



*Presbytery
of the Gulf South
Evangelical Presbyterian Church*

Round Up Newsletter

A Snapshot of the 33rd Stated Meeting – April 25-26, 2025

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior!

Gulf South Presbytery is blessed with churches that know what hospitality looks like. And First PC Meridian is no exception. It was a special weekend for Presbytery and very much so for our host church, as TE Rhett Payne preached his last sermon as their pastor on Friday evening. Rhett moves to our Honorably Retired roll, but like so many pastors, he is headed right back onto the field. For the ladies, Donna Payne shared her experiences in a talk titled 'Reflections on a Lifetime in Ministry.'

One thing a first-time commissioner or observer might notice is how often we pray in presbytery meetings. We open and close each day in prayer. Committee reports open and often close with prayer. On occasion, we stop mid report and pray over a matter that is being considered.

So, it was with much prayer that Gulf South presbyters went about the business at hand and doing it in a Presbyterian way – right and orderly.

- The Friday and Saturday sessions were opened with devotions and prayer by our Moderator, RE Brandon Queen, and TE Chip Cowsert, incoming Pastor for First Presbyterian Meridian.
- Presbytery, in accepting RE Henry Beck's resignation as a Facilitator, recognized his service and honored him with lengthy applause. TE Bob Vincent will continue as our sole facilitator, "pastoring to our pastors" across the Presbytery.
- Speaking for the Pastoral Care Committee, TE Scott Castleman described the Presbytery Sabbatical Grants, which would help pastors within the presbytery cover costs associated with their sabbatical. He emphasized that a sabbatical isn't an extended vacation, but a "holy time" for a pastor to invest in his relationship with God.
- World Outreach gave an update on our missionaries, some of whom are returning to the field in very sensitive locations. For that reason, their names are not listed here. But you are still asked to pray for them, because, even if you don't know their names, God knows them individually as well as their every need.

- Presbytery endorsed TE Bruce Rux to serve on the General Assembly’s Chaplains Work and Care Committee.
- TE Scott Cheatwood, chair of the Nominating Committee, put out a call to all our elders in the Gulf South to consider serving on one of our committees. We are a “bottom up” organization and need the participation of officers from our churches.
- Presbytery heard reports from TE Ro Taylor and TE Richard Rieves.
 - Ro, our church planter in Hattiesburg, MS, described ongoing efforts to connect with the community and build a core group for that plant.
 - Richard, who is Executive Director of the EPC Church Planting Network, described its work of identifying planters, training them, and supporting their efforts to develop self-sustaining churches. The network partners with four presbyteries - Gulf South, Central South, Southeast, and Florida and the Caribbean.
 - Presbytery approved continued financial support for the Hattiesburg plant and the network.
- Next, Presbytery considered an ascending overture from the session of Covenant Monroe. It requested the GA direct the National Leadership Team to review and clarify the role of the GA Stated Clerk. After receiving the Bills and Overtures Committee report and the motion to adopt the overture was made, opportunity for presbyters to speak was given. In the end the overture was not adopted.
- Top of mind for Next Generation Ministries is the upcoming **EPiC2025** on June 2-6 in Biloxi, MS. TE Scott Castleman will speak and Samuel Oh will lead worship. Even with registration officially closed, a few more attendees can be accepted. Churches need to contact Weston Blaha (wblaha@icloud.com) ASAP. There are scholarships available to help with the \$300 fee.
- TE Chip Cowser prayed for our Candidates under Care and reminded us that we are called to raise up leaders for the church. After he gave an update on our current candidates, Daniel Croskrey came forward to be examined. After hearing a convincing and very encouraging testimony of faith, Presbytery approved Daniel to be our newest candidate for ministry.
- Our Church Health Coordinator, TE Ron Horgan, spoke of his recent meeting with other coordinators to receive updates and information and gave us a short statistical update on churches in general. He described his recent visits to churches in south Texas and the Refocus workshops he has conducted in the presbytery.
- The Ministerial Committee conducted examinations of two ministers with calls to serve Gulf South churches. At the conclusion of the exams, they were approved unanimously to be received into the Presbytery. They are:
 - Jason Minter, who comes from the Presbytery of Florida (ECO), will serve as Pastor of Covenant Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Lake Jackson, TX.

- Bill Fikes, who comes from Tennessee Valley Presbytery (PCA), will be the Assistant Pastor at Westminster Presbyterian in Laurel, MS.

Also, the committee reported that, acting as a commission of Presbytery, it had approved:

- Ed Ramer to be the Assistant Pastor at Grace Presbyterian in Alexandria, LA.
 - Chip Cowser to be the Pastor at First Presbyterian in Meridian.
 - TE Bob Roane and TE Rhett Payne to move to the Retired roll.
 - TE Payne to be the stated supply to Westminster Presbyterian of Gulfport.
 - The dissolution of the pastoral relationships TE Brett Becker (Quest) and Will Shurley (Westminster Gulfport)
- Finally, Presbytery formally closed Quest Church, our mission church in New Braunfels, TX, as the few remaining members move to seek new church homes.

Gulf South will next meet at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Jackson, MS, on September 26 and 27.

The Round-Up Newsletter, sent after each stated meeting, is meant to be shared freely with the pastors, ruling elders, congregations, and friends of Gulf South Presbytery. If you know of someone who might enjoy receiving this newsletter, ask them to email the Stated Clerk at statedclerk.gsp@gmail.com to be added to the mailing list.