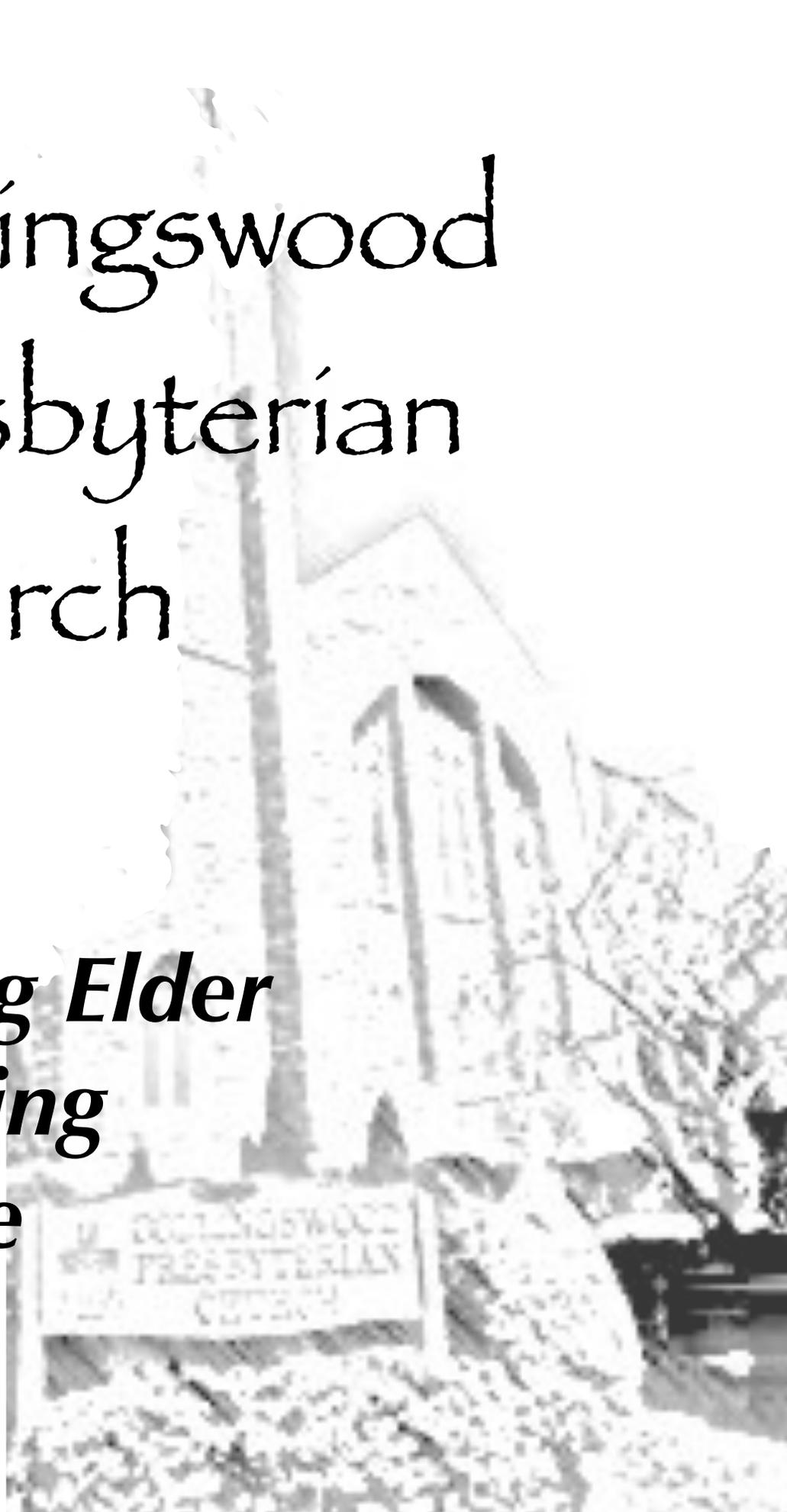


Collingswood Presbyterian Church

Ruling Elder Training Guide



Reformed Theology 101

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 PC(USA)'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/>

10 things ruling elders should know

August 5, 2015 The Presbyterian Outlook by Alyson Janke

In my work as a presbytery stated clerk, I am called upon to help equip ruling elders-elect for their service on the session and in the wider church. As a ruling elder myself, I recognize the need for polity education for those of us who are not seminary-trained church leaders. Here are ten things I think every ruling elder should know.

1. God called you to this service.

Sometimes we think of serving on the session of our churches as “taking our turn on the board.” Although we responded to a nominating committee’s invitation, God was behind it. Being a ruling elder is a ministry to which we are ordained. Ruling elders (and deacons) answer the same questions at ordination as teaching elders (ministers) answer, except those questions specifically related to the duties of the ministry. Ordination is for life, even though terms on the session are limited. When a ruling elder is not serving on the session, he or she is still eligible to perform many of the functions of the ministry, such as being the clerk, assisting in the administration of the sacraments or being a commissioner to one of the more inclusive councils.

2. We are presbyterian, not congregational or episcopal.

Congregational types of churches make decisions in congregational meetings. Episcopal types of churches authorize their bishops to make decisions for the life of the church. Presbyterians come together in groups elected by the people they serve to make decisions. These elected people are called presbyters, ruling elders and teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament). Very few decisions are made by single individuals and very few decisions are made by vote of a congregation. Most decisions for the life of a congregation are made by the session. These range from providing for the worship, education and spiritual nurture of people in the congregation to managing the physical property of the church and adopting a budget.

3. There are four councils, or governing levels, in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The session is the council of the congregation. The congregation elects the persons who serve on its session. There is a moderator or co-moderators and the ruling elders elected for specific terms. The presbytery is all the congregations and teaching elders within a certain district (G-3.0301). The synod is a specific geographic area with at least three presbyteries (G-3.0401). The General Assembly is the council of the whole church (G-3.0501). When presbyteries, synods or the General Assembly meet as deliberative bodies they are composed

of commissioners who are ruling elders and teaching elders in numbers as nearly equal as possible.

4. Presbyters are commissioners, not delegates.

Whether we are serving on our congregation's session or as a commissioner to presbytery, synod, or General Assembly, we seek to "find and represent the will of Christ," (F-3.0204) not those who elected us. While their opinions and positions inform us, they do not bind us. When we gather together we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, listen to discussion and debate and vote as we are led by the Spirit.

5. When presbyters are gathered as deliberative bodies, decisions are made by voting.

After opportunity for discussion and discernment, "a majority shall govern" (F-3.0205). We use the most recent edition of "Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised" (RRONR) as our parliamentary authority (G-3.0105). RRONR is a tool that helps us determine the will of the body. It should never be used as a means of exercising power at the exclusion of fairness. We can understand this by keeping in mind three parliamentary principles which are identified in Marianne Wolfe's booklet, "Parliamentary Procedures in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)":

The rights and the unity of the body shall be preserved; The will of the majority shall prevail; The rights of the minority shall be protected.

We bear in mind that Christ is the head of the church (F-1.02) and all of the business we conduct should be done in a way that builds up the body of Christ.

6. "Ruling" in the title of ruling elders is about measuring, not flexing power (G-2.0301).

It is their role to measure the spiritual health of the congregation entrusted to their care and make decisions that equip and strengthen the congregation's discipleship. Ruling elders follow the example of Christ and lead by service while working with moderators of session and pastors.

7. Compassion is one of the characteristics of ruling elders.

In many Presbyterian churches there are deacons who carry out ministries of compassion, witness and service (G-2.0201). In the Presbyterian churches that have chosen not to have deacons, "the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session" (G-2.0202). In either case, part of the role of the session is to be a compassionate witness in the congregation and community.

8. We sometimes disagree.

Occasionally people on church councils avoid disagreement in order to be “nice” or more “Christian.” As far back as 1788, Presbyterians recognized that, “there are truths and forms with respect to which men (people) of good character and principles may differ” and that we then need to exercise “mutual forbearance” (F-3.0105). Disagreement is not a bad thing when it is expressed in ways that do not disturb the “peace, unity, and purity of the church” (W-4.4003g).

9. We are a constitutional church.

Presbyterians believe that our life together is best when lived with “a disciplined concern for order ...” (F-2.08). Our constitution is more than a set of rules. Part 1 of the Constitution is the Book of Confessions, consisting of 12 documents whose origins span 1,800 years of church history. Part 2 of the constitution is the Book of Order with four sections describing the way we order our life together. It is important to remember that part 1 is the Book of Confessions, reminding us that the foundation of our polity is what we believe. Our specifications of order grow out of that foundation. Even the Book of Order begins with a three-chapter synopsis of what we believe (called The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity) before it launches into the other three sections: The Form of Government, The Directory for Worship and The Rules of Discipline. These living documents are changed by a specified method as often as every two years.

10. We are a connectional church.

Each congregation is part of a web of relationships in our Presbyterian family. In part, this means that each congregation and each session is accountable to the larger church through the presbytery. This accountability is expressed in requirements for annual reporting and review of session records. Presbyteries and synods are likewise accountable to the council above. We’re all in this together. The decisions of one council influence the work of another. Persons ordained by one presbytery or session are ordained in the whole church. We support and pray for each other. Those elected as ruling elders to serve on their sessions may also be called upon to serve as commissioners to presbytery, synod, or General Assembly.

Understanding these basic principles of Presbyterian polity can help us to be more comfortable in our roles as ruling elders and to serve and lead more effectively.

ALYSON JANKE is a ruling elder with varied experience in using and interpreting Presbyterian polity, including 20 years as the stated clerk of John Knox Presbytery; 7 years on the General Assembly’s Advisory Committee on the Constitution; and 17 years teaching Presbyterian polity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

PCUSA Book of Order

RULING ELDERS: THE MINISTRY OF DISCERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church

The great ends of the Church are:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

F-3.0202 Governed by Presbyters

This church shall be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament). Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and guide in its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament shall be committed in all their work to teaching the faith in word and in deed and equipping the people of God for their ministry and witness.

G-2.0301 Ruling Elder Defined

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God’s Spirit and governance of God’s people. Ruling elders, together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, and they are eligible for any office.

G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities of Session

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator,

the presbytery shall make provisions for a moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.

The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).

In light of this charge, the session has responsibility and power to:

- a) provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a minister of the Word and Sacrament or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.
- b) provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received. This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care among the congregation in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.
- c) nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ. This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

G-3.0202 Relations with Other Councils

Sessions have a particular responsibility to participate in the life of the whole church through participation in other councils. It is of particular importance that sessions:

elect, as commissioners to presbytery, ruling elders from the congregation, preferably for at least a year, and receive their reports; nominate to presbytery ruling elders from the congregation who may be considered for election as commissioners to synod and General Assembly, and to serve on committees or commissions of the same, bearing in mind principles of inclusiveness and fair representation in the decision making of the church (F-1.0403); see that the guidance and communication of presbytery, synod, and General Assembly are considered, and that any binding actions are observed and carried out; welcome representatives of the presbytery on the occasions of their visits; propose to the presbytery, or through it to the synod and General Assembly, such measures as may be of common concern to the mission of the church; and send to presbytery and General Assembly requested statistics and other information according to the requirements of those bodies, as well as voluntary financial contributions.

W-2.0303: Ruling Elders

Ruling elders are called to nurture the common life of the people of God through their gifts of discernment and governance. They should also cultivate an ability to teach the Word when called upon to do so. When appropriately prepared and commissioned by the presbytery, ruling elders may proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments in a particular congregation (G-2.1001).

In a particular congregation, ruling elders shall provide for the church's worship and encourage the people's participation. Specifically, when serving together on the session, ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament: make provision for the regular preaching of the Word and celebration of the Sacraments, corporate prayer, and the offering of praise to God in song; oversee and approve all public worship in the congregation, with the exception of responsibilities reserved for the minister of the Word and Sacrament; determine occasions, days, times, and places for worship; and have responsibility for the arrangement of worship space, the use of special appointments (flowers, candles, banners, paraments, and other objects), and the ministries of music, drama, dance, and visual arts.

Elders at CPC

Organization

The Session of CPC consists of six persons elected for a term of three years, renewable once. The Session is led by a Moderator, who is normally the Pastor, and Clerk who is elected annually by the Deacons.

Moderator

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

Elders

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 Clerk with questions and clarifications as well as requests for help with their assignments.

Mission

The Session (elders, together with the pastor) is to strengthen and nurture the faith and life of the congregation through their leadership and service. encourage the people in the worship and service of God equip and renew the people for their tasks within the Church, equip and renew the people for their mission in the world. visit and comfort and care for the people with special attention to the sick and the lonely and to those who are oppressed, inform the Session and the Pastor of those who may need special attention and cultivate the ability to teach the Bible

General Tasks

These are some of the general responsibilities of the Session:

1. *receive members into the church;*
2. *lead the congregation in participation in the mission of the church;*
3. *provide for the worship of the people of God including preaching and the sharing of the Sacrament;*
4. *provide for the spiritual growth of its members;*
5. *develop and supervise the educational program;*
6. *lead the congregation in ministries of personal and social healing;*
7. *challenge the people of God in stewardship of money and time;*

8. *establish the annual budget and other special offerings;;*
9. *lead the congregation continually to discover God's working in the world ;*
10. *instruct, examine, ordain, install, and welcome new elders;*
11. *supervise the board of deacons and all other organizations within the congregation;*
12. *provide for the administration of the church's program;*
13. *provide for the management of the church's property;*
14. *maintain regular and continuing relationships with higher governing bodies;*
15. *establish and maintain all necessary ecumenical relationships;*
16. *serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline;*
17. *keep an accurate roll of members;*

Committee Structure

The current committee Structure of CPC is shown below. While currently an elder serves as chairperson, this is not required. The chairperson is a member of CPC, committee members do not necessarily have to be members of CPC, but should be active in attending worship.

Worship & Music

To provide the congregation and community with meaningful opportunities to worship God in the Reformed theological tradition, making full use of the many means of expression with which God has blessed us including online and other communications strategies.

Administration & Personnel

The Administration & Personnel committee insures that CPC's personnel and managerial systems perform effectively to empower the congregation's work for Christ.

Properties

The Properties committee insures that CPC's physical plant performs effectively to empower the congregation's work for Christ.

Christian Education

The CE committee develops and sustains opportunities for children, youth and adults to gain in knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ at CPC and in the Collingswood community.

Mission

The Mission committee is to increase MAPCs awareness of and participation in meeting the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the local, national, international communities in the name of Jesus Christ.

Finance & Stewardship

The Finance and Stewardship Committee oversees the Financial Operations of the congregation and educates CPC in the ways and means of making full use of the material, physical, intellectual, and spiritual gifts granted to us by God.

Other Training Resources

Books

The Presbyterian Elder - <https://www.pcusastore.com/Products/0664503306/the-presbyterian-ruling-elder.aspx>

Book of Order 2019/2021 - available as download through PCUSA store

Called to Discipleship - https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/vocation/pdf/called_to_discipleship_intro_and_call.pdf

Videos

re:Ruling Elder - <https://equip.pcusa.org/course/view.php?id=312>

Ordination Questions

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

Do 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?

Do 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?

Do 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?

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

Will 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?

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

Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

Will you be a faithful elder, 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?

