

**Covenant Presbyterian Church, Athens, GA**  
**Stated Session Meeting**  
**March 28, 2023**

A stated Session meeting, called according to the Book of Order, was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church and via Zoom on March 28, 2023. Moderator Dana Waters welcomed everyone, declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Elders present: Katy Arora, Bert Ballard-Myer, Carolyn Hatfield, Jennifer Frey, Kathryn Fowler, Abby Horvath, Linda Koehler, Valerie Stone, Ansley Tweedell, Donny Whitehead

Elders absent: Clayton Adams and Dick Zimdars,

Others present: Pam Knox, Luanne Rigsby and Dana Waters,

### **Devotional**

In light of the grief we all feel after the recent school shootings in Nashville, TN, Valerie Stone read Psalm 23 and a poem, "The Peace of Wild Things" by Wendell Berry which expresses that when we're in despair, we can find peace among the wild things of the natural world which don't worry about what might come next but live in the present.

### **Review of Minutes**

The minutes from the February 28, 2023, stated meeting were reviewed. Jennifer Frey moved and Kathryn Fowler seconded that the minutes be accepted as presented.

**Motion carried.**

### **Approval of the Agenda**

A motion from the Nominating Committee for a congregational meeting was added to the agenda. Jennifer Frey moved and Valerie Stone seconded to approve the agenda as amended. Following discussion, the **motion carried.**

### **Clerk's Report**

Luanne Rigsby, Clerk, presented the following item for discussion: Approval as members by letter of transfer: Corky Callaway from Red Oak Methodist, Covington, GA, and Richard Kimmich from Ashford Memorial Methodist Church, Watkinsville, GA. Corky and Rich met with the Session on March 19, 2023 and told their faith journeys, but there wasn't a quorum at the meeting. Abby Horvath moved and Kathryn Fowler seconded that the Session approve the transfer of membership of Corky Callaway and Rich Kimmich to Covenant Presbyterian. Following discussion, **motion carried.** New membership total  $229 + 2 = 231$ .

## **Financial Report**

Pam Knox, Church Treasurer, reviewed the Financial Summary for February, 2023, as well as the detailed financial report for the month. Pam reported that that we are doing well financially having received more pledges and spending less than anticipated. She asked Ministry Team chairs to remind their members to promptly submit any expenses for which they need to be reimbursed. The restricted accounts have been reviewed. Some were spent out and will be eliminated and others will be kept. Pam thanked the ministry teams for their prompt submission of their budgets and for their work on restricted accounts listed under their teams.

Prior to the meeting, the Session received minutes of the Finance Ministry Team's recent meeting, as well as the proposed budget for the 2023-2024 fiscal year which begins July 1, 2023. Pam explained that the proposed budget of \$462,507 is a "wish budget". It is more than last year's budget of \$403,591 due to rising costs of supplies, utilities and insurance, funding for Montreat (last year restricted accounts were used for Montreat) and 6% raises for all personnel as recommended by the Personnel Committee. This year the Finance Ministry Team prepared a "Narrative Budget", which explains the budget by splitting the money budgeted into 4 categories (worship, spiritual growth, fellowship and outreach) that are aligned with the mission of the church. The pledge packets were mailed out to the congregation this week and are due back by April 16, 2023. After pledges are received, the budget will be revised to fit the amount of money pledged. The Financial Report was accepted into the minutes.

## **Ethical Standards During a Pastoral Transition**

Prior to the meeting, a document written by the Committee on Ministry of the Northeast Presbytery, "Appendix B Guidelines for Ministers Leaving" was sent to the Session for their review. Dana explained that this document gives guidelines for congregations concerning inviting former pastors back for weddings, baptisms and funerals but is less binding than the Interim Pastor Contract for Northeast Georgia Presbytery, Section G, a 3-way contract between Covenant Presbyterian, the interim pastor and Northeast Georgia Presbytery. That contract reads, "The Session encourages the Transitional/Interim Pastor to deny any requests by, or for, any former pastor to conduct any services of worship, including baptisms, weddings, and funerals in any of the facilities of the congregation." Dana explained that when he was asked to invite a former pastor back to perform a wedding, he made the decision to deny that request in accordance with the contract he has signed. If the Pastor denies the request, the Session has no action to take in the matter. Dana shared that these rules are in place to help a congregation with closure regarding former pastors, which is an important part of the church's work during this time of transition.

## **Presbytery Meetings Report**

Donny Whitehead, Susan Parish, Randy Parish, and Dick Zimdars served as commissioners to the NEGA Presbytery meeting held at Belle Terrace Presbyterian Church on February 25, 2023. Donny reported that it was a good meeting with a speaker from Paine College and excellent music. The commissioners picked up ideas on how to conduct the upcoming Presbytery meeting in May hosted by Covenant. Donny, Susan, Randy, and Abby Horvath served as commissioners for the called Presbytery meeting held on Zoom on March 25, 2023. At that meeting, they voted on a number of amendments to the Book of Order. All amendments but one passed. Dana thanked all commissioners for attending the meetings.

## **Small Group Proposal**

Before the January stated Session meeting, a document written by Rich Reaves, "Connections for Family Support", concerning formation of small groups around mutual interests was sent to the Session. Discussion was deferred until the March meeting. Opening the discussion, several existing (or existing pre-Covid) "small groups" were mentioned by the Session, including one attended by the Hatfields, Knitters and Knotters, Bell Choir and BRAS. We have also used sign - up sheets for outings of common interest including baseball games, hiking, opera, etc. However, the Session agreed that there isn't much awareness among church members of the existence of small groups. Session decided to first take an inventory of small groups and move on from there. Valerie Stone, Fellowship MT chair, asked everyone to email her about small groups they know about. She will make a list and put an article in *The Covenanter* asking what kinds of small groups the congregation would like. One idea proposed was that the youth might like to take leadership on the Green Dream Team. Session will discuss the list at the next meeting. Luanne will write Rich and update him on progress.

## **Information from Missions Outreach**

Bert Ballard-Myer, Chair of Missions Outreach, reported that two different private schools have contacted Covenant on the possibility of renting space for their schools starting in the fall of 2023.

1. The Learner's Collective is made up of 12 students, age 11 and up. They meet M-W, 8:30 to 3:30 and would need 2-3 classrooms.
2. The Joy Village School "centers on the joy and thriving of black youth", has 25 students and meets M-F, 8:30 to 3:30 and would need 4-5 classrooms.

Bert asked the Session to look at the schools' websites and email her all their questions. She will try to get the answers by the next meeting.

## **Nominating Committee Motion**

The Nominating Committee, comprised of Kay Brooks, Marie Ballard-Myer and Donny Whitehead, has identified a slate of 7 candidates for the Pastor Nominating Committee. Donny Whitehead, on behalf of the Nominating Committee, moved that Session call a Congregational Meeting on April 23, 2023, following worship for the purpose of electing the Pastor Nominating Committee. Coming from committee, the motion needed no second. Following discussion, the **motion carried**.

## **Announcements - Ministry Teams**

Bert Ballard-Myer announced that the Volunteer Appreciation Day will be held after church on April 30<sup>th</sup> for all volunteers. Invitations will be sent by Evite. Bert asked all Ministry Team chairs to send her their list of volunteers. Bert asked for volunteers to help plan the event.

Dana announced that following the request last year from the UGA Presbyterian Student Center for each church in the Presbytery to make a contribution to the Next80 campaign for renovation their building, a member of Covenant donated \$5000 to the campaign.

Dana reported that the nursery is back under the Christian Education MT. He thanked Worship MT for carrying the nursery under their team for the last year.

## **Motion to Adjourn**

There being no further business, Donny Whitehead moved and Carolyn Hatfield seconded that the meeting be adjourned. **Motion carried**. Dana closed with prayer at 8:50 p.m.

***Next Stated Meeting: Tuesday, April 25, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. Carolyn Hatfield will present the devotional.***

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Dana Waters, Moderator

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Luanne Rigsby, Clerk