

June 30, 2021

Dear Bebo, Roger, members of the Shepherding and Advisory Committee, and fathers and brothers of the Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley (PMV):

Thank you so much for the honor and privilege of working for the Lord in PMV with you. By your call and permission, I serve PMV as Chancellor/CEO and John E. Richard's Professor of Systematic & Historical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary. Since June 1 of last year, I have also been serving as the President of RTS Jackson (in the wake of the retirement of Guy Richardson). September 1st of this year will mark the beginning of my 9th year as Chancellor of RTS (which is truly hard for me to believe). June 1 was the beginning of my 32nd year teaching for RTS. August will mark the beginning of my 32nd year of PCA ordination (1990), and the 37th since my licensure by Calvary Presbytery (1985). I think I was licensed in PMV in 1991 (to work at Trinity PCA as an assistant with Gordon Reed), and I became a member of presbytery here in 1996, upon becoming Senior Minister at First Pres. RTS is entering our 56th year of ministry this fall. We have been blessed by God at RTS, even in the midst of the current upheavals in our country and world. I want to share with you briefly about both my labors and God's favor to us at RTS, as a part of my annual report to PMV.

When COVID-19 interrupted our world beginning about March of last year, I thought we would see a significant enrollment downturn at RTS, especially of incoming students. Instead, 2020-2021 turned out to be RTS's best year ever. We taught more credit hours than ever before and enjoyed record enrollment, and by God's grace we were able to be face-to-face, in the classroom, almost everywhere (except New York City) for the whole academic year beginning in the fall. But this is just part of the amazing blessing that God has poured out on RTS.

While the MDiv degree is and has been in decline in theological education in North America (and that is truly a tragedy), the MDiv enrollment of RTS is growing, and growing dramatically, against all trends and odds. To give you a feel for this, MDiv headcount at ATS schools, including our peer institutions, is down 12% over the last eight (8) years. But RTS MDiv headcount is up 34% over that same timeframe, and our overall enrollment is up over 23%! Indeed, RTS students took over 22,000 credit hours worth of courses this past year, and the numbers for the current academic year look strong.

To give you a comparative feel for size, if you put Westminster Philadelphia, Covenant St. Louis, and Westminster California together, RTS would be larger than them combined. How has that happened to a school that started with 14 students on a horse farm in West Jackson, MS in 1966? Well obviously the first and most important answer is the blessing and kind providence of God. But I think at the level of second causes, RTS's faithfulness to the inerrancy and authority of the Bible, and the Reformed faith as expressed in the Westminster Confession, and commitment to the Great Commission, combined with what is now the largest, most prolific (and widely regarded as the best) Reformed faculty in the world, and the fact that RTS campuses are surrounded by about 51,000,000 people close by, and are positioned geographically in the midst of a high percentage of Bible-believing people, all of those things together are factors in RTS being (by far) the largest residential MDiv Reformed seminary in North America.

The RTS faculty has 50 fulltime professors, who average 20 years of service, have over 925 combined years of pastoral experience, and have written over 90 books in the last five years. RTS awards almost 5 million dollars

a year in scholarships to our seminarians, indeed almost 80% of our students received seminary financial aid. RTS is one of only a handful of institutions to still require the biblical languages, a full slate of Old Testament, New Testament, Systematic Theology, and Church History courses, in an MDiv degree of more than 100 credit hours. Just another reason why RTS graduates have the best preparation for ministry in all of higher theological education.

For all this, I am profoundly thankful, and I recognize it as a stewardship that I have been given to nurture and maintain. In addition to my seminary duties, I still continue to serve congregations in PMV and the PCA, preaching, doing interviews, podcasts, and leading prayer meetings online. I have increasingly preached in person in Sunday services in these last few months since March of 2021. I serve as PMV's representative on the PCA GA Nominations Committee, and have actively participated in that important work (Fred Greco was this year's chairman, and did an amazing job). This month (June of 2021), I have attended numerous the ARP Synod, the EPC General Assembly and the PCA General Assembly. I continue to attend numerous PCA (and other NAPARC) presbytery meetings (often as a representative of the PCA).

This past year I regularly preached in numerous PCA and other reformed churches. I continue to preach on average about three Sundays per month, and regularly speak at special services (conferences and the like). Most of my preaching is in the PCA. When I am not preaching somewhere, I am worshiping at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS under the able ministry of my pastor, David Strain. I had a couple of books published last year: *When Pain is Real and God Seems Silent* (Crossway) and *Does God Care How We Worship?* (P&R). I'm working on a brief commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians (for The Good Book Company), and I contributed to the RTS volume on *Covenant Theology* (Crossway).

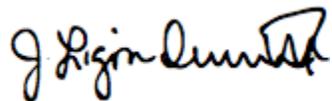
I teach a full load of theology courses at RTS, in addition to my other duties as Chancellor. This is by conviction that my calling is primarily to teach and preach the Word. I have taught at RTS Jackson, Washington, and New York City regularly for the last four years. Last summer I taught "Theology of the Westminster Standards" online to a full class of students from every continent. Last fall I taught "Theology of Worship" online. In January, I once again taught "Introduction to Pastoral and Theological Studies" for RTS New York City. In the spring, I taught Covenant Theology for RTS Jackson. This summer I am teaching Systematic Theology 1 at RTS Atlanta and Covenant Theology at RTS Washington, DC .

RTS's QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan) will be (for the next six years) focusing on making sure the Westminster Standards are thoroughly woven into the DNA of the entire RTS curriculum and that students gain a mastery of them. We will be looking to publish a faculty volume on the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, as well as other resources for pastors, seminarians, laypeople and churches.

My wife, Anne, is actively involved in the women's ministry program at First Presbyterian Church and is volunteering with the RTS Jackson Women's Fellowship. She taught Bible at First Presbyterian Day School last year, and plans to do so again this year. Our daughter, Sarah Kennedy, is teaching Middle School in Greenville, SC. She is at Brian Habig's church, Downtown Presbyterian (PCA) in Greenville. She is to be married next week (DV) to a young man she met at church. Our son Jennings is a rising senior at Mississippi State University (studying English, History, Philosophy and Religion) in the Shackhous Honors College. He is serving on the worship team and as the youth director at Grace PCA, Starkville (under Seth Starkey). He senses a call to Gospel ministry and plans to start RTS upon graduation. I trust that he will be coming before you sometime soon. The thought of which is a great blessing to me.

I would humbly request that the presbytery continue my service laboring out of bounds of presbytery at RTS.

Your friend,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Ligon Duncan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".