

**PRESBYTERIAN POLITY, CM 217-2**  
**SYLLABUS (final)**  
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
January Term, 2014  
Clifton Kirkpatrick, Professor

**Course Description:**

In this experiential approach, students learn to think theologically and systemically as they apply the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to specific issues and practices at the congregational, presbytery, synod, and general assembly levels. Attention will also be given to ministry and administration in the Presbyterian tradition based on the theology of the church in the Book of Order.

**Objectives**--at the conclusion of the course students:

- Will have a basic theological understanding of the ecclesiology on which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is based.
- Will be prepared to offer excellent leadership and participation “in government and discipline” in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “serving in governing bodies of the church.”
- Will be able to moderate sessions, shape congregational life, and lead the worship and sacramental life of congregations in conformity with the Constitution of the PCUSA.
- Will be familiar the basic principles of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and be prepared for the Standard Ordination Examinations in Church Polity.

**Course Evaluation:**

Successful completion of the course requirements (below) will measure proficiency in achieving the various objectives above. Overall class performance on the standard ordination exams of the PCUSA in Church Polity and Worship and Sacraments will be another indicator of how well these objectives have been met. Students will also respond to the seminary’s online evaluation form for this course at the end of the semester. However, you are encouraged to communicate your evaluative observations about your experiences of the course to the instructor at any time, in the spirit of the learning community.

**Course Requirements:**

Practice Ordination Exams: To prepare students for the denominational examination process, 25% of the class grade will be based on completion of three parts of Polity Exams from past Presbyterian Standard Ordination Examinations in Polity. These will be assigned in class sessions.

Another 25% of the class grade will be based on a three part final exam assigned in the last session of the course (or students may submit a copy of the PCUSA exam in Church Polity being taken on February 1, 2014 and their responses as their final exam for the class). Exams are found on the seminary website at [http://www.lpts.edu/docs/whitelibrary/church\\_polity.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.lpts.edu/docs/whitelibrary/church_polity.pdf?sfvrsn=0).

One section of an exam will be assigned as a take-home assignment at three different class periods. The student is urged to stick with the time limits in the practice exams (one hour for each section) in order to learn to pace yourself for the actual exam. Completed exams are submitted to the professor electronically.

Agendas and Moderating (5% of course grade) ) based on the ability to prepare an agenda collaboratively with the student serving as clerk and to moderate sub groups of the class as if they were a session meeting. These agendas are to be sent electronically to all members of your sub-group (session) and to the professor no later than 9:00 pm the evening before that session group meets.

Serving as Clerk (5% of course grade) based on the ability to record clearly and simply the proceedings of a particular sub-group (session). These minutes are to be sent electronically to all members of your sub-group (session) and to the professor no later than 9:00 pm the evening before the session group meeting that will approve them.

Participation in class (15% of course grade) demonstrating: a) ability to read, reflect on, and apply the assigned readings to the class discussion and b) ability to play a positive role in group discussion.

Pinpoint Responses to Reflection Questions through 50 Word Sentences (25% of course grade)  
For each session after the first a reflection question is listed on the schedule to focus our discussion around a key aspect of our polity and worship. Students will record their response to the reflection question for each week through one 50 word sentence. (See description by Professor Charles Cohen of the University of Wisconsin at the end of this syllabus.) We will often begin our class meetings or our “session” meetings by sharing aloud our sentences with one another and reflecting upon them together. The sentences should be emailed to the professor no later than 9:00 pm on the evening prior to each class so that they can be posted on CAMS in advance to facilitate class

discussion. These 50 word sentences count for 25% of the course grade. A description of this methodology is found as an endnote to this syllabus.<sup>i</sup>

## **Bibliography**

### **Required Books**

*Book of Order 2013-2015*, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II. This publication is also available online at <http://store.pcusa.org/OGA13010>. (However, for preparation for the Standard Ordination Exams and for future use, it is important to be familiar with using the hard copy of this part of the Constitution.)

Gray, Joan S. and Tucker, Joyce C. *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Geneva Press, 2012.

### **Readings on CAMS or Online**

Since we have a new Form of Government in the PCUSA most publications related to the new polity are online or available through [Presbyterianleader.com](http://Presbyterianleader.com). The readings from these sources are noted in the schedule for each session. These readings can be found either on CAMS or on the web (web addresses are provided).

### **Other books you should have in your library:**

Robert, Henry M., III, et al. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief*. Da Capo Press; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (2011) ISBN: 9780306820199.

*The Book of Common Worship*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

*The Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), part 1.

## **Policies of LPTS:**

### **Use of Inclusive Language**

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. For more information, see:

<http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-support-center/online-writing-lab/avoiding-gender-bias>

## **Academic Honesty**

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

## **Special Accommodations**

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center ([kmapes@lpts.edu](mailto:kmapes@lpts.edu)) during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

## **Citation Policy**

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

## **Attendance Policy**

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

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## **Class Schedule, Topics, Readings, and Reflection Assignments**

### **Session 1 – January 8, 2014**

**Theme:** Introduction to Presbyterian Polity, One Another, and the Roles of Session in Discerning God's Will

**Components:** Getting acquainted with one another and our Presbyterian journeys  
Overview of course syllabus, assignments, and schedule  
Introduction to Lambeth Bible Study  
Assignment of Moderating and Clerking Duties  
Book of Order Jeopardy  
Overview of the Vision and Structure of the Constitution  
Introduction to Constitutional Resources  
Review Ordination Examinations for Polity  
Agendas and Meeting Planning  
Parliamentary Procedure  
Tricks of the trade in moderating meetings

**Readings:** Book of Order: Preface, Table of Contents and Index  
Gray and Tucker, introduction and pp.1-10, 116-129.  
Sawyer, "Tricks of Trade for Moderating"  
Wolfe, "Parliamentary Procedures in the PCUSA,"  
Ellison, "Parliamentary Procedure for Presbyterians"  
Lambeth Bible Study Method  
OGA, Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations,  
<http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/prep4min/pdfs/ordination-exams-handbook.pdf>

First Take Home Practice Ordination Polity Exam assigned (Limit yourself to one hour for doing each exam)

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## **Session 2 – January 9, 2014**

**Theme:**        **Basic Foundations and Vision of the Church and its Mission in our Constitution**

**Components:** Basic Principles and Theological Foundations for our Polity  
From a Polity for Governance to a Polity for Mission  
Introduction to the concept of a Missional Polity  
Connections to our Confessions  
Introduction to the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity  
Contribution of Presbyterian Polity to Trust, Community and Mission  
Renewal  
Leadership and Reformed Polity

**Readings:**    Foundations of Presbyterian Polity (read both the Foundations themselves and the article on CAMS under that title)  
Book of Confessions: Nicene Creed, Westminster Shorter Catechism, and Brief Statement of Faith  
The Confession of Belhar  
OGA, “The Missional Church and the New Form of Government”  
Barber and Wright, “The Approved New Form of Government”  
Hooker, “Missional Polity”  
Kirkpatrick and Valentine, *Presbyterian Leadership* (Chapter 2, “Resources from our Tradition”)

**Reflection:**    Based on the principles articulated in our Books of Order and Confessions, what biblical image of the church would best reflect a Presbyterian understanding of our ecclesiology and why?

## **Session 3 – January 10, 2014**

**Theme:**        **Congregations: The Basic but not Sufficient Form of the Church**

**Components:** Introduction to the Form of Government  
The Mission of the Congregation  
Organizing Congregations and Fresh Expressions of Christian Community

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Categories and Ministries of Members  
Baptism and the Ministry of Members  
Meetings and Responsibilities of Congregation  
Review of First Ordination Exam  
Overview of the Rules of Discipline

**Readings:** The Form of Government, Chapter One, "Congregations and Their Membership" Rules of Discipline, especially Chapters D-1, D-2, and D-10  
Gray and Tucker, pp. 130-143  
Charles Wiley, "Ordinary and Extraordinary Discipline,

**Reflection:** In your own words what does the Form of Government's mean when it claims that the local congregation is the "basic" but "not sufficient" form of the church?

#### **Session 4 – January 15, 2014**

**Theme:** Teaching and Ruling Elders and Deacons in their Life Together in Congregations

**Components:** The complimentary roles of teaching and ruling elders, and deacons in congregations  
Development of Profiles for Deacons, Ruling Elders, Teaching Elders, and Teaching Elders serving in Validated Ministries  
Ministerial limits and prerogatives  
Ordination, Calling, and "The Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith"

**Readings:** Form of Government, Chapter 2, "Ordered Ministry, Commissioning, and Certification"  
Directory for Worship, W-4.4000, "Ordination, Installation, and Commissioning"  
PCUSA, *Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry*, pp. 10-54  
Gray and Tucker, pp. 11-46 and 58-72  
Ellison, "Selecting and Preparing Ruling Elders and Deacons"

**Reflection:** Identify two responsibilities that ruling and teaching elders share in common and one that is distinct for each?

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Take home polity exam 2 assigned to students.

**Session 5 – January 17, 2014**

**Theme:**           **The Councils of the Church, beginning with the Session**

**Components:** The role of Councils

Changes to councils because of the new Form of Government

Principles of Administration

Independent yet Interdependent Councils

Role of the Session governing and guiding the spiritual life and mission of the congregation

**Readings:**       Form of Government, 3.01 – 3.0205, “Councils of the Church,”

Gray and Tucker, pp. 47-57 and 73-88

OGA, “The Session and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love, and Witness”

**Reflection:**     How is the session to measure its faithfulness in leading the congregation in its life and mission?

Take home worship exam 3 assigned to students.

**Session 6 – January 21, 2014**

**Theme:**           **The More Inclusive Councils: Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly and the Church Ecumenical**

**Components:** The role of presbytery, synod and General Assembly

Establishing, amending and interpreting the Constitution

The General Assembly as a program agency and as a governing body

Being Presbyterian and Ecumenical

Transferring to and from and Uniting with Churches of Other

Communions

Mock General Assembly Meeting



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<b>Readings:</b>	Form of Government, chapter 3.03-3.0503, chapter 5, and chapter 6 Gray and Tucker, pp. 88-99 Kirkpatrick, <i>Is There a Future for the PCUSA?</i> Overtures before the 221 <sup>st</sup> General Assembly Joe Small, "The Travail of the Presbytery" Wright, "Presbyterian Commitment to Ecumenism"
<b>Reflection</b>	What do you think will be the most significant actions taken at the 221st General Assembly?

### **Session 7 – January 23, 2014**

**Theme:**           **Decently and In Order / Worship and Sacraments in Presbyterian Polity**

**Components: Part I**

Administrative Review  
 Finances and Property  
 Trustees and Incorporation  
 Alternatives for Conflict Resolution

**Part II**

The Centrality of Word and Sacrament in Reformed Worship  
 Overview of the Directory for Worship  
 Worship, Sacraments and the Confessions

**Readings:**

Form of Government, Chapter 4, "Church and Civil Authority,"  
 Directory for Worship  
 Gray and Tucker, pp. 100-115 and 144-161  
 Victoria Curtiss, , "Guidelines for Communal Discernment" (on CAMS)  
 "Church Finances and Property" (on CAMS)  
 "Polity Resources for Dealing with Conflict and Discipline" (on CAMS)  
 Selected portions of Book of Confessions dealing with Worship and  
 Sacraments (use the index to find references to baptism and Lord's  
 Supper)  
*The Sacrament of Baptism*, David Gambrell, PresbyterianLeader.com  
*The Sacrament of Communion*, David Gambrell, PresbyterianLeader.com

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**Reflection:** Identify by confession and paragraph number two sections in the *Book of Confessions* that most helpfully articulate the Reformed doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

Take home final polity exam (in three parts) will be distributed (or students may submit the PCUSA exam being taken on February 1, 2014 for their final exam). Completed exams are due electronically to the professor by noon on January 31, 2014. (Those submitting their actual senior ordination exam in polity will submit the exams and the questions to the professor by noon on February 3, 2014.

<sup>i</sup> Charles L. Cohen on the 50-word assignment: "A single-sentence exercise with a finite word limit counters students' proclivity for aerating their prose with superfluities. Given at most fifty words, students must distill their arguments' fundamentals and phrase them concisely, for, as my syllabus warns, the fifty-first word and its successors face a terrible fate. (I have been known to cut out extraneous verbiage and turn the tattered remnant into a paper airplane—a practice proved sound pedagogically if not aerodynamically.)

Fifty words might appear too many—the contests cereal companies run, after all, ask for only twenty five—but I prefer giving students sufficient rope. For one thing, the fifty-word limit allows them to cope with the assignment, which often requires complicated responses. For another, it weans them from dependency on simple declarative sentences and challenges them to experiment with multiple clauses. Some can handle compound-complex sentences, but most require—and appreciate—tutelage in them. Nor are fifty words too few; no student has ever complained about an inability to pare down the verbiage. Had Goldilocks stumbled into my section instead of the Three Bears' den, she would have found the word limit "just right."

Consider, for example, the assignment that I recently gave students in History/Religious Studies 451, entitled "Constructing a hypothesis": "Using the maps in the front of the packet, compare the distribution of churches within Anglo-America east of the Mississippi River in 1750 with the distribution in 1850 and, in one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (need I say more?), hypothesize the reasons for the difference." To complete the exercise, students must examine a series of maps, aggregate data presented graphically and convert it into written form, analyze that data and develop a hypothesis to explain patterns they may have found. They must attend carefully to the material (not the least of the minor assignment's benefits is its capacity to monitor students' preparation), read the maps against each other, and offer a succinct but accurate conclusion, thereby rehearsing several critical skills simultaneously.

The quality of the responses varied, as one might expect, but the best submission hit the mark exactly, intellectually and, at fifty words, quantitatively: 'The maps show a relative decline in Anglican and Congregational Churches in relation to the growth of other churches between 1750 and 1850, which reflects the shift towards the disestablishment of state churches and the demand for a constitutional

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guaranty of religious freedom that occurred during the American Revolutionary Settlement.’ Even more impressive, English is not the writer’s native language.”<sup>i</sup>