

Ministerial Application Lowcountry Presbytery

Date: April 5, 2021

Name: Richard Downs

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City/State/Zip: Cambridge, MA 02140

E-mail Address: rickdowns@gmail.com

Birthdate: 12/28/1952 Age: 68 Spouse Name: Ricarda

If yes, please give full details on a separate sheet of paper.

Children (names/ages):

Arwen Downs / 39

Catharine Downs / 37

Noah Downs / 35

Crystal Lyons / 31

James Downs / 30

Cecelia Downs / 29

Ordained by: Central Carolina

Date: September 18, 1982

Current Ministry: without call

Current Presbytery: Southern New England

Educational Record (List institution, dates, degree):

Florida State University, 1971-74, B. S.
Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977-81, M. A. R., M. Div.
Grace Theological Seminary, 1985-86, M. A. B. C.

List organizations you have belonged to and give dates:

List all ministries (and positions held) you have had since ordination:

I served on the board of World Harvest Mission from 1984-2002 (est.)

What experiences have you had in presbytery committees and offices?

I can't remember all, but I've served on candidates, MNA and nominations committees.

I've also served on the denominational Nominations Committee and am currently on the Permanent Committee of CDM, class of 2022.

In what areas would you like to serve presbytery?

Wherever needed.

The following is from Ron Heald, Stated Clerk of Southern New England Presbytery:



Ron Heald <rheald64@gmail.com>

to SNEP, Downs, Mark ▾

Hi, Rick and Alex.

Alex, I can confirm that Rick is a member in good standing of **SNEP**. If you need something more formal please let me know.

Thanks,

Ron

LCP LDT: Ordination/Transfer Views Form

The following questions will help us to become acquainted with your views on the various things asked. You may use other materials as you prepare your answers, but it is important that what you write adequately reflects what you believe personally. Please be thorough, but concise.

I. Westminster Standards

What, if any, differences do you have with the Westminster Standards and why (by “why,” we expect a biblical rationale for your stated difference)? Please make sure to list all your differences with the Standards, even if you are unsure if they constitute an allowable difference:

I have happily existed under the umbrella of the WCF and its Catechisms for nearly 40 years. At my ordination exam I took exceptions to the Puritan Sabbath expressed in WCF XXI-7, 8 and an exception to XIX-1, 2 wherein is implied, if not asserted, that the Ten Commandments were, in some fashion, in the possession of Adam. Any exception now would be less strenuous. I'm more inclined these days to acknowledge that the Confession is wiser than I.

I do understand the Ten Commandments to be essentially Mosaic and part, rightly speaking, of the Mosaic Covenant. That Joseph acknowledges, pre-Moses, the seventh commandment, and that the second table is replicated in the New Testament affirms that there is a transcendent moral law that bridges the covenants. Adam was likely aware of such, but it seems to me a stretch to say that he had the Ten Commandments. The complexity of Jesus' interactions with Jewish leaders on the Sabbath as well as the ease with which the church moved from the seventh day to the first as the Lord's Day speak to me of the Fourth Commandment being a little different from the others. I'm certainly inclined to embrace the wisdom of the Fourth Commandment, but I understand its moral force to be different from the other nine.

I am not a libertine on the Sabbath. I have encouraged students to avoid studying and workaholics to rest on Sunday. I take Sabbath observance in some fashion to be essential and an increasingly counter-cultural demonstration of faith. I question moving public worship to Saturday night or other days in the week. I like the evening service and would like a Sunday bracketed by morning and evening worship. I puzzle over brothers and sisters who claim fealty to the confession but somehow justify shopping and going to restaurants.

The Presbytery will review these and determine if they are:

- Merely semantic

- More than semantic, but not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine.
- Out of accord, hostile to the system or striking at the vitals of religion.

II. Book of Church Order

What, if any, differences do you have with the Book of Church Order and why (by “why,” we expect you to give a biblical rationale for your difference)? Please list & explain:

I think that the office of deacon should not be gender-specific. Romans 16 indicates that Phoebe was a deaconess and 1 Timothy 3.11 seems best understood as describing female deacons. It seems to me that the gender-specific authority asserted in 1 Timothy 2.12 does not extend to the office of deacon. The BCO’s vow that the congregation should honor the authority of officers (24.6) would best be limited to the office of elder. Deacons should be honored and encouraged, not obeyed in the same way elders are obeyed.

This being said, I think that the convictions held by many against female deacons should be honored. I do not seek to change the BCO and am content with the provision in it for deacon assistants of both genders.

The LDT will review these and recommend that the Presbytery determine if they are:

- Merely semantic
- More than semantic, but not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine.
- Out of accord, hostile to the system or striking at the vitals of religion.

III. Questions on Theology

1. What is your view of Scripture?

I am heartily in accord with WCF I and the first ordination vow, not only as a theological proposition, but rather as the vital component in any individual life in Christ and in any practice in the church. Not only should 2 Timothy 3.16 and 2 Peter 1.21 inform one’s view of Scripture, but Psalms 19 and 119 need constant reflection and accompanying prayer. The Word, in the end, is all we’ve got.

2. Briefly explain your understanding and view of the Trinity.

Heartily in accord with WCF II. One God, three persons. The deepest mystery, an anchor for worship and adoration. The Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Son obeyed the Father and only did his will while on earth. The Son accomplishes redemption and the Spirit applies it. We pray to the Father, the Son has become to us 'wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,' we ask the Father for the Spirit in order to bear fruit.

3. Briefly explain your view of the person and work of Christ.

Christ is the eternal Word, begotten from all eternity. He's the Lord and giver of life, the gift of God. He came from the Father's side to seek and save the lost, to preach the good news, to be served and give his life as a ransom for many, to destroy the works of the devil. All of this is centered on his atoning death. He took the sins of many upon his soul and suffered God's just punishment so that God could be both just and the justifier of those who put their faith in Christ. He was raised with power and declared to be the Son of God (not that he wasn't the Son before, but the powerful declaration of such was in his resurrection.). All of his enemies are made his footstool. He is coming again at the end of the age to judge the world.

4. Explain your view of justification.

It is the declaration of God that the one who has repented and believed is righteous, not by any works accomplished in himself but rather through the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

5. Explain your view of sanctification.

It is also God's work effected by faith; it is the day by day laying aside of the old man and putting on the new in repentance and faith. Moral improvement is to be an expected by-product.

6. Explain your view of the relationship between faith and works.

All human works, rightly viewed, are splendid sins, filthy rags, unless they are derived purely from faith rather than fear or pride. Good, albeit flawed, works are necessary in the life of a believer because this is what the Spirit does in conforming us to the image of Christ. HC 86 says that we thus express gratitude and praise to God, are assured of our faith (the conscience cannot bear justification without sanctification), and bear witness to our neighbors of the truth of the gospel. All of these works emanate from faith, for Christians, obedience is the obedience of faith, that is rooted and grounded on the gospel.

7. Explain your view of covenant theology (including your understanding of the covenant of works & covenant of grace).

I take covenant theology simply to say that it is impossible for human beings to have an immediate relationship with God. We can only relate to God via a covenant. The whole of Scripture is to be understood as either a covenant of works (Adam in the garden and Christ in his perfection) or a covenant of grace (everything after the fall for everyone besides Christ in his perfection). Within the covenant of grace there are two kinds of covenants for God's people: law (bilateral) and promise (unilateral). The covenant God made with Abraham was a promise covenant, expressed in his promise to be his God, give him a land and progeny. The covenant with Moses was a law covenant, expressing both blessings and curses depending on the performance of the Israelites. Both covenants were in effect at the same time. The Mosaic covenant was broken, Israel suffered the curses, the presence of the Lord departed from them. The Abrahamic covenant was sustained and resulted in the coming of Christ, the true temple. Christ establishes the promised new covenant in his blood. Christians are the children of Abraham. They are free from the law yet uphold the law, not to fulfill a covenant but out of gratitude and love.

8. Explain your view of dispensationalism.

I take dispensationalism to be critically flawed in its hard division between Israel and the church. Other errors follow.

9. Are you familiar with the theological perspective(s) commonly referred to as the "Federal Vision" or "Auburn Avenue Theology?" Please explain your understanding and thoughts, as well as where you find yourself agreeing with the main points of this perspective. Please also read the 2007 General Assembly Federal Vision study committee report and indicate your thoughts on the 9 "declarations" at the end of that report.

I have forgotten about the Federal Vision. I affirm the nine declarations.

10. Explain your view of Calvinism (Do you adhere to the "5 points of Calvinism?")

Love all things Calvin. I'm happy with the 5 points but prefer to use 'definite atonement' and 'preservation of the saints' in the terminology.

11. What is your view of the gifts of the Spirit?

I'm a practical cessationist, skeptical that any 'leading of the Spirit' other than in the paths of righteousness could be self-delusion.

12. Do you believe there is any continuing or new revelation?

Emphatically no.

13. What is your view of speaking in tongues? Are you in agreement with the PCA's position on this issue (<http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/pastoralletter.html>)?

I am in agreement with the PCA's position paper.

14. What is your view of eschatology?

I was amillennial when such was an issue, although historic post and pre millennial positions have their attractions. I think it's important that we actively look for the coming of the Lord Jesus and that we are modest in our assessment of current events and predictions of the future.

15. What is your view of hell?

Hell is a place of eternal torment apart from the presence and blessing and grace of God, even his common grace. It is both the natural consequence of the soul who resists the lordship of God and a punishment meted out by God against the reprobate. Hell is central in the teaching of Jesus and thus should also be part of any gospel preaching.

16. The PCA holds that some positions on creation other than a literal 6 24-hour day position may be held by officers. (Check this link to find this paper - the actual recommendation is at Page 64: <http://www.pcahistory.org/creation/report.pdf>.)

- Do you believe the Westminster Confession requires a literal 6 24-hour day view and all other views are exceptions? (Yes or no.)

No

- Which of the following views of creation do you hold?
 - A literal 6 24-hour day view of creation?
 - An 'age-day' view of creation?
 - An 'analogy' view of creation?
 - A 'framework' view of creation?

If anything, I would favor a framework view. I have preached on Genesis 1 and mentioned different views without advocating for one or the other. I think a good

exegesis of the chapter would seek not to impose upon it questions it itself does not deign to answer. There are so many helpful things, one could say 'more important' things, to be gleaned from the creation account.

- If you hold other than a literal 6 24-hour day view, would you be willing to limit all public preaching and teaching in this church to that view if asked by the Session? (Yes or no.)

As mentioned, I have not advocated for any position from the pulpit or in any teaching, however I would question the legitimacy of such a censure.

17. It is the position of the PCA that only men are eligible for service as officers of the church, including as Deacons (BCO 7-2).

- Do you believe that, in the future, the office of Elder should be opened to women?

No.

- Do you believe that, in the future, the office of Deacon should be opened to women?

As mentioned, I'm content with the current arrangement. I would not want those who oppose female deacons to be disenfranchised.

- If requested by the Session, would you be willing to work with either a separate Board of Deaconesses or with non-ordained women serving alongside Deacons?

Yes.

- Do you believe that each local church should have an organized ministry (such as Women In The Church) to aid women to grow spiritually and to exercise their gifts?

Yes, although the question is then raised about men's ministry. I currently serve on the permanent committee of CDM and we have been very surprised and impressed with the energy and popularity of the women's ministry department at CDM.

18. What do you believe is the role of women in the Church today?

I think that gender distinction in the office of elder should not translate to an entire ministry that favors men. A very important principle which also needs voice is the priesthood of all believers. I've sought to make sure that the distinction in the church is between elders and non-elders rather than men and women. In principle, if a non-elder male is involved in a ministry or role, such should also be open to a woman. Wisdom is needed for exceptions. One such would be the wisdom of having single men rather than single women in the sole leadership of a community group. So, to answer the question, and not to be flippant, I think that the role of women today should be the same as it has ever been.

19. Please describe your view of worship. Please include a description of the type of service you prefer/intend on using (e.g. contemporary, traditional, “blended”, hymns-only, etc).

I have used John Frame's Worship in Spirit and Truth as a baseline. I look forward to digging into Reformation Worship by Gibson and Earngey. I also appreciated Tim Keller's chapter in Worship by the Book. I think that the norm in worship should be the regulative principle. That norm would be informed by the situation in which the congregation seeks to minister and the personal tastes of the community. This with regard to formal/informal dress, guitar vs. piano, etc.

The worship that I have led for many years is probably traditional, although the music ranges from ancient to contemporary. I prefer depth of theology in the lyrics of songs sung, and in the words of a former worship leader here in Cambridge: “More Bach, more better.” I think it's critical that the music enables congregational singing and that, accordingly, if a sound system is used the volume should be minimal. The musicians emphatically should not drown out the congregation.

20. Please describe how you and your family celebrate the Lord's day. It might be helpful to read WCF 21.8 and mention how your practice interacts with this part of the Confession.

When preaching, I rise early to pray and rework my sermon. My wife and I attend worship in the morning then occasionally practice hospitality in getting together with others after worship. I take a sacred nap and we have a quiet evening, often with family (grown children in the area). I'm seeking to break my addiction to the New England Patriots and am hopeful that a move to South Carolina will help me. Sometimes I'll ride a bike or take a walk. Rarely I'll play golf.

21. The PCA holds that a divorced man is eligible for office if his divorce was either prior to conversion or, if after conversion, for biblical grounds. Biblical grounds are defined as adultery by the spouse, or desertion (which is described as sometimes being without actual, physical desertion). The position is that if a divorce is on biblical grounds, the man is free to remarry. (Read the paper here: <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/2-289.doc>)

- Are you fully in accord with this position? (Yes or no.)

Yes

- Do you believe a divorced man is not eligible for office? (Yes or no.)

No

- Do you believe a remarried man is not eligible for office? (Yes or no.)

No

- Have you been divorced? If so, please provide details. (Yes or no.)

No

22. The PCA's position is that the civil (judicial) laws of the Old Testament have ceased and that Christians are not obliged to obey them, other than 'the general equity thereof may require.' (Link to PCA statements: <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/2-555.doc>, and see WCF 19-4.)

- Are you in full agreement with this position? (Yes or no.)

Yes

- If not, please describe in a separate statement those areas of Old Testament civil (judicial) law that still have application today and how that would work out in the church and/or world today.

23. What is your view of the use of alcohol?

Permissible with wisdom and charity.

24. What is your view of the use of tobacco?

Permissible, probably unwise.

25. Please describe your style of preaching. Who are the people who have most influenced your preaching style?

I preach expositionally, probably a little more attuned to folks who are educated. I've been in Cambridge for over 20 years.

26. How would you describe your style of evangelism? Do you actively seek opportunities to share the Gospel with others?

I ask people to read the Bible with me, usually a gospel, usually Mark. I like the pattern in Christianity Explored of seeing who Jesus is, the local response to him and his own definition of his work. I have had little evangelistic success recently.

27. What is your view of missions (both outside the United States & within the United States, e.g. church planting)? Include in your answer how you will communicate its importance to your congregation/ministry?

I'm committed to missions. I have overseen the planting of a dozen churches and was on the board of World Harvest Mission for 18 years.

28. In your counseling ministry (or future counseling ministry), how do you handle the counseling of women? What precautions do you take?

I used to counsel intensively and made no provision for counseling women other than to make sure that others were in the building close by. However, now I would more careful. I'm wary of societal claims of trauma and abuse along with younger people now perceiving themselves as fragile. I would be very reluctant to speak a firm word alone with a young woman.

29. What is your use of/work with the Greek & Hebrew in your sermon preparations?

My functional Hebrew left me long ago but I still know the alphabet and can interact with commentaries. I would not be able to parse verbs. My Greek is a little better.

(The following questions relating to your views of the sacraments need to be answered by those who are intending on a teaching elder transfer or ordination exam. For those preparing for a licensure exam, it is not necessary, at this time, to fill out this section.)

IV. Questions on the Sacraments

1. What is your view of baptism? (Include a brief explanation of covenant baptism).

As per WCF XXVII, baptism is a sign and seal of covenant of grace, ingrafting into Christ, regeneration, remission of sins, and growth in grace. It is to be administered to believing adults and their children, only once. It is not so tied to salvation that those baptized are certainly saved nor that one cannot be saved without it.

2. What is your view of immersion? Will you immerse new converts? (Why or why not?).

I take immersion to be legitimate but not necessary. I am willing to immerse upon request. My condition is that a significant portion of the congregation be present at such.

3. What is your view of the efficacy of baptism (please include your thoughts about baptismal regeneration)?

Grace is conferred at baptism. In believing adults, regeneration precedes baptism. Children are not regenerated by baptism, but ordinarily through the prayers, instruction and example of their parents, along with the ordinary means of grace in the church, come to a sincere personal faith.

4. What is your view of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper?

Christ is spiritually present in the Lord's Supper, and thus he both blesses those receiving the bread and cup by faith, and judges those who take in an unworthy manner.

5. Do you fence the table when you administer (or will administer in the future) the Lord's Supper? Do you use the language of BCO 58-4? Why or why not? And if not, what do you do?

I ordinarily fence the table. I do not use the word 'evangelical' from BCO 58.4. The word has no agreed upon meaning (especially since the secular press has gotten hold of it), and I would not wish to fence the Table against members of liberal, Orthodox or RC churches. I often refer to baptism as a prerequisite.

6. What is your view of paedocommunion? When should children be included in the participation of the Lord's Supper & why?

Children should be admitted to Lord's Supper, as with any other communing member, upon their profession of faith and admission by the elders of the church. This is in accord with 1 Corinthians 11.27-29.

IV. Questions on Piety

1. Describe your personal devotional life.

I read M'Cheyne daily, think about it and pray.

2. If you have a family, describe your family worship practices.

My wife and I read the first two chapters of M'Cheyne and pray together in the morning.

3. If married, how does your wife feel about this call?

She is enthusiastic about it.

4. What role has pornography played in your life?

No role. Although I should say that it's a little bit of a slippery slope. While I have never willingly accessed a porn site, there are movies and TV shows that I would have been better off not seeing. I'm careful not to watch a repeat of such.

5. When is the last time you looked at pornography? What steps have you taken to prevent future offenses?

As mentioned, I have not accessed porn. My only defense is the love of God and love for my sisters in the faith, including my wife and daughters.