. from Commercial-Office/Planned Development to Commercial-Neighborhood. Caly will ask B&G if anyone is willing to attend the meeting so we'll be "in the know". Tom will call the building owner, Paula Sartain, and see what kind of buyer she envisions.

Congregational Care - Ansley Land updated that the new directory will be produced by Heritage Portraits. Photographs will be taken September 18-21, and the directory should be available within two months.

Personnel - Dennis Calbos announced that the Personnel Committee is planning a staff recognition and celebration by taking the staff to lunch. The committee has been working on updating policies. Dennis asked for guidance as to where and how they should be properly saved.

Fellowship - Rebecca Silver reported we had a good turnout for the Heart of Covenant Dinner and the Youth Group sponsored Games Night. Upcoming events include:

April 20, 2025 - Breakfast following Easter Sunrise Service

May 3/4 - Spring Picnic/Strawberry Festival – possibly held at Jubilee Partners

June 1 - July 27- Summer Cookies and Punch

June 8 - Pentecost Punch and Cake reception

Christian Education - Brian Herndon said that four youth and 3 adults will be attending Montreat Youth Conference. No Covenant Connection April 9th due to spring break. Easter Egg Hunt is April 19th at 11:00 a.m.

Mission Outreach - Bob Brewster reported that the Green Dream Team has been revived. Mission Outreach is looking for ways to be supportive of immigrant rights. The ministry team has added budgeted funds to support Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition and Athens Area Homeless Shelter this year.

NEGA Presbytery Meeting Report

Tom attended a Zoom NEGA Presbytery meeting on March 25, 2025. All four amendments to the constitution passed. One of the amendments was for the *Book of Order* to include a statement saying that sexual orientation and gender identity are two things against which we do not discriminate. The 2nd amendment requires that candidates for ordination as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Elders be asked their views on the previously mentioned amendment during their examination.

Important Dates

March 30, 2025 - Asher Hill's last official day as Technical Director. He will be recognized for his contributions and given a gift from the congregation during worship.

There will be a called Congregational meeting at the end of this Sunday's service to elect Rich Reaves as Elder to complete the remaining term of Carolyn Hatfield.

April 6, 2025 – Abby Horvath's last day. She is hosting a farewell party after church.

April 11, 2025 - Memorial Service for Juergen Wiegel at Presbyterian Village at 2:00 p.m. with a reception following. Presbyterian Village doesn't encourage bringing in food from the outside food. The family requests donations to the Juergen Wiegel Student Support Fund in Microbiology in lieu of flowers.

April 15, 2025 - Memorial Service for Larry Hatfield at Covenant at 2:00 p.m. Reception following in the fellowship hall catered by Presbyterian Village-Athens in conjunction with Congregational Care Ministry Team.

Motion to Adjourn

There being no further business, Warren Combs moved and Dennis Calbos seconded that the meeting be adjourned. **Motion carried.** Tom closed with prayer at 8:25 p.m.

Next Stated Meeting: Tuesday, April 22, 2025, at 6:15 p.m. Kathryn Fowler will present the devotional.

Tom Buchanan, Moderator

Luanne Rigsby, Clerk