



## Foreword to the Report of the 2021 Reformed Tradition Working Group

October 2021

The Davidson College Board of Trustees received a draft report and met with the working group at its August 4, 2021, board retreat and received a final report, which was discussed at its October 8, 2021, board meeting. In response to the report, the Board of Trustees issued the following statement:

*The Board of Trustees met with the Reformed Tradition Working Group in August 2021 and received the final report at its October 2021 meeting. The Board acknowledges with gratitude the thoughtful and important work of the Reformed Tradition Working Group. The Board affirmed that many of the recommended actions will be ongoing practices of the Board and the College. The Board directed the Executive Committee to work with President Quillen to further consider the additional recommendations and develop proposed actions.*

## Report of the 2021 Reformed Tradition Working Group

August 30, 2021

### Preface

In all times, but in these times in particular, lives shaped by the humane values of an education in the liberal arts are desperately needed in our world. Formation in the humanities – grounded intellectual rigor with a focus on service rooted in a concern for the larger public good and for how we walk the earth – produces lives that nurture and enrich our society and engender our future. This educational vision has sustained Davidson College across the years, enabling the college community to see itself more clearly and embrace important and necessary changes, prompted all the while by its core values.

Davidson College was established by Presbyterians in 1837. The college's founders were inheritors of a specific strand of Protestantism known as the Reformed Tradition. Since its beginnings in the 16th century, people in the Reformed Tradition have valued education at the highest level, establishing schools, colleges, and seminaries that engaged the best scholarship of the day. They built these institutions on several distinctive principles: 1) the Creator is the source of all truth; 2) humans are to

search for and accept truth from any source, whether religious or not, recognizing that no tradition or discipline has a full understanding of truth; 3) an appreciation for the liberal arts; 4) emphasis on an education that enriches the whole person, body, mind, and spirit; and 5) a belief that our search for truth is enriched, and our comprehension of the world broadened, when faith and reason work together in mutual respect.

Today, Davidson is affiliated with a specific denomination called the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) which formed in 1983 by the merger of two prior denominations. Its affiliated colleges like Davidson embody a contemporary expression of the Reformed Tradition affirming that reverence for the divine can go hand in hand with educational excellence, support for diverse religious identities and spiritual practices, and a commitment to equity, inclusion, and racial, gender, and economic justice.

Although it is possible to envision a Davidson unconnected to any overt theological grounding, the fact remains that Davidson owes many of its core values to the Reformed Christian ethos from which it has grown. With its emphasis on unfettered intellectual inquiry, service to others, the stewardship of talents and gifts, the principled transformation of society, the care of creation, respect for the dignity of every human being, and lives called to reflect the glory of God, we believe the Reformed faith as expressed through the Presbyterian Church (USA) and its predecessor denominations has been integral in shaping Davidson's mission and purpose.

A Davidson grounded in and conversant with its particular faith tradition – and a Davidson free to critique and question that tradition – will form humane instincts, develop lives of leadership and service, shape people who respect and contend for the dignity of every person, and encourage ways of being that seek the flourishing of all humanity. Moreover, a college community that understands, has due regard for, and openly discusses the strengths, limitations, and failings of the particular faith tradition in which the institution has been formed will more deeply appreciate and engage with the particularity of diverse religious traditions and worldviews.

Our hope is that Davidson College will:

- flourish as a diverse and pluralistic liberal arts college where people of all backgrounds, whether religious or not, know deeply that they belong, are valued, and have gifts to contribute to the larger community;
- embrace the dynamic values of the Reformed faith's vision for liberal arts higher education and the life of body, mind, and spirit in service to God and all humanity;
- welcome conversations about the Reformed faith, all religious traditions and worldviews, the liberal arts and sciences, and our mutual hope for a just and equitable society in which all can thrive.

The 2021 Reformed Tradition Working Group commends to the Board of Trustees [the work of our predecessor group in 2017](#). We affirm its explication of the college's Statement of Purpose.

In particular, we affirm the identification of the “constellation of values” that are rooted in the Reformed Tradition and which give shape to Davidson College's distinctive culture:

- an education that cultivates humane values and prepares students to lead and serve for the common good guided by a moral compass (which may differ from one individual to another);
- academic excellence and an unfettered quest for truth rooted in intellectual rigor and broad learning;
- an honor code that creates a community of integrity and trust;
- an ethos in which the dignity and worth of each person is clearly affirmed;
- openness to and respect for diversity and differences of religion, worldview, and opinion;
- development of the whole person, body, mind, and spirit, in a residential community setting;
- an emphasis on personal relationships as vital to human flourishing;
- an aspiration to continually being reformed in ways that thoughtfully draw upon a particular set of shared values that positively engage current realities.

Finally, we would lift up one paragraph of the 2017 report which has helped inform both our work and the recommendations we submit to you:

Today, the role of the Reformed Tradition at Davidson has shifted significantly. It no longer operates from ‘above’ (by using explicitly religious categories to exercise power over and normative influence upon College policies, the curriculum, and faculty expectations). Instead, its influence is from ‘below.’ The tradition shapes the College’s ethos and undergirds a set of values and a vision that benefit the entire College community in a quiet but pervasive way.

We hope that the recommendations that follow might extend those benefits even further. To that end, we present our report, share our observations as a springboard to further conversation, and offer recommendations for the Board’s consideration.

## Group Identity and Charge

Board Chair Alison Hall Mauzé appointed the 2021 Reformed Tradition Working Group (RTWG) in late 2020. We are a group of sixteen members – pastors, seminary and college professors, a diversity officer, a retired college president, a seminary student, a leader of a denominational agency, a chaplain – whose collective experience spans eight decades of the embodiment of the Reformed ethos at Davidson. Many of us have been deeply engaged in cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue and have championed diversity and inclusion in church and society for years. All of us have a deep and abiding affection for Davidson College.

Board Chair Mauzé charged us to identify and recommend means by which Davidson College does and could embody the commitments of the Reformed Tradition. Specifically, she posed two questions:

*How do we, Davidson College, as a pluralistic educational institution that welcomes and serves people of all faiths, embody our ties to the Reformed Tradition now, so that attributes that many Davidson people value can always draw strength from this tradition? And, how can Davidson best now embody our foundational relationship to the Reformed Tradition, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and Davidson College Presbyterian Church (DCPC)?*

# Process

During the course of the past seven months the working group has met virtually and in person both as a full group and in smaller gatherings sixteen times, including meetings with President Quillen and Board Chair Mauzé. We spoke with two panels of faculty members of various disciplines and faith traditions. We met with students who represented a variety of campus organizations and religious backgrounds. We reviewed how a sampling of other colleges and universities express their connection to a faith tradition.

Each of us has brought to the task our particular experience and perception of Davidson's embrace of and connection to the Presbyterian Church (USA) and to the specific Christian tradition from which both the denomination and the college were born.

We were heartened by President Quillen's conversation with our group, in which she encouraged us to examine and define expressions of the Reformed Tradition that befit a liberal arts college.

*I appreciate the fact that at Davidson we remain grounded in our particular faith tradition. We are asking you as experts, that is to say as people who understand, study, and live in this tradition every day: what does it mean to be within that tradition and to build a pluralistic educational community? Not necessarily a community of faith, but an educational community that is grounded in this particular tradition and at the same time, because of that tradition, open and inclusive with respect to faith. Because of the faith imperatives of that tradition, how do we create an environment that is inclusive and respectful and honors the dignity and worth of each human being?*

*There are differences between a community of faith and an educational institution; what does it mean to say an "institution" embodies a particular religious tradition though that institution is not a community of faith? How does all that play out in the daily life of our students; for those that are Presbyterian, for those that are Christian and those that are not? What gives that tradition its power today?*

During her time with us, President Quillen reflected on three specific gifts of the Reformed Tradition to Davidson College. First is the concept of vocation as every person's sense of being called to a work or profession that is fruitful and contributes to the common good. Second is the wholly unearned gift of grace and the culture of gratitude it can create on our campus when we are open to the opportunities engendered by these gifts without a sense of entitlement. Third is the power of forgiveness, both offered and received, which helps members of a community, individually and collectively, to remain open to redemption and restoration.

We spent time examining closely the following:

1. The college's Statement of Purpose
2. The college's relationship with the Davidson College Presbyterian Church (DCPC)
3. The functions and commitments of the office of the college chaplain

4. The Craig Family Distinguished Professorship in Reformed Theology and Justice
5. Prior working group reports
6. The [Davidson College website](#) and other communications material

## Observations and Conclusions

In looking at current manifestations, we observe that Davidson's relationship with the PCUSA and its theological tradition is, in many ways, more robust than that of other Presbyterian church-related colleges and universities, and it takes on a range of substantive, meaningful shapes and forms. The relationship with the Davidson College Presbyterian Church, the pastoral and coordinating work of the college chaplain, the presence of the Craig Family Distinguished Professor of Reformed Theology and Justice, and the advent in recent years of the Reformed Theology Symposium are a few of the most tangible embodiments. Refer to Supporting Documents for [how Davidson meets the Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities guidance on conceptualizing and living out Presbyterian church-relatedness](#).

Many of the students we interviewed said that until the recent bylaws discussion, they had little or no idea of Davidson's denominational affiliation. Presbyterian students represent nine percent of the Davidson student body, and while some of them were surely aware of the connections between the college and the PCUSA when they matriculated, many others were not. Students from a variety of religious backgrounds who spoke to us expressed their genuine surprise in learning (largely from the bylaws discussion on campus) that Davidson had specifically Christian and Presbyterian ties.

While hiring letters for all new faculty and staff acknowledge Davidson's formative roots in the Reformed Tradition and include a copy of the college's Statement of Purpose, there seems to be a wide range of awareness of the college's church affiliation among these groups. The faculty we talked with were aware but acknowledged varying degrees of awareness or support across campus.

The [college website makes note of the college's Presbyterian and Reformed ties](#) for those who look for it. The RTWG observed that the college's admissions materials and its faculty and student orientations do not include information about such ties and affiliations.

As we learned during our work, the relationship between the college and the Davidson College Presbyterian Church (DCPC) is on solid footing. DCPC provides church space as a venue for some of the college's larger gatherings and has a dedicated 24-hours Student Center. Meanwhile, the church enjoys its facilities, located on college property, for a token fee of one dollar per year in a long-term lease. Davidson faculty and staff are generous with their time and talents in support of DCPC's faith formation classes. Moreover, the college's facilities office provides engineering support, facilities expertise, and connections with contractors and vendors when DCPC needs such services. The college staff is also partnering with DCPC leaders on collaborative outreach projects to serve the Davidson community, projects that will put students, staff, and faculty in relationship with church members and service to the wider community. The church's Campus Ministry Committee serves students in a variety of ways, offering refreshments to families during first-year student move-in, providing home-baked cookies during exam study breaks, and cooking meals for the Monday night student gatherings. The President's Office has collaborated with the church to help underwrite the cost of a part-time ordained staff member who provides pastoral support

and leadership for the UKirk Presbyterian campus ministry. The church is currently seeking an endowment so that this position becomes full-time and ongoing.

We spent significant time learning about the work of the office of the college chaplain. Refer to Supporting Documents [2020-21 Chaplains' Office annual report](#). Over the past 28 years, the ministry of Rob Spach '84 has evolved in a variety of ways. He began, alongside Assistant Chaplain Brenda Tapia, as part of a Presbyterian presence among a student body with religious identities that were predominantly from a range of Christian backgrounds. As Davidson's diversity expanded, students' expectations and desires based on religious heritage and spiritual practice blossomed. As an expression of the Reformed Tradition's openness to and respect for the world's various religious traditions, the chaplains' office adapted to provide a welcoming and empowering space and climate for all. Today, the chaplains' office staff, which includes associate chaplains who are Buddhist, Catholic, and Jewish, organizes and coordinates a wide array of worship, meditation, study, and community engagement opportunities. The chaplain also serves as the liaison for a strong cadre of local clergy and other faith leaders that support numerous and varied student-led religious and spiritual organizations.

Our work was enriched by the participation of the Craig Family Distinguished Professor, Doug Ottati. We were impressed by the array of courses Professor Ottati offers and by the number of students who participate in those courses. In our meetings with selected faculty members, we saw the range of conversation partners from different faith traditions and different disciplines he has on the campus.

The RTWG celebrated what we learned about the first Reformed Theology Symposium in 2019 and noted with regret the pandemic-caused cancellation of the second installment in March 2020 and again in 2021. The working group heartily supports the program and is grateful to the alumni and members of the Davidson College faculty and staff who have made it possible. We recognize that it will need more sustainable leadership and structure if it is to become a regular part of the college's offerings.

In sum, we are heartened by the ways the values connected to the Reformed Tradition are reflected authentically and vibrantly in the daily life of the college. We have reached some conclusions about how those embodiments might be a) recognized and celebrated, and b) strengthened and ensured.

## Recommendations

To answer the charge given us, we respectfully offer our recommendations to the Board of Trustees in five key areas: 1) Communication, 2) Governance, 3) the Chaplains' Office, 4) the college's relationship with local PCUSA churches, and 5) Ethos and Education.

## Communication

As a working group, we recognize the challenges inherent in describing Davidson College's grounding in the Reformed Tradition in a world in which the language of religion is culturally fraught. Nevertheless, we believe in the importance of clear communication about how this tradition informs Davidson's ethical values and educational mission as expressed in the Statement of Purpose, including the affirmation that "faith and reason work together in mutual respect and benefit toward growth in learning, understanding, and wisdom."

- We recommend developing language regarding the college's relationship with the Reformed Tradition (with particular attentiveness to unfettered inquiry, inclusivity, and social justice imperatives), as well as the range of opportunities for religious practice and spiritual growth on the Davidson College campus.
- We encourage articulating the nexus between our PCUSA affiliation and the values that define Davidson College, particularly by:
  - providing a succinct description with suggested language for campus tours and other presentations
  - including such language in admission and marketing materials where appropriate
  - reviewing the college website for consistent inclusion across divisions and departments
- We offer the following as a possible one-sentence summary of Davidson's link to the Reformed ethos:

*As an independent liberal arts college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA), Davidson draws on that faith community's educational vision and ethical values, often shared by diverse religions and worldviews, to foster an undergraduate experience centered on learning, leading, and living for the common good.*

## Governance Matters

In order to support the ongoing vitality of the college's relationship with the Reformed Tradition and the Presbyterian Church (USA):

- We recommend that among the Presbyterian members of the Board of Trustees, the Governance and Nominating Committee assures the continuing presence of PCUSA pastors and/or theologians on the Board of Trustees. Their presence brings a deep, nuanced, and vital understanding of the Reformed theological tradition which informs Davidson's values.
- We recommend that the Board continue its current practice of setting aside time at one meeting annually to engage in a discussion related to the college's particular faith tradition and diverse campus religious and spiritual life. Topics could range from celebrating new and expanded

opportunities for students to explore and discuss their faith to understanding and appreciating the various aspects of Davidson's historical religious ties.

- We recommend that the Board establish a committee or sub-committee focused on religious life and church relations to encourage periodic review of how the college is living out its foundational commitment to the Reformed Tradition, which includes fostering a respectful and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff of all faiths and worldviews.

## The Work of the Chaplain

The robust and diverse programs, outreach, and support provided by the chaplains' office to the campus community and beyond are testaments to both the importance and effectiveness of the chaplains' work. The college chaplain also serves as one of the key embodiments of the Reformed faith at Davidson and one of the best demonstrations of that faith's openness to and respect for other faiths and worldviews. Toward that end, we make the following recommendations:

- We recommend that the college continue to employ as the college chaplain a pastor ordained in and accountable to the Presbyterian Church (USA).
- We recommend that college leadership consider changing the title from Chaplain to Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life to reflect more accurately the position's scope of responsibilities.
- We encourage the president and the senior leadership team to include regular input and perspective from the chaplain, especially when considering issues related to the ethos, values, and vision of the college.

## Relationship With Local PCUSA Congregations

- We encourage the college to continue to build on its positive and robust relationship with the Davidson College Presbyterian Church.
- We recommend that the college collaborate, as appropriate, with DCPC as the church raises funds for an endowment to support a full-time campus ministry position. This position provides important connection between the college and the church and support of Davidson students.
- We recommend that the college invite Davidson Presbyterian Church, the historically Black Presbyterian church in town, into a conversation to build and strengthen its relationship.

## Ethos and Education

During our meetings, we have heard from individuals who want to learn more about the Reformed faith tradition that has shaped Davidson as well as the pluralistic religious and spiritual community that thrives on campus today. They are interested in broadening their religious literacy and having thoughtful



discussions that connect diverse beliefs and identities, humane values, and study of the humanities, arts, and sciences.

## Ongoing Orientation Opportunities

- We recommend that orientation for new faculty and staff include a session centered on how Davidson's identity and educational mission have been and continue to be undergirded and informed by its originating tradition. The session would include at least these topics: 1) a review of Davidson's founding in the Reformed Christian faith with its historic support of liberal arts education, and 2) the college's current affiliation with the PCUSA and the denomination's respectful engagement with diverse religions and worldviews. Ideally, the session for new faculty will be co-led by a tenured member of the faculty and the college chaplain.
- We recommend that new trustee orientation continue to have a session centered on the Statement of Purpose and what it says about how the ethos of the college is shaped by Reformed Christianity.
- We recommend that the college offer regular opportunities for college personnel whose work is externally focused (Admission, College Relations, Communications, for example) to gain deeper understanding of the intersection of the Reformed ethos and the college's life.

## Establish The Davidson Forum

We recognize the strong historic relationship between Reformed Christianity, humanistic education, and the liberal arts that emerged during the Reformation of the 16th century in Geneva and elsewhere, and has continued at educational institutions throughout the world, e.g., St. Andrews University (Scotland), Stellenbosch University (South Africa), and the University of Mkar (Nigeria).

- We therefore recommend the creation of what we've provisionally named The Davidson Forum. This forum will provide students, faculty, staff, and alumni with opportunities on campus for regular conversations, educational events, and community engagement centered on the intersections of Reformed faith, pluralism, social ethics, and liberal arts education. Today, occasional efforts of this kind are led informally by the Craig Family chair and the college chaplain in addition to their customary responsibilities. We offer the following recommendation to formally expand upon their good work.

The establishment of a standing program that connects Reformed values, diverse worldviews, concern for social justice, and a liberal arts education will require the creation of a new position and program budget in the division of Academic Affairs. We recommend hiring an individual with strong administrative skills and appropriate educational credentials who is deeply acquainted with Reformed Christianity (both by academic training and in practice, such as a minister with a Ph.D. or a post-doctoral fellow). This person will work closely with the Craig Family Distinguished Professor of Reformed Theology and Justice to implement the activities of the forum, including:

- Planning and presentation of the biennial Symposium on Reformed Christianity. Past foci have been Reformed Christianity (as well as other faith perspectives, specifically an Islamic one) and liberal arts education, and Reformed Christianity and social justice. Future topics might include Reformed Christianity and religious pluralism, or Reformed Christianity and democratic institutions, for example.
- Coordinating of seminars and colloquies for interested faculty and students in the areas of faith and the liberal arts, and faith and public life. Topics might include the moral importance of one's calling or vocation, religious views of economic development, and understandings and practices of prayer across a variety of religions, cultures, and historical eras.
- Offering in partnership with the chaplains' office ongoing opportunities for student, faculty, staff, and trustees interested in learning more about Davidson's grounding in Reformed values.
- Hosting on occasion a theologian-in-residence.
- Developing a periodic newsletter for alumni and friends with columns on Reformed faith and liberal arts education, occasional reviews of books on related topics, and updates on campus programs addressing matters of Reformed faith and liberal arts.
- Collaborating with other college offices, including the Center for Civic Engagement, to organize and coordinate defined experiences for students that put into practice and reflect upon important values and commitments, such as combating racial injustice, making affordable healthcare accessible to all, or promoting voter registration.

## Conclusion

We are grateful for the opportunity to explore together the varying ways Davidson College continues to reflect the core values of the Reformed ethos, and we are grateful for the Trustees' recent reaffirmation of the Statement of Purpose, where those values are most clearly expressed. Davidson's embodiments of the Reformed faith and commitments continue to animate its distinctive strengths.

Our ongoing stewardship of the college's health and vitality entails identifying and building on those strengths and values, including the commitment to cultivating a community in which every person has a strong sense of belonging. Let us be willing to say that we are beneficiaries of divine grace, and that Davidson is and will continue to be a student-focused institution of higher learning, grounded in the Reformed Christian Tradition and therefore faithful to a God bound by no church or creed. That same faith tradition summons us to join with people of diverse worldviews to extend the college's loyalty to all of humanity. We value and welcome diversity and respect the world's various religious traditions. We honor the dignity and worth of every person. We explore all reality through unlimited employment of our intellectual powers. We focus on studies that are liberating and dedicate ourselves to the quest for truth.

Respectfully submitted,

The 2021 Reformed Tradition Working Group

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