PT520 CHURCH POLITY
SYLLABUS

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
CHARLOTTE

FALL 2015

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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 both church discipline and parliamentary procedure is considered. Administration of the sacraments is discussed and modeled and moderating a meeting is covered.

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 and how to moderate a session meeting.
4. The student will understand the implications of orderly oversight regarding church discipline, worship and the sacraments.
5. The student will gain an introductory 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 might 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>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td>Interacts with topics of polity by writing a paper based on scriptural principles.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td>Interacts with topics of polity based on Scripture, with options for some exegetical work</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reformed Theology</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Some consideration of Reformed ecclesiology</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sanctification</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Maybe a small emphasis on attitudes necessary for church discipline and working with others in the church context</td>
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<tr>
<th>Desire for Worldview</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<th>Winsomely Reformed</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<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>
<td>Gracious approach to the various biblically based positions on church government</td>
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<tr>
<th>Preach</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<th>Worship</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Required reading of the PCA Book of Church Order in the area of worship; training in the sacraments is covered</td>
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<tr>
<th>Shepherd</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<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>
<td>Pastoral oversight of members and need for shepherding is addressed in lectures and reading</td>
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<tr>
<th>Church/World</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to interact within a denominational context,</td>
<td>Polity addresses the relational aspect</td>
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REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:  (Approximately 516 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)[AP1]
   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. However, there may be an addition to the number of required (50) pages of Recommended Reading on Reserve list.


4. In addition to the above requirements, the student is asked to read 50 pages from any of the books from the recommended reading lists below. The 50 pages of reading will be reported on the final exam.

RECOMMENDED READING (Highly Recommended) (50 pages):

**CHURCH POLITY (GENERAL):**


2. Cowan, Steven B., Gundry, Stanley N. and Toon, Peter *Who Runs the Church?: 4 Views on Church Government* (Counterpoints: Church Life) (Sep 1, 2004) et al.


4. Sprinkle Jr., Robert *Questions on Presbyterian Theology and Polity*


6. Taylor, Roy: here is a link to an article written by the State Clerk of the PCA, Dr. Roy Taylor: on non-hierarchical Presbyterianism: [http://www.pcahistory.org/bco/articles/Taylor--Non-hierarchal.pdf](http://www.pcahistory.org/bco/articles/Taylor--Non-hierarchal.pdf)

**CHURCH DISCIPLINE:**


2. Wray, Daniel E. *Biblical Church Discipline*. (Paperback - Dec 1978)
CHURCH OFFICERS:

5. Keller, Tim *Resources for Deacons*.

CHURCH LIFE AND COMMUNITY:

1. Anyabwile, Thabiti M. *What is a Healthy Church Member?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008
4. Eubanks, J.E. Jr. *Grafted into the Vine: Rethinking Biblical Church Membership* Doulos Resources: [http://www.doulosresources.org/books/books/books/grafted.html](http://www.doulosresources.org/books/books/books/grafted.html)

HISTORY OF THE PCA AND PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY:

2. Clements, Don. *Historical Roots Of PCA*.


10. Smith, Morton, *How is the Gold Become Dim?*


**WOMEN IN THE CHURCH:**


5. Gundry, Patricia. *Woman Be Free*.


**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. Paper (60% of course grade)

One *eight page paper* is required for the course. The paper must be double-spaced, 12 point/Times New Roman typeset with standard margins. *(Note: Please Number Your Pages)*

Sources: Use at *least five (5) sources* for your paper and list those sources at the end of the paper.

(Choose one of the following OPTIONS):

1. **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.

2. **Character and Qualifications of Church Officers**

   Using Scripture and at least five 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.

3. **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.*

4. **Other Polity or Book of Church Order Topics.** Study and analyze a topic, draw conclusions and make application to local church life and ministry.

   Choose from one of the following topics:

   A. Design an 8 week church membership classes
   B. Design a church leadership training program or curriculum
   C. Do a study in church discipline
   D. Do a study on one of the sacraments
   E. Present a case for *ordination*[AP3]
F. Compare and contrast the use of rotating sessions vs. permanent sessions

5. Church Court Visit (only if you have never visited a session/leadership meeting of your church elders/session):

Sometime during the semester, 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. In the paper….

- Document the meeting with the pastor by giving his name and the date, time and place of the meeting.
- Explain something about your church’s or denomination’s polity structure and why you like or dislike it. Use at least five sources in this study.
- Give a summary of the meeting you attended.
- 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.
- 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? In what ways did your pastoral interaction assist you?

Due: October 22 (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.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/20</td>
<td>Introduction – Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2    | 8/27 | Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Government  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 1-3* |
| 3    | 9/03 | Practical Uses of Polity in the Local Church  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 4-6* |
| 4    | 9/10 | Session Meetings: Leading and Moderating  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 47-58; Appendices A-E* |
| 5    | 9/17 | 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* |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>The Book of Church Order: Worship and The Sacraments: Baptism</td>
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| 10/01 | Ruling Elders: Development, Selection, Training and Leading  
Dr. Mark Ross, Christ Covenant PCA, Charlotte, NC |
| 10/08 | **FALL READING WEEK** |
| 10/15 | The Book of Church Order: Church Discipline  
**Read:** Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 9, 27-34* |
| 10/22 | The Book of Church Order: Church Discipline  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 35-46; Appendices G, I*  
Eight Page Polity Paper DUE |
| 10/29 | Deacons: Development, Selection, Training and Leading  
Dr. Mark Ross, Christ Covenant PCA, Charlotte, NC |
| 11/05 | Parliamentary Procedure  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 10-15*  
**Read:** Dickson, *The Elder and His Work, pp.9-63* |
| 11/12 | Women in Ministry  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 59-63; Appendix H* |
| 11/19 | Women in Ministry and/or Brief History of the PCA  
Subscription Issues/Presbytery and General Assembly Operations |
| 11/26 | **THANKSGIVING BREAK** |
| 12/03-8 | **FINAL EXAM (Includes Reading Report)** |
RTS Charlotte Classroom Internet Usage

RTS Charlotte recognizes how essential it is for students to have reliable, campus-wide access to the internet. For that reason, we have made Wi-fi available for our student body, not only in the library and student lounges, but also in the classrooms. We know that students need to use the internet to download class materials, access files on the Cloud, and to access other important information.

However, we also recognize that internet access in the classroom provides opportunity for abuse and misuse. Some students have unfortunately used their internet access to engage in many activities that distract them from the classroom lectures (e.g., surfing the web, checking sports scores, playing games). Not only does such activity hamper a student’s own seminary education, but it distracts other students who can see their computer screens. In addition, donors and classroom guests (who often sit in the back) can see this inappropriate internet usage, which reflects poorly on RTS.

So, how can these challenges be addressed? One option is to turn off the internet entirely. But, we recognize that this creates problems for students who use it for legitimate reasons. Thus, we prefer to address this problem by appealing to the integrity of the students as ones who are preparing for a lifetime of ministry to Christ and his church. We are asking each student to take personal responsibility for their behavior in this area and to encourage others around them to do the same.

In order to encourage this accountability, and to change the culture of the campus as it pertains to the internet, we are asking each student to sign the pledge below at the beginning of each term. As a pledge, we ask you to sign with integrity and with an honest desire to keep it.

“On my honor as a student at Reformed Theological Seminary, and as a one preparing for the gospel ministry, I pledge that I will use the internet in the classroom only for appropriate class-related activities.”

Signed:________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________