PT520 CHURCH POLITY
SYLLABUS

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
CHARLOTTE

FALL 2011

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Associate Professor of Practical Theology

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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.

### Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: PT520 Church Polity  
Professor: Dr. Rod Culbertson  
Campus: Charlotte  
Date: Fall 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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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<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>
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<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>
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<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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Shepherd

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.

Strong

Pastoral oversight of members and need for shepherding is addressed in lectures and reading.

Church/World

Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.

Moderate

Polity addresses the relational aspect of working with other church members.

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.pcanet.org/BCO/](http://www.pcanet.org/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)

RECOMMENDED LISTENING:
The link below provides the 2009 discussion between Tim Keller and Ligon Duncan on the issue of women’s roles in the church, women deaconesses and the ordination question. This is a very helpful discussion for both sides on the issue.

http://byfaithonline.com/page/media/podcast/questions-and-answers-about-deaconesses

SUGGESTED READING:

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

Sometime during the semester (earlier is better; due November 23), 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). 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 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), you should drop this assignment and do a second paper on a topic from the section below (Short Polity Paper).

Due: November 22.

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

   Length: 6 pages

   I. Form of Church Government Debate

   Using Scripture, church history and tradition, pragmatic considerations and any number of resources (references) you wish, 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

   Using Scripture and any resources (references) you wish, 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.

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. Consider how your views and convictions will be explained to those in your future (or present) ministry or church.

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 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: October 4.

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 and all of the reading (general concepts). Concepts related to polity history, church offices and qualifications, the Book of Church Order and parliamentary procedure will be specifically covered, among other matters.

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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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8/30</td>
<td>Introduction – Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Government</td>
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</tbody>
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| 2    | 9/06 | Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Government  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 1-3* |
| 3    | 9/13 | Practical Uses of Polity in the Local Church  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 4-6* |
| 4    | 9/20 | Session Meetings: Leading and Moderating  
**Read:** *PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 10-15*  
**Read:** Dickson, *The Elder and His Work*, pp.9-63 |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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| 9/27 | The Book of Church Order: Worship and The Sacraments: Communion  
*Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 47-58; Appendices A-E* |
| 10/4 | Ruling Elders: Development, Selection, Training and Leading  
*Read: Dickson, *The Elder and His Work*, pp. 64-131  
*Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 7-8*  
>*Short Polity Paper DUE* |
| 10/11 | **READING WEEK** |
| 10/18 | Deacons: Development, Selection, Training and Leading |
| 10/25 | The Book of Church Order: Church Discipline  
*Read: Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline*  
*Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 9, 27-34* |
| 11/1 | The Book of Church Order: Church Discipline  
*Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 35-46; Appendices G, I* |
| 11/8 | The Book of Church Order: Worship and The Sacraments: Baptism |
| 11/15 | Parliamentary Procedure |
| 11/22 | Women in Ministry  
*Read: PCA Book of Church Order, Chapters 59-63; Appendix H*  
>*Church Court Visit Report (or Optional Paper) DUE* |
| 11/29 | Brief History of the PCA  
Subscription Issues/Presbytery and General Assembly Operations |
| 12/08-13 | **FINAL EXAM** |