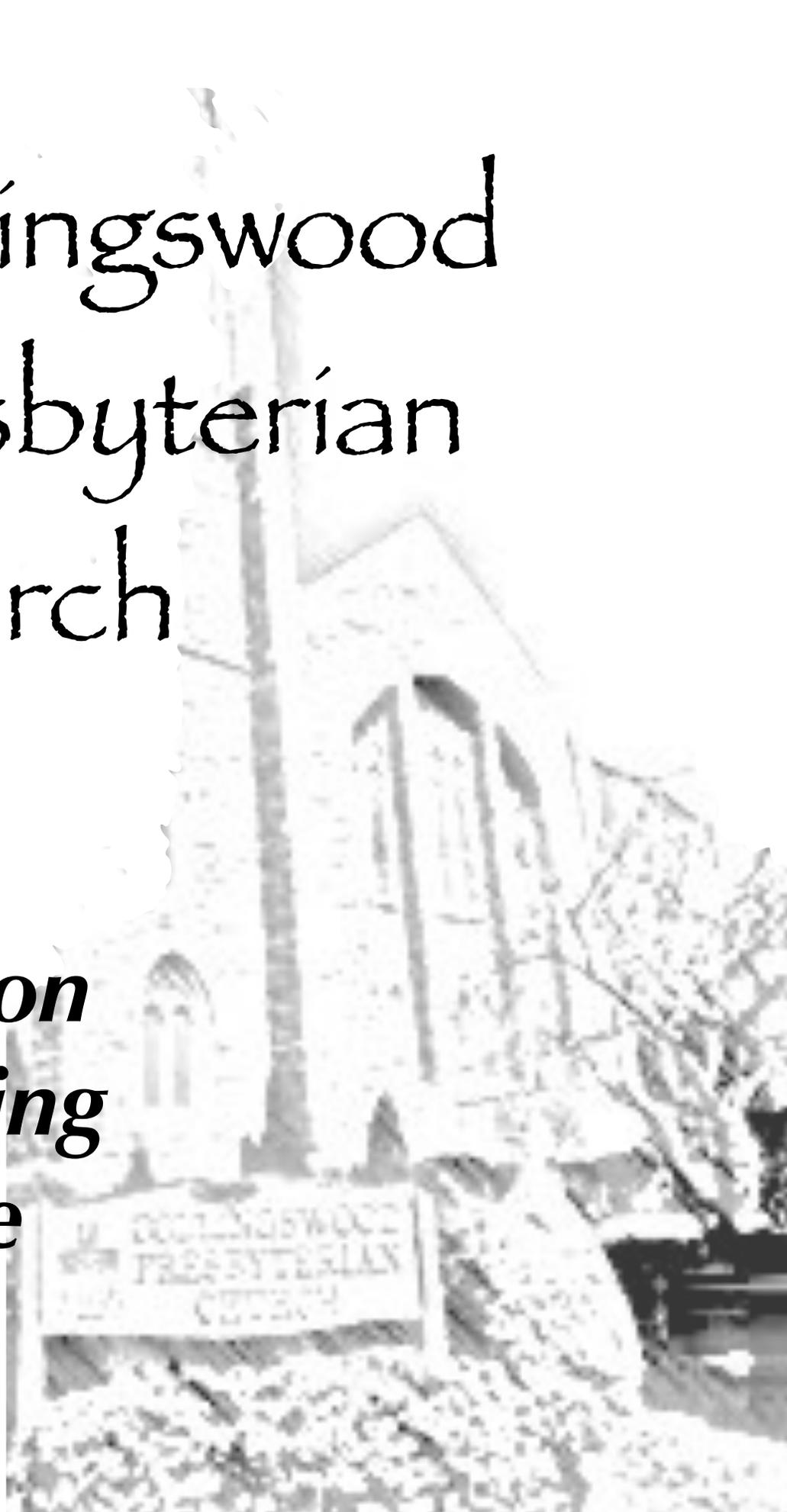


# Collingswood Presbyterian Church

## *Deacon Training Guide*





# Reformed Theology 101

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Cynthia Rigby, ‘one of the great theologians of our time,’ lays out Reformed beliefs during an hour-long webinar

by Mike Ferguson | Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE — The mystery of the Reformed faith is not that God is unknowable — it’s that the unknowable God, from the Reformed perspective, has made God’s Self known.

In an hour-long webinar created last week, the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Rigby, the W.C. Brown Professor of Theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, lays out that assertion along with other basic tenets of Reformed theology. The Presbyterian Mission Agency’s Office of Christian Formation and the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators put on the free webinar; a recording is available here.

During the webinar, Rigby, called by the Dallas Morning News “one of the great theologians of our time,” discussed six basic teachings of Reformed theology.

## **The sovereignty of God**

Not a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing it. Without God’s sovereignty, the reformer John Calvin said, life would be unbearable.

“It’s not that God causes things to happen,” Rigby said, “but that God is with us even when horrible things happen.”

Still, people of faith can well grow frustrated when problems persist over the years.

“Why isn’t God solving this? We have been praying the Lord’s Prayer for 2,000 years. Show us the money already, O God!” she said.

The sovereignty of God authorizes us to keep hoping, to keep pushing, she said, because “we have something better than a right — we have an identity,” she said, quoting Jacquelyn Grant in “White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus”: “When black women call Jesus Lord, they are saying the slaveholder isn’t.”

## **The goodness of Creation**

We sometimes attach negative attributes to Creation and sex, eating good food and drinking good wine and otherwise enjoying this world, but “nothing could be further from the truth,” Rigby said.

“We believe everything was created good. That’s what makes the Fall more serious,” she said. “The good news built into the fabric of Creation is who we really are.”

The fact that Jesus did not sin makes him more human than we are, not less human. Jesus was tried in every way that we are, and we can hold one another accountable. “We can approach

each other and say, 'Hey Cindy, you aren't being who God made you. I insist you correct that behavior,'" she said. "We are laying claim to our created goodness."

## **The centrality of Christ**

Before he was Abraham, Abram believed God, who "reckoned it to him as righteousness," according to Genesis 15. God's word is huge and it's ubiquitous, "even as it was present in Jesus," Rigby said. "Abram was saved through the same word we know through Jesus Christ," which has some implications for further interreligious dialogue, Rigby said.

When Rigby gets to heaven and sees her father, she'll also be glad to greet her Buddhist friend, "because Jesus was able to save him, too." She labeled Jesus a priest, judge prophet — and, to the poet Emily Dickinson, a "tender pioneer" who bushwhacks through the forest and claims victory over sin and death so we might live an abundant life.

## **The tenacity of grace**

This is difficult to discuss, Rigby said, because there are few human analogies. Grace is unfathomable, but the theologian Barbara Brown Taylor has this story to help explain what grace is: A Yankee visits a southern diner and orders two eggs over easy with wheat toast and bacon. The plate is served with what is to the Yankee an unknown substance oozing out of every other item ordered. The customer asks about it, and the waitress replies, "Oh honey, those are grits. Grist comes whether you order it or not."

"Grace is like grits," Rigby said. "It comes whether you order it or not."

"We talk about gratitude and response, but we still fall into the pattern of thinking about grace transactionally, and we need work on that," she said.

Theologian Karl Barth notes that when Jesus says on the cross, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise," it's not clear he's speaking just to the criminal who asks him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

"Barth says, 'Aren't those thieves lucky? They participated in Jesus' life and death, and they get to participate in his resurrection.'"

## **The inseparability of word and sacrament**

Christians are good at lifting up pairs of things that are simultaneously true, she said: Jesus is fully human and fully divine. We are at the same time righteous and sinners. The Trinity is one in three, three in one.

At the Synod of Alexandria in 362 CE, participants were warring about the Trinity. In the end, leaders told both sides they were right, "and people were mad about that, because they wanted a better answer," Rigby said. "The oneness of God and the three-ness of God are not in tension."

The PC9USA's Directory for Worship says word and sacrament are inextricably intertwined. Rigby pointed to a New Testament miracle as proof: Jesus lectured the 5,000, and then he fed

them. “The bigger miracle,” she said, “was this important man stopped talking long enough to serve lunch.”

## **The transforming work of the Holy Spirit**

Reformed theologians get a “bum rap,” she said, for not caring enough about the work of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, “the Holy Spirit sealed the deal on the truth of who Jesus Christ is and God’s benevolence,” Rigby said. “Without the Holy Spirit, we can know nothing.”

For Calvin, part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to help people know they are God’s Elect “so that they can live the abundant life God wants them to live,” she said. “Calvin said to treat everyone as though they are the Elect. That’s up to God, not us.”

The forgiveness of sins “is not only a possibility, but a requirement of Reformed theology, and there’s a lot of misunderstanding about that,” Rigby said. “If we could model forgiveness better, it could make a real difference in the world.”

And as we go out into that world, “remember we are part of the Reformed tradition,” Rigby said as a benediction to close the webinar. “To whom much is given, much will be required. We are all in it together as a community of faith.”

This Article: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/reformed-theology-101/>

Webinar: <https://apcnet.org/project/basics-of-reformed-theology/>

# Called to be servants

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By caring for persons in need, deacons reflect the heart of Christianity

By Stephany Jackson | Presbyterians Today

**O**n just about any Sunday visitors to Peace Presbyterian Church in Louisville will cross paths with Lee Kennedy. A deacon for the past three years, Kennedy assists guests with parking, seating and technological equipment for presentations. He gives them information about the church and introduces them to the pastor. He does all of this with a spirit of hospitality.

Kennedy's responsibilities as a deacon include serving quarterly as a worship leader, substituting as teacher for the young adult and adult Bible classes and assisting people in the community with food and financial help. He says serving as a deacon allows him to demonstrate his love for Christ and has inspired him to enroll in Bible college.

Though Kennedy has held many other leadership positions in the church — such as trustee, chair of the usher board and chair of the church's capital campaign — he says being a deacon has been the most rewarding for him. "Some people see this as just a title," he explains. "I see this as a Bible-based ministry."

While all Christians are called to care for persons in need, the ministry of deacons is the light that guides the way. Deacons are a reflection of the heart of Christianity. As our country faces some of its most challenging times, growing numbers of people will need care and compassion. Deacons are called to model and extend the love of Jesus Christ.

## A job description for deacons

**T**he 1992 General Assembly put forward an expanded vision of the ministry of deacons when it approved a report from a task force studying the theology and practice of ordination. The report (as summarized in *The Presbyterian Deacon: An Essential Guide*, by Earl S. Johnson Jr.) said a deacon's job description includes the following tasks:

"Exhibit within the church and before the world the exemplary moral authority of sympathy, witness and service after the example of Jesus Christ."

Being a servant to all is tough business. Working with people's problems, hurts, disappointments and needs requires, as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Book of Order puts it, that deacons be "persons of spiritual character." They should be persons of deep faith and high moral standards (see 1 Timothy 3:8–13), committed to a life of prayer, study and other spiritual disciplines. Attention to these practices can help deacons persevere during times of disappointment or burnout.

The office of deacon was established early in the New Testament church to make sure food was distributed to widows and others in need (see Acts 6:1–6). The leader of the first group of deacons was Stephen, whose witness cost him his life (Acts 7).

Early Protestant reformer John Calvin believed that the primary task of the deacon was to take care of the poor and to distribute alms. According to Calvin, helping the poor is worth everything — even to the point of giving yourself and all of your possessions.

To be a deacon involves becoming a servant to others — a role that may not seem very appealing. But this is exactly the role to which Jesus calls all who are truly committed to following him:

“... whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43–45).

### **“Care for God’s people in crisis”**

**D**ifficult times call for well-trained, committed deacons. The history of early African American congregations offers an example of how the church can make a difference during times of national crisis. Long after the slaves were set free, the physical, emotional and psychological effects of slavery could still be felt and seen. It took some time for freed African Americans to live lives truly independent of those who had owned them as property. The church was the place where most of them went for help. At the church they could find food, shelter, rest, education, encouragement and hope.

These services were coordinated by the Sanctified Women’s Missionary Society, which insured that anyone who came to church seeking help was treated with respect and dignity. Even though the Society had few resources, the women willingly shared whatever they had. The hospitality extended to frightened and desperate people had a direct impact on the healing of an entire community. Members, visitors and strangers were all viewed as fellow sojourners and children of God who needed to be reminded of the love of Jesus Christ.

In her book *If It Wasn’t for the Women* (Orbis, 2001) Cheryl Townsend Gilkes describes how women in African American churches organized to promote social change and address the needs of college students, young people, household domestics, unwed mothers and a variety of other groups.

### **“Challenge structures and conditions, within the church and within the wider society, which keep persons and groups powerless and voiceless.”**

**A**ccording to Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, it is work such as the tasks administered by deacons — feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the prisoner — that qualifies one to inherit eternal life. In this parable (verse

40) Jesus informs his followers what is required of them, saying, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it for one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Becoming a church that is mission-focused and discipleship-driven will require members to work for justice in the world and to develop trusting relationships with people whose lives are vastly different from their own. Deacons will need specialized training to help people who are overwhelmed with financial, medical, emotional and other debilitating problems. Churches must become places of hospitality for members and strangers alike, at whatever cost.

### **“Become liturgical representatives of the church’s presence in the world and the world’s presence in the church.”**

**D**eacons traditionally have set the Communion table, visited and prayed for church members who are sick or bereaved, and served as liturgists. Now they also are being challenged to become bridge-builders between the church and the community and to participate regularly in leading worship.

The ministry of the deacon does not have to be confined to the congregation. It can include tasks such as representing the church on the boards of grassroots organizations. Deacons are usually well positioned to help their congregation further its relationship with its neighbors by sponsoring community meals, clothing drives, job training, after-school programs, parenting classes, financial seminars, health fairs and other programs.

### **“Develop new forms of leadership at every level of church, community and governing body life.”**

**C**ongregations that invest the time to train and support deacons are likely to be healthier than those that do not. The deacons’ ministry may be organized as a board, with the church’s pastoral staff as advisory members. Deacons also may be commissioned individually to fulfill specific responsibilities. This may work best in small congregations that have difficulty finding enough officers to staff a board or in churches whose members do not have the time or are too far apart to meet regularly.

The bottom line, says Earl Johnson, is that deacons can model new and even risky ways of serving. “Perhaps in the coming years,” he writes, “it will be more important to be creative, innovative, spontaneous, and Spirit-filled in our service than it will to be safe and orderly.”

### **A model of caring**

**J**esse Tucker, chair of the board of deacons at Louisville’s Peace Presbyterian Church, says she is inspired by Romans 12:9–13: “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”

Last September when a windstorm left thousands of Louisville homes and businesses without power, Peace Church answered the call to serve. “We opened our hearts and shared nutritional meals and services with God’s people who were in need,” Tucker says.

Guided by the example of its deacons, Peace Church members regularly welcome visitors to worship, prepare dinners for bereaved families and visit the sick, shut-ins and people in prison. They keep in touch with students away from home and provide meals, babysitting and other services to incapacitated members and neighbors.

Tucker says the charge to serve as the caring and nurturing arm of the church puts deacons in tune with the needs, joys and sorrows of the congregation and community. “We are commanded to minister to those in need, to the sick, to the friendless and to those in distress within and beyond the community of faith.”

## **Character and duties of deacons**

**T**he office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies and sound judgment should be chosen for this office.

It is the duty of deacons, first of all, to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. They shall assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time by the session, such as leading the people in worship through prayers of intercession, reading the Scriptures, presenting the gifts of the people, and assisting with the Lord’s Supper. Book of Order, G-6.0401–02

# PCUSA Book of Order

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## DEACONS: THE MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND SERVICE

### **G-2.0201 Deacon Defined**

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of: compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for

- the poor
- the hungry
- the sick
- the lost
- the friendless
- the oppressed,
- those burdened by unjust policies or structures
- anyone in distress

Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

### **G-2.0202 Under Authority of the Session**

Deacons may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties as may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord's Supper. (W-3.0414). A congregation by a majority vote may choose not to utilize the ordered ministry of deacons. If the congregation has neither a board of deacons nor individually commissioned deacons, the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session.

### **W-2.0302 Deacons**

Deacons are called to lead the congregation in compassion, witness, and service, representing the ministry of the church in the world and the presence of the world in the church. While deacons have no particular responsibilities for the ordering of worship, the session should ensure that deacons (where present) have regular opportunities to lead in worship, and that their ministries of compassion, witness, and service are reflected in the public services of the church.

# Deacons at CPC

## Organization

The Board of Deacons consists of six persons elected for a term of three years, renewable once. The Deacons are led by a Moderator and a Secretary/Treasurer who are elected annually by the Deacons.

## Moderator

The Moderator is responsible for the overall leadership and guidance of the Deacons. In cooperation with the Pastor and Session, the Moderator calls and convenes meetings (at least monthly) and insures the various ministries and other projects are carried out.

## Members

Members perform their duties as assigned by the Board. They may have one-time or occasional responsibilities as well as specific ongoing ministries. They should feel free to contact the Moderator or Pastor with questions and clarifications as well as requests for help with their assignments.

## General Tasks

These are some of the general responsibilities of the Deacons:

1. *Promotes, in many and innovative ways, the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Collingswood area by word but especially by actions;*
2. *Responsible for maintaining CPC as an active, loving community of faith;*
3. *Works with Pastor to identify special needs of members and members with special talents;*
4. *Develops visitation plan, insuring all who waned to be visited are visited;*
5. *Produces membership directory;*
6. *Maintains history/memory of congregation, educates Pastor on relationships among members;*
7. *Works with Worship on special, community-oriented services, organizes mailings and other promotions;*
8. *Organizes regular fellowship events (coffee hours, dinners, parties, outings, small group fellowships);*
9. *Works with Worship committee to provide greeters to identify newcomers to church;*
10. *Identifies newcomers to CPC neighborhood (welcome baskets, community directory, etc.);*
11. *Works with Mission to publicize church activities and events;*

## Collingswood Presbyterian Church

- 12. Works with Pastor to insure Pastoral needs of bereaved family are met and follow-up help is available*
- 13. Works with Clerk and secretary to insure updated information on members (birthdays, baptized members, children, addresses, and telephone numbers, etc.);*
- 14. Organizes phone chain for rapid congregational communication, especially by those needing prayer;*
- 15. Meets regularly with Pastor to review progress;*
- 16. Takes on other duties as determined by Pastor and Session.*

### **Mission Projects**

The local mission projects undertaken by Deacons in recent years include:

School Supply Drive, CROP Walk, Food Drives, Christmas Tree giving

# Ordination Questions

**At the Service of Ordination, the following questions will be asked of you:**

**D**o you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

**D**o you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?

**D**o you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

**W**ill you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

**W**ill you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?

**W**ill you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

**D**o you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

**W**ill you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

**W**ill you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

# Notes

# Notes

*Share your faith*

