PT520 – Church Polity – Parish Track
Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte
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Fall 2008
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NOTE: This syllabus may be changed slightly between now and the first day of the course, but not in any major way.

Course goals
• To grasp the biblical basis for the Presbyterian form of church government
• To become familiar with historic theological writings related to church polity
• To understand the historical background your denomination/church as it applies to modern practice and theology
• To become familiar with the your denominational standards concerning the governance and worship of your denomination/church
• To prepare students to apply Biblical principles of polity within a congregation, presbytery, and the higher courts of your denomination
• To equip students for teaching principles of church polity to both church officers and members in general of a local congregation

Book List
Required books (available through RTS Charlotte bookstore):
• Adams, Jay E. Handbook of Church Discipline.
• Brown, Mark (editor) Order in the Offices: essays defining the roles of church officers
• Hall, David & Joseph Hall Paradigms in polity: classic readings in Reformed Presbyterian Church Government
• Kuiper, R.B. The Glorious Body of Christ.
• Wray, Daniel E. Biblical church discipline. (pamphlet)

You must also obtain a copy of your denomination’s governance handbook (eg, the PCA Book of Church Order or the ARP Form of Government). If you are in a congregational church, then you must bring to the first meeting a copy of that church’s by-laws and/or other governance documents. BRING THIS TO THE FIRST SEMINAR.

***Additional resources & syllabus are online at
http://home.carolina.rr.com/kenmcmullen/polity/index.html

Meeting Dates & Times
(We will meet in the Multipurpose Classroom.)

Orientation:
August 25 (Monday) – 1:00-4:00 PM ***Pastoral mentors must attend this meeting. Failure to do so will require the student to drop the class!

Mid-Term Seminar
September 29 (Monday) – 1:30-3:30 PM*

Final Seminar:
November 24 (Monday) – 1:30-4:00 PM*

*These dates may be negotiable if all in the course can agree on a common time.
Assignments

**Mentor-Student Weekly Readings/Discussions**

In addition to discussing other readings and projects that the student will be engaged in, the student and his pastoral mentor will be required to read through the book, *The Glorious Body of Christ* by R.B. Kuiper, during the semester. Below is the schedule of readings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of:</th>
<th>Reading Assignment:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug.25-31</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep. 1-7</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 5-8</td>
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<td>Sep. 8-14</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 9-12</td>
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<td>Sep. 15-21</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 13-16</td>
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<td>Sep. 22-28</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 17-20</td>
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<td>Sep. 29 - Oct.5</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 21-24</td>
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<td>Oct. 6-12</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 25-28</td>
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<td>Oct. 13-19</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 29-32</td>
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<td>Oct. 20-26</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 33-36</td>
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<td>Oct. 27 – Nov.2</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 37-40</td>
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<td>Nov. 3-9</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 41-44</td>
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<td>Nov. 10-16</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 45-48</td>
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<td>Nov. 17-23</td>
<td>Kuiper, chapters 49-53</td>
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In discussing the chapters each week, particular attention ought to be given to how the principles discussed apply to that particular church and its parent denomination (or the American church in general).
Unit 1 – Historical & theological basis for church polity

DUE DATES:
Parts 1-2  - OCTOBER 10, 2007
Part 3 – OCTOBER 17, 2007  (NOTE: other assignments will be due before this one, so watch your time! If you wait too long to start this, you’ll never finish everything.)

Part 1 – Readings in Polity
Read ALL of the assigned reading below in the order listed!!!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>READING ASSIGNMENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical basis for</td>
<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 2 – Hall (pp.12-34)</td>
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<tr>
<td>presbyterian church</td>
<td>• Perspectives on Church Government (pp. 87-138) “The</td>
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<td>government;</td>
<td>Presbytery-led Church” by Robert Reymond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical controversies in</td>
<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 20 (pp.260-277)</td>
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<td>polity;</td>
<td>• Order in the Offices, Ch. 2 – Clowney (pp. 43-65)</td>
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<td>Offices of the church.</td>
<td>• Order in the Offices, Ch. 7 – Boer (pp. 135-154)</td>
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<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 5 – Calvin (pp. 62-73)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 29 – Miller (pp. 422-434)</td>
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<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 6 – Miller (pp. 74-102)</td>
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<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 3 – Hodge (pp.67-79)</td>
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<td>• Paradigms in Polity, Ch. 37 – Thornwell (pp. 572-584)</td>
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<td>• Order in the Offices, Ch. 8 – Murray (pp. 157-170)</td>
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<td>• Theories of the Eldership – Lee Irons (library reserve)</td>
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<td>• Order in the Offices, Ch. 12 – Rayburn (pp. 219-234)</td>
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<td>• Order in the Offices, Ch. 13 – Reynolds (pp. 235-256)</td>
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Part 2 – Biblical basis for polity

From the readings you have done above:
1. Create a list of 4 issues that you see as important for either your congregation or the church in general to address.
2. For each issue, create a 1-paragraph synopsis of the issue/problem, and list one or more readings that are relevant from the list above (turn a copy of this in to me by e-mail as soon as you complete it, no later than October 12).
3. Give a copy of your list to your pastor, and discuss it together.
4. If possible (with the pastor’s permission), give copies to the elders and make a brief presentation from it in a session meeting.
Part 3 - ***Term Paper on Offices of the Church (10-12 Pages, double-spaced)  
DUE OCTOBER 17, 2007

For this paper, use the resources listed in this syllabus and any others you desire. You will need to do four basic things in this paper:

1. Discuss the differences between the 2, 2 ½, & 3 office view and the main people who (denominations & theologians) who adhere to each view
2. Identify the implications, pro & con, of each view for the life of the Church
3. Identify which view you think is the most Biblical & why (document your reasons from Scripture & the secondary literature)
4. Based on the above, which view do you think the ARP Form of Government espouses, and discuss whether this is what ends up happening in practice
5. Don’t forget your bibliography on a separate sheet – this does NOT count toward your 13-15 pages.

***This is a formal paper, so use as your style guide:

I prefer footnotes to endnotes. Err on the side of too many footnotes rather than on plagiarism!

The McMullen Style Guide

All papers handed in must follow the following style guidelines to be acceptable:
- margins: top & bottom 1 inch; sides 1.25 inches
- font: Times New Roman, either 10 or 12 point - no large or fancy fonts (this sentence is in Times New Roman 10 pt)

Assignments will be turned in by e-mail to me at kmcmullen@rts.edu. If you’re using a program other than Microsoft Word to type it, send it to me in Rich Text Format (rtf). If you have no clue what I’m talking about, ask for help.
Unit 2 – Church Governance

DUE DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 2007

Part 1 – Denominational governance

Read completely your denomination’s book of church governance (eg., the PCA Book of Church Order or the ARP Form of Government). If you are a part of a congregational / independent church, then read all by-laws and governing documents which that congregation has.

Part 2 – Application to congregational life

For each of the following areas, write a 2-3 paragraph summary of the procedures outlined for that area by your denomination’s book of church governance (turn this report in my box or by mail: kmcmullen@rts.edu):

1. What, if any, discussion is given to the Biblical basis for church governance?
2. How are new members to be received?
3. What are the responsibilities of members in the church?
4. How are officers nominated and elected?
5. How often are session meetings to be held and what areas of church life is the session responsible for?
6. How is the local board of deacons organized? Who may serve on it? What areas of church life is the deaconate or its equivalent group responsible for?
7. What occasions are there for the whole congregation to discuss and/or vote upon issues?
8. In what ways is the local congregation subordinate to or responsible to higher church courts?
9. In what ways is the local congregation not subordinate to higher church courts (i.e., in what areas may it act autonomously)?
10. How are pastors examined for ordination?
11. How does a congregation go about selecting a pastor?
12. How is the denomination involved in the process of a church calling a pastor?
13. Is there a process for church discipline issues to be appealed to higher courts of the church – how or not how?
14. How do boards, committees, and/or commissions relate to the congregation, presbytery, and/or denomination? How do these organizations exist at different levels of the church courts?

NOTE: If your denomination provides a study guide related to your book of governance for students preparing for ordination, now would be a good time to get a copy of this and work on it in conjunction with this assignment to save yourself preparation time later!

Part 3 – Running church meetings

1. Review your church’s book of governance and any local by-laws on how your church’s session meetings are to be run. Find out if additional guidelines such as Robert’s Rules of Order are used.
2. Ask for permission to sit in on and observe (silently!) a session meeting. Is the meeting run (1) informally, (2) somewhat formally (eg, some use of Robert’s Rules), or (3) very formally. Is the manner in which business is discussed effective? How so or not so?
3. Discuss with the pastor his experience in running church meetings, both good and bad.
Unit 3 – Church Discipline

DUE DATE: OCTOBER 31, 2007

Part 1 – Complete the following readings:

- Adams, Jay. Handbook of Church Discipline, chapters 1-3
- Wray, Daniel E. Biblical church discipline
- Dever, Mark. Nine marks of a Healthy Church, chapter 7.
- Sittema, John. With a Shepherd’s Heart, chapter 27.

Part 2 – Church discipline in your church

Discuss with your pastor the history of church discipline in your congregation.
- What has (or hasn’t) been done in the past?
- Has discipline (1) never been applied, (2) rarely applied, (3) consistently applied, or (4) overly applied in the church?
- How consistently has discipline been applied?
- Do the church officers help to foster a proper atmosphere of discipline? How so or not so?
- Ask one elder to read Daniel Wray’s pamphlet, Biblical Church Discipline, and then discuss it with him. Discuss his reactions to the booklet and how church discipline could be improved in your congregation. Discuss with your pastor using Wray or Adams or other readings as a basis for further training on the subject with all the elders.
- Create a 2-3 page (single spaced) summary of your findings based upon your discussions to turn in along with Part 3 below.

Part 3 - Church conflict/discipline project (3-4 Pages, double-spaced)

You will need to decide upon a church conflict problem (real or hypothetical) to deal with. For the problem, you need to show:
1. A summary of the issues involved
2. Outline a plan of action with supporting Biblical basis
3. List a short bibliography of sources relevant to the action plan (Firestorm, by Ron Susek can be a good resource to start with.)
**Unit 4 – Officer Training – Optional for extra credit!**

**DUE DATE: NOVEMBER 21, 2007 (turn in by e-mail or my mailbox)**

**Part 1 – Officer training in your church**

Discuss with your pastor the history of officer training in your congregation.
- What has (or hasn’t) been done in the past?
- What has been the most effective approach?
- What has been done in a more general way to prepare future leaders for the church (even before they are nominated for office)?
- **Interview two officers** – one who has been an officer 5 years or less, and one who has been an officer for more than 5 years. Ask them how the church could have helped them prepare for service better when first elected, and how the church could help them be better equipped for their work as an officer in the future. Then discuss your findings with the pastor.
- **Create a 2-3 page (single spaced) summary of your findings based upon your discussions to turn in.**

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**GRADING**

- Unit 1: 40% of final grade
- Unit 2: 25% of final grade
- Unit 3: 25% of final grade
- Unit 4: up to 7 points extra credit towards final grade
- General course participation (with your pastor and in seminars): 10% of final grade

**NOTE:** You will also be required to sign the attached statement at the end of the course attesting to the fact that you’ve read ALL of the assigned reading. If you cannot honestly do so, either finish the reading or be ready for a lower grade. The reading is crucial in a non-classroom course.
Reading Report

Due in Prof. McMullen’s box by 5:00 PM, Friday, December 5, 2008!

Name: _____________________

I attest that I have read the following amount of the required readings for this course as listed in the course syllabus (check one):

100% _____
95% _____
90% _____
less than 90% _____

Signed: _____________________