PT520 CHURCH POLITY
SYLLABUS

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
CHARLOTTE

FALL 2013

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will help students examine the biblical data relative to church government and the Book of Church Order. The organization and function of church courts, including discipline and appeals, are considered, and parliamentary procedure is emphasized.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

COGNITIVE (KNOW/UNDERSTAND):

1. The student will understand the three types of church government and be able to give a biblical basis for the Presbyterian form of church government.
2. The student will understand why proper church polity is helpful in leading the local church and its session meetings.
3. The student will gain a greater understanding and wisdom in the development of church officers and leaders.
4. The student will understand the implications of orderly oversight regarding church discipline, worship and the sacraments.
5. The student will gain a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure and the work of church courts.

AFFECTIVE (FEEL/MOTIVATION):

1. The student will gain a greater respect and appreciation for the various forms of church government, particularly the Presbyterian form of church government.
2. The student will gain a greater sense of the need for functional church government.
3. The student will grow in confidence in leading a session and working in the courts of the church.
4. The student will grow in conviction regarding the maintenance of the purity and peace of the church through informal and formal means of church discipline.
5. The student will grow in confidence in using proper parliamentary procedure.

VOLITIONAL (DO/COMPETENCIES):

1. The student will experience church polity in a real life setting by attending at least one meeting of a church court or leadership meeting.
2. The student will do a report on a practical area of polity, drawing conclusions and making application to the field of study.
3. The student will walk through parliamentary procedure and gain initial exposure as to how to run a session or congregational meeting.
### MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.

*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</strong></td>
<td>Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scripture</strong></td>
<td>Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reformed Theology</strong></td>
<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sanctification</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Desire for Worldview</strong></td>
<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Winsomely Reformed</strong></td>
<td>Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preach</strong></td>
<td>Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worship</strong></td>
<td>Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shepherd</strong></td>
<td>Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church/World</strong></td>
<td>Ability to interact within a denominational context,</td>
<td>Polity addresses the relational aspect</td>
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REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS: (Approximately 500 pages)

1. *PCA Book of Church Order*. PCA CEP, 188 pp. (white pages only)
   Available online on the PCA website: [http://www.pcaac.org/resources/bco/](http://www.pcaac.org/resources/bco/)
4. In addition to the above requirements, the student is asked to read 65 pages from any of the books in the Reserve List below. Reserve List reading will be reported on the final exam. NOTE: If your church tradition is Baptist or Anglican and you would like to do reading in polity from your respective tradition, please request the privilege to do so from the professor, who will be glad to approve appropriate reading in lieu of the required 65 pages of Recommended Reading on Reserve list.

RECOMMENDED READING (ON RESERVE) (Highly Recommended) (65 pages):

1. *Biblical Church Discipline* by Daniel E. Wray (Paperback - Dec 1978)
5. *Questions on Presbyterian Theology and Polity*, Sprinkle Jr., Robert
SUGGESTED READING:

1. Anyabwile, Thabiti M. What is a Healthy Church Member? Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008
5. Clements, Don. Historical Roots Of PCA.
7. Davis, Dale Ralph. The House that Jesus Built: a welcome to the Church, Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007
8. Eubanks, J.E. Jr. Grafted into the Vine: Rethinking Biblical Church Membership
    Doulos Resources: www.doulosresources.org

HISTORY OF THE PCA:

2. Kornegay, Jerry, editor, *Living History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, (St. Louis, MO: The PCA Historical Center, 1994).
9. Smith, Morton, *How is the Gold Become Dim!*

**REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION:**

I. Class attendance and discussion.

You will be expected to attend class and participate in the class discussion, especially as we interact with the textbooks and assigned reading, as well as the required papers. Excessive absences could be detrimental to your final grade.

II. Reading (15% of course grade):

Reading is required and the student will be graded through an honor system approach.

III. Papers (60% of course grade)

Two short papers are required for the course. Papers must be double-spaced, 12 point/Times New Roman typeset with standard margins.

1. **Church Court Visit:**

   Length: 4 pages *(Please Number Your Pages)*

Sometime *during the semester* (earlier is better; due November 14), attend a Session or Presbytery or Congregational Meeting or a parallel/similar leadership meeting held by your church leaders (session, consistory or ruling board) or held by your designated regional body of churches (presbytery, synod or association). This assignment is intended to expose you to polity meetings that you might otherwise not see. If you are planning to do this with your
church/pastor, please arrange it well ahead of time, gaining both the pastor’s and the session’s permission, as the session meetings are normally held only once per month and presbytery meetings are held only once per quarter annually. Begin the process now! If you do not have a present church affiliation, you can attend with a classmate, friend or in a group, as long as those leading the meeting know that you are coming and attending the meeting.

In addition to the meeting, interact with your pastor or a church leader about what you experienced and ask any questions which you might have about the meeting. Document the meeting with the pastor by giving his name and the date, time and place of the meeting.

Write a four page-paper emphasizing the following:

a. Give a summary of the meeting.

b. Report on observations you made (excluding details of a sensitive nature) such as: the agenda, issues discussed, interactions, leadership, conflict and resolution, organization of the meeting, decisions rendered, etc.

c. Give a clear reaction to what you saw and heard. Answer questions such as these: What did you like about the meeting? Dislike? Was there anything new that you learned? Any surprises or anything unusual that you experienced? Is there any way in which this meeting could have been improved? What questions do you still have about your church’s form of government?

d. In what ways did your pastoral interaction assist you?

NOTE (OPTION): If you have served as a pastor with elders or as a ruling elder (on a session) or have already attended multiple session meetings in the past for some reason, you should drop this assignment and do a second paper on a topic from the section below (Short Polity Paper).

Due: November 14 (at the time of class).

2. Short Polity Paper (Choose one of the following four OPTIONS):

Length: 6 pages (Please Number Your Pages)
Sources: Use at least three (3) sources for your paper and list those sources at the end of the paper.

I. Form of Church Government Debate

Using Scripture, church history and tradition, pragmatic considerations and at least three sources (references), explain, describe and debate, compare and contrast the three (or four) positions on church polity, giving strengths and weaknesses, potential usages and problems for each. Explain why you hold the position or view you personally have chosen (or prefer) in regard to church polity.

II. Character and Qualifications of Church Officers

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Using Scripture and at least three sources (references), do an analysis of the qualifications of church officers, primarily focusing upon the Pastoral Epistles. Explain how you would apply what you have learned in a local church setting or environment. Practical principles of discipleship, leadership development and training would be appropriate. Exegetical work in the passages is acceptable, as long as application to local church polity and ministry is included.

III. Church Discipline

Consider a church conflict situation (real or hypothetical) that you might face or have to deal with in the ministry. (If real, please change the names and avoid indiscretion regarding the parties involved). Describe the problem, the parties involved and the relevant issues. Write out or outline a plan of action with (stated) Scriptural support for your “pastoral” strategy. How will you go about trying to solve this problem and whom else will you involve in the process? Give steps to take, depending upon the response of the involved parties (i.e., explain what route you would take if decisions are made in agreement to or disagreement with the discipline carried out at any stage in the process). Make some concluding remarks about your case. Use three sources for this paper.

IV. Role of Women in Church Leadership

Examine Biblical evidence for the principle of headship as related to women in ministry and how they may or may not function in ordained or non-ordained offices, worship services and/or teaching and leadership responsibilities. Give priority to Biblical teaching, but feel free to explain arguments from church tradition which impact the issues involved. Use three sources in the writing of this paper. Consider how your views and convictions will be explained to those in your future (or present) ministry or church. Feel free to write this paper as an explanation of “Women’s Roles in the Church” for your members and inquirers.

V. Other Polity or Book of Church Order Topics

Choose from one of the following topics covered in the PCA Book of Church Order: Worship, Church Discipline, the Sacraments, Ordination. Do a Bible study or modified research paper (3 sources) of your choosing. Get written approval for your topic from the professor prior to beginning the assignment. Study and analyze the topic, draw conclusions and make application to local church life and ministry.

Due: September 26 (at the time of class).

IV. Final Exam (25% of course grade)
The final exam will be a comprehensive, written exam that will cover content from all of the lectures.

Due: Exam Week

POLICY ON CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM: Cheating is the use of another person’s work on behalf of your own work, with the assumption being that it is your work. The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers says, “To plagiarize is to give the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from someone else.” Plagiarism is the use of ideas, information and content from a particular source without giving credit to that source by footnoting the source or accounting for it in a bibliography. Cheating will result in an automatic zero (0) grade for the assignment, paper or exam involved. Plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is considered academic theft. The RTS academic consequences of plagiarism are as follows: 1) First offense: The student must rewrite the paper and receive no better than a passing “D” grade for it. 2) Second offense: The student fails the entire course.

POLICY ON LATE WORK: Any work turned in late and without either a written excuse or previous permission granted by the professor will be docked one point/day for that assignment.

POLICY ON GRAMMAR AND SPELL CHECK: Any work turned in which appears to lack “proofing” or displays poor grammar will receive a small penalty affecting the grade.

POLICY ON INTERNET USAGE (from the RTS/Charlotte Student Handbook): Students are expected to conduct themselves at all times as mature believers. Godly behavior, expected of all Christians, is especially required of those who are preparing themselves to become ministers of the Word. Classroom manners should reflect this maturity. Students should be respectful of professors, attend all class periods, and hand in assignments on time. Classroom etiquette also includes leaving cell phones turned off, refraining from surfing the Internet and laptop computer games and talking to your neighbor during lectures.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/22</td>
<td>Introduction – Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Government</td>
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</table>
| 2    | 8/29 | Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Government  
Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 1-3 |
| 3    | 9/05 | Practical Uses of Polity in the Local Church  
Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 4-6 |
4 9/12  Session Meetings: Leading and Moderating  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 47-58; Appendices A-E*

5 9/19  The Book of Church Order: Worship and The Sacraments: Communion  
**Read:** Dickson, *The Elder and His Work, pp. 64-131*  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 7-8*

6 9/26  The Book of Church Order: Worship and The Sacraments: Baptism  
>Short Polity Paper DUE

7 10/03  The Book of Church Order: Church Discipline  
**Read:** Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 9, 27-34*

10/10  READING WEEK

8 10/17  The Book of Church Order: Church Discipline  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 35-46; Appendices G, I*

9 10/24  Ruling Elders: Development, Selection, Training and Leading  
Dr. Mark Ross, Christ Covenant PCA, Charlotte, NC  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 10-15*  
**Read:** Dickson, *The Elder and His Work, pp.9-63*

10 10/31  Deacons: Development, Selection, Training and Leading  
Dr. Mark Ross, Christ Covenant PCA, Charlotte, NC

11 11/07  Parliamentary Procedure

12 11/14  Women in Ministry  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 59-63; Appendix H*  
>Church Court Visit Report (or Optional Paper) DUE

13 11/21  Brief History of the PCA  
Subscription Issues/Presbytery and General Assembly Operations

11/28  THANKSGIVING

12/05-10  FINAL EXAM