

John Calvin Presbytery
November 01, 2025

Two Hundred-Twentieth Stated Meeting
Trinity Presbyterian Church,
Springfield, Missouri

Autobiographical Information

Wendy Downing

I was born in E. St. Louis, IL, in March of 1960. I grew up in Florissant, Mo. (North County of St. Louis), with a family of five: mother, father, one older brother, and one younger brother. I was raised in a Christian home and grew up in the United Methodist Church. I went through confirmation and was involved in UMYF at the “proper stages,” but church wasn’t really important to me until I was in high school. When I was in high school I became the president of the UMYF and began to become aware of the larger structures of the Church through being on Youth Council, the Administrative Board, the Evangelism Committee, and the Council on Ministries. As my “head knowledge” of the church grew, so did my “heart knowledge.” I began to feel a pulling by God into the direction of ministry. My calling has been an inner voice, yet the unmistakable voice of God’s presence urging me in the direction of God’s purpose for my life – ministry. No miraculous feats or miracles, just an undeniable inner “push” from God.

My academic education for ministry started at Central Methodist College where I received my BA in religion. My seminary education was at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. I did three years of class work and a one-year internship working full time at a 700 member church in Dimmitt, Tx.

After graduating from seminary in 1986, I was ordained a Deacon in the UMC with a two- year probationary period before being ordained Elder in 1988. During the probation years I was appointed to serve as associate pastor of 1st UMC in Sikeston, Mo. In 1988 I was appointed to a two-point charge in Southeast Missouri (Dexter & Bell City). In June of 1990, I took a “leave of absence” with the United Methodist Church to stay home with my one-year-old daughter, Courtney. While on leave, I had a second child, a son named Eli. I wanted to find a part-time job in ministry so I could stay home with my children and work in a place where I was fulfilling my calling. In December of 1991, I began working at Missouri Delta Medical Center in Sikeston, as their part-time chaplain. In 1994, after three years of part-time work, I really needed a full-time job and began working as a full-time hospice chaplain for Providence Hospice Group in Sikeston. I held this position for four years. I was the bereavement coordinator for the hospice (as well as chaplain) for the entire time I was there. I loved my work there and was very fulfilled by what I did in both roles I played there.

In January of 1996, after 10 years of marriage, my husband and I divorced. I was working full time as a hospice chaplain and by that time, was filling in on Sundays at a small Presbyterian Church in Fisk, Mo. In 1998, the hospice began to fail financially, and the church offered me a ¾ time position. I took the job, and the hospice closed several months later. I became a full-time pastor at Fisk Presbyterian in 2006, and was there for a total of 21 years. After serving in the Presbyterian Church for 10 years I realized that it felt more like "home" than the United Methodist Church. In studying Reformed theology, I felt comfortable with the differences in beliefs from one denomination to the other, and much prefer the form of government in the Presbyterian system. I grew to appreciate the local churches governing themselves with the Session in charge of the administrative parts of the church, and I truly believe the people of the church should steer the church in the direction they believe it should go (within Book of Order guidelines).

I re-married in 1997 to a Presbyterian Pastor named John Goodwin. John went to seminary after we married, and became the called pastor for the Presbyterian Church in Sikeston for 12 years. He has been a step-father to my children since they were 5 and 7 years old. My daughter is now 36 years old and is a speech pathologist working in the Nixa schools. My son, Eli Birdwell, is a 34 year old mining engineer and lives in Jackson, MO. My daughter has 2 sons, Dawson and Grady, who are 6 and 4 respectively. My son has 3 boys: Colton (6), Grant (5), and Case (2).

Over the years I have taken four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), mostly while serving as a chaplain. Both jobs, being a chaplain and a church pastor, have fulfilled my sense of calling.

During the 21 years I served the Fisk Presbyterian Church, I served on the COM, and have moderated the sessions of two other Presbyterian churches when they were without a pastor.

My last 8 years of ministry were served at the Presbyterian Church in Steelville, MO. I retired from there on February 28, 2025. My husband and I moved to Republic to be closer to our daughter and our grandsons at that time.

Statement of Faith – Wendy Downing

I believe in the Trinity: God the Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit. God acts as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. All three persons of the Trinity have a part in each of the actions of God, although it is through Christ and with the tradition passed on to us from the Apostolic witness about the Christ event, that we receive personal salvation. I believe that Christ is Lord, (as we turn our lives completely over to him), and Savior (as he made his life a once and for all sacrifice on our behalf- Hebrews 10:10). The Holy Spirit is the creative, nurturing, guiding presence of God in our lives. It is God, through the power of the Spirit, that fills the void deep within each of us. God as Parent is all empowering and all encompassing love.

I believe Scripture is essential for our guidance and growth in the Christian faith and for understanding the Incarnation of God in Christ. The Bible preserves for us the strength, confidence, failures, and successes of those who have come before us and who have created the community we call the Church. I believe the Bible to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. In addition, I also believe that scripture should always be interpreted within the context of the time for which it was written before we generalize to the present age. If we fail to do this kind of basic interpretation first, we can, and many times do, turn the truths of the Bible into falsehoods to fit our own selfish needs and desires. The truths of the Bible can be found in as many ways and on as many levels as there are styles of literary form to its makeup. When Scripture is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ is present with us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that Christ is also present with us through the Holy Spirit when we practice the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are the enacted Word of God, and a sealing of what the written Word proclaims. Through baptism we enact the claim God has on our lives and are incorporated into the family of God through God's grace. By sharing in the Lord's Supper we remember God's faithfulness to us and the price Jesus paid for our sins. The Word (both written and proclaimed) and Sacraments together are the source of our grounding in the faith.

I believe that all persons are created in God's image. Because we are finite creatures and because God has made us to be thinking, rational, creatures capable of decision making, we are also capable of wrong decisions which produce evil in the world. Many times we exhibit sinful, self-serving natures which are destructive to ourselves and to others. We cannot change this on our own; it is only through God's grace, salvation, and love that we are able to be whole persons, living toward the goal of a more Christ-like life. I believe that all things happen in God's design and that all things, even the bad that happens to us, can be used by God for good (Romans 8:28).

The Church is a sign that points to God's action in the world. As the Church, we are to be the vehicles for the expression of worship, love, concern, and justice in the world. The Church's mission is reconciling the world to God. It is through the Church and through our worship that we are commissioned to serve as God's reconciling community. The laws or doctrines of the Church are rules by which we can carry out our task of ministry to the world more effectively and in an organized fashion, avoiding chaos and confusion. The rules and doctrines of the church are based on our understanding of God's Word, but are not sufficient for salvation. It is by faith, through grace alone, that we are saved. Although the rules and doctrines put forth in our constitution were created by men and women and can be reformed when new understandings of the Gospel come to light, they are important to our history and form who we have become as Presbyterians and are the guiding principles in our mission of reconciliation to the world.