



REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – WASHINGTON, D. C.

CHURCH POLITY 06PT5325

COURSE SYLLABUS

Spring 2023
April 19 – May 10
Wednesday, 7:00 – 10:00 pm

Visiting Lecturer in Pastoral Theology: Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.

- **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR DR. SILVERNAIL:** If you have questions, cannot attend a class, or need any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Address: Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church
2 Cardinal Park Drive, SE Suite 101A
Leesburg, VA 20175

Cell #: (703) 431-0046

Email: dsilvernail@potomachills.org (best way to reach me)

A brief biography of Dr. Silvernail is available at
<http://www.potomachills.org/dr-david-silvernail>

- **OFFICE HOURS:**
 - Office hours will be in the classroom during lunch and right after class. Otherwise, please make an appointment to meet at the RTS office or you may contact the instructor to setup an alternate time and place.

NOTICE – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY!
THERE ARE READING ASSIGNMENTS
DUE ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS!

- **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.

- **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. A MIND FOR TRUTH (Cognitive — Know/Understand):

- 1.1. The student will understand the three major types of church government and be able to give a biblical basis for church government.
- 1.2. The student will understand why proper church polity is helpful in leading the local church and its session (leadership board) meetings.
- 1.3. The student will gain a greater understanding and wisdom in the development of church officers and leaders and how to moderate a session meeting.
- 1.4. The student will understand the orderly oversight regarding church discipline.
- 1.5. The student will gain an introductory understanding of parliamentary procedure and the work of church courts.

2. A HEART FOR GOD (Affective — Feel/Motivation):

- 2.1. The student will gain a greater respect and appreciation for the various forms of church government, particularly the Presbyterian form of church government.
- 2.2. The student will gain a greater sense of the need for functional church government.
- 2.3. The student will grow in confidence in leading a session and working in church courts.
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. The student will grow in confidence in using proper parliamentary procedure.

3. FOR SERVANT LEADERSHIP (Volitional — Do/Competencies):

- 3.1. The student might experience church polity in a real life setting by attending at least one meeting of a church court or leadership meeting.
- 3.2. The student will do a report on a practical area of polity, drawing conclusions and making application to the field of study.
- 3.3. The student will walk through parliamentary procedure and gain initial exposure as to how to run a session or congregational meeting.

- **CLASS COUNSEL**

1. I recognize that many of you work long days and have awkward commutes. **Please leave sufficient time to battle adverse traffic so that you can arrive on time.**
2. **Please come to each class prepared**, with readings, prayers, liturgies, and reading reports completed. From the first class, I will call on students to discuss assigned material. It is a courtesy to teacher and fellow students alike if your class contributions are informed by prior study. Take notes of these discussions. These exchanges are a vehicle for learning, and you will be expected to retain the material that we discuss.
3. **Please ask questions in class.** When necessary, I will establish the boundaries and let you know when I need to press on in delivering information and when we should stop to enjoy a discussion. But a certain amount of time is set aside each week for discussion and I would be disappointed if we did not make it useful.
4. **Give some thought to your questions.** There is no question too simple to ask (although there are many that are too difficult to answer). But please do not stop the class to regale it with stories, ride hobbyhorses, play teacher to your fellow students, or ask to have a word spelled.
5. **Please turn off your cell phones.** Checking your mobile phone in a class discussion or lecture is as thoughtless as checking it while holding a conversation. If you take calls during class (unless extreme emergency), you will be marked down.
6. Please do not use web access for web-surfing, chatting, and emailing.
7. You may quietly snack and drink and stretch in class, or pace about the back of the room if it helps you stay alert.

• **COURSE OBJECTIVES RELATED TO MDiv* STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<p>➤ Strong</p> <p>➤ Moderate</p> <p>➤ Minimal</p> <p>➤ None</p>	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	1. Students will interact with topics of polity by submitting 3 book reports, a church court visit & response paper, and a defense of polity paper based on scriptural principles.
Scripture	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.)	Minimal	1. Students will interact with topics of polity based on Scripture and its proper application, with options for some exegetical work.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	1. Students will read and discuss the Biblical and theological principles of Reformed ecclesiology.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	1. Students will work on developing appropriate attitudes necessary for church discipline and working with others in the context of the local church.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	1. Students will learn how to apply the principles of church polity to their specific denominational context.

Winsomely Reformed	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.)	Moderate	1. Students will learn how to graciously approach the various biblically based positions on church government in an honest but constructive manner.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Strong	<p>1. Required reading of the PCA Book of Church Order in the area of worship.</p> <p>2. Student will open and close each class in prayer.</p> <p>3. Pastoral oversight of members and need for shepherding is addressed in lectures and reading.</p> <p>4. Students will learn how polity addresses the relational / connectional aspects of working with other church members and other church bodies.</p>

- **REQUIRED READINGS.** The reading requirement for this course is on par for a Master's degree course, as is evident below. Students will be responsible for the reading assignment as the requirements of the course will demonstrate.

Due Wednesday, April 19, 2023:

- ☐ *Book of Church Order of the PCA.* Atlanta, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk, 2019. **Chapters 6, 56-58**

Available online, as an app for an iOS device, and in print through the PCA Bookstore (<http://www.pcaac.org/resources/bco/>).

- If you plan on being ordained in the PCA, you should have a print copy.
- Students from other denominations may substitute the *Book of Church Order* of their particular denomination (e.g. OPC, ARPC, EPC, ECO, RPCNA, RCUS, URC, KAPC, PCUSA, Sovereign Grace, ACNA, or AMiA).
- Students from denominations or independent churches that do not have a *Book of Church order* will use the PCA version.

- ☐ Lucas, Sean Michael. *What is Church Government.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009. (28 pages)
- ☐ McGraw, Ryan & Speck, Ryan. *Is Church Membership Biblical?* Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015. (31 pages)

Due Wednesday, April 26, 2023:

- ☐ *Book of Church Order of the PCA.* **Chapters 1-5, 7-26**
- ☐ **Engle, Paul, and Cowan, Steven, eds.** *Who Runs the Church: Four Views on Church Polity.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. (310 pages) – **Book Review Due**
- ☐ Lewis, Arthur & Robert, Henry. *Robert's Rules Simplified.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006. (72 pages)
- ☐ Taylor, Roy. Two articles written by the former Stated Clerk of the PCA
 - *The Uniqueness of PCA Polity* (6 pages) found at http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/clerk/taylorLR_12152009_Uniqueness%20of%20PCA%20Polity.pdf.
 - *The Presbyterian Church in America Non-hierarchical Presbyterianism* (7 pages) found at http://pcahistory.org/pca/clerk/taylor_non-hierarchical.pdf.
 - Students from other denominations or independent churches may substitute the *equivalent documents* of their particular denomination or church.

Due Wednesday, May 3, 2023:

- ☐ *Book of Church Order of the PCA.* **Chapters 27-46**

- ❑ Adams, Jay. *Handbook of Church Discipline*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. (109 pages) – **Book Review Due**

Due Wednesday, May 10, 2023:

- ❑ Knight, George. *Two Offices (Elders/Bishops, and Deacons) and Two Orders of Elders Preaching/Teaching Elders, and Ruling Elders): A New Testament Study* (9 pages)
<https://pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-462.html>
- ❑ Rayburn, Robert. *Three Offices: Minister, Elder, Deacon* (11 pages) found at
<https://cpcpga.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Rayburn-Three-offices.pdf>
- ❑ Waters, Guy Prentiss. *How Jesus Runs the Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011. (151 pages) – **Book Review Due**

734 Total Pages plus the BCO

- **REQUIREMENTS:**

- **ATTENDANCE:** Each student is required to attend each class. If you know you cannot make it to a class session, notify me in advance. Pastors readily reflect that some of the most important lessons learned in seminary were learned from classmates. Therefore, a portion of the final grade will be allotted to attendance and participation in the listening and feedback process.
- **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. Plagiarism is a Serious Violation of Academic Standards and will result in a grade of zero for that assignment. 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 and will result in a referral to the Academic Dean for Disciplinary Action.
- **POLICY ON GRAMMAR AND SPELL CHECK:** Any work turned in which appears to lack "proofing" or displays poor grammar will receive a penalty affecting the grade.
- **POLICY ON LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** Late assignments will be dropped **one full grade** on the above scale **for each day** they are late. For example, an assignment that is **one day**

late will be dropped from an A to a B, **two days late** will be dropped from an A to a C, and so on. Missing assignments will be given a zero (0).

*****Late and Missing assignments are the primary reason for low course grades.*****

- **ALL WRITTEN WORK SHOULD HAVE NAME, DATE, COURSE, AND ASSIGNMENT LISTED IN THE HEADER (First Page Only) ACCORDING TO THE FOLLOWING FORMAT:**

Name of Student Here
September 25, 2021

Church Polity 06PT5325
Waters Reading Report

- **ALL WRITTEN WORK IS TO BE SUBMITTED IN MICROSOFT WORD (NO PDF'S).**
- **ALL WRITTEN WORK IS TO BE SUBMITTED IN TIMES NEW ROMAN, 12 POINT, DOUBLE-SPACED, ONE INCH MARGINS, SINGLE SIDED, WITH PAGE NUMBERS.**
- **AS THIS IS AN ACADEMIC COURSE, EACH STUDENT WILL FOOTNOTE ALL THEIR WORK WITH ANY REFERENCES THEY USE FROM ANY OTHER WRITTEN TEXT, AUDIO, OR INTERNET SOURCE.**
- **ASSIGNMENTS:**
 - **Debate / Class Participation:** 20% of total grade April 19-May 10
 - **Polity Book Reviews:** 30% of total grade April 26-May 10
(10% each)
 - **Defense of Polity Paper:** 30% of total grade May 17
 - **Church Court Response Paper:** 20% of total grade May 24
- **GRADING SCALE:** The standard RTS grading scale will be used:

A	(97-100)	4.00	C	(80-82)	2.00
A -	(94-96)	3.66	C -	(78-79)	1.66
B +	(91-93)	3.33	D +	(75-77)	1.33
B	(88-90)	3.00	D	(72-74)	1.00
B -	(86-87)	2.66	D -	(70-71)	0.66
C +	(83-85)	2.33	F	(below 70)	0.00

1. Polity Book Reviews (3 papers, 4 pages each):

Each student will turn in a Reading Report on the required reading textbooks by **Adams, Engle, and Waters**. Students will write a brief report (approximately four pages) following the form below. Students are to answer those questions and turn them in on the date that book is covered in class.

Name of Student here
May 3, 2023

Church Polity 06PT5325
Waters Book Review

Topic – What is this book about?

Give a brief overview of the book, including its theme and the author's theological perspective. (one paragraph)

Audience – Who is this book written for?

Who does the author identify as his audience? And why? (one paragraph)

Purpose – Why did the author write this book?

Explain its argument – not your reaction to its argument. (approximately 1/2 page)

Structure – How has the author structured the book?

How does he progress from the first chapter to the last? Some books are heavily dependent upon a specific structure while other books are much less so. The more heavily dependent the book is upon a structure, the more important it is that you describe it. (approximately 1/2 page)

Value – What is unique about this book?

What makes this book different from others that deal with the same topic? (approximately 1/2 page)

Critique – How well does the author succeed?

Earlier you identified the book's topic, audience, purpose and structure. Now you want to tell how well he succeeded in these things. Did he do justice to the topic? Did he write in such a way that this will appeal to his audience? Did he achieve his purpose? Did he follow a clear structure and was that structure helpful? (at least 1 page)

- What strengths did you identify?
- What weaknesses did you identify?
- Is it faithful to Scripture?

Application – How did (or will) the book affect you in ministry?

Offer some specific application to your own ministry demonstrating the value and relevance of the material in this book. (approximately 1/2 page)

2. Form of Government Debate (May 3):

- In this exercise, the class will be divided into two groups for two debates. The format will be each group will have six minutes to present, followed by a three-minute response.
- Students will be given some class time to develop their arguments, but please come to class with some ideas and resources. Students who defend episcopacy in the first debate will defend Presbyterianism in the second debate.
- For the first debate, one group will defend Presbyterian ecclesiology and the other will defend Episcopalian ecclesiology. The question put to the class will be, “Shall this body adopt an Episcopal polity that is hierarchical in structure, with regional bishops over local presbyters?”
- For the second debate, one group will defend Presbyterian ecclesiology and the other will defend Congregational or Independent ecclesiology. The question put to the class will be, “Does the Scripture hold forth that many particular [or local] congregations may be under one presbyterial government?”

3. Defense of Polity Paper (10 pages): Due May 17

(EMAILED TO PROFESSOR)

- Using Scripture, church history and tradition, pragmatic considerations and at least five sources (references), explain, describe, compare and contrast the four positions on church polity, giving strengths and weaknesses, probable usages and potential problems for each. (5 pages)
- Explain why you hold the position or view you personally have chosen (or prefer) regarding church polity. Give the Biblical basis for your chosen church polity. Demonstrate the practical outworking of this form of government in the life of the local church. (5 pages)

4. Church Court Visit and Response Paper (5 pages): Due May 24

(EMAILED TO PROFESSOR)

Sometime *during the Spring (February - May)*, 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 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/board's permission, *as the session meetings are normally held only once per month and presbytery meetings are normally held only once per quarter. **Begin the process now!***

If you do not have a 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, elder, or other 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. 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:
 - What did you like and dislike about the meeting?
 - Was there anything new you learned?
 - Any surprises or anything unusual you experienced?
 - Is there any way in which this meeting could have been improved?
 - Did the pastor/elder you talked to leave encouraged? Why or why not?
 - What questions do you still have about your church's form of government?
 - In what ways did your pastoral interaction assist you?

CLASS SCHEDULE

Wednesday, April 19

1. Introduction to Church Polity
2. Book of Church Order, Church Membership
3. Importance of Church Membership Class

Wednesday, April 26

4. Parliamentary Procedure (*guest speaker*)
5. Book of Church Order, Form of Government
6. Book of Church Order, Graded Courts
7. Engle Book Review

Wednesday, May 3

8. Form of Government Debates
9. Book of Church Order, Rules of Discipline
10. Church Discipline Case Studies
11. Adams Book Review

Wednesday, May 10

12. Book of Church Order, Officers in the Church
13. Working with a Session or Board
14. Waters Book Review
15. Class Evaluations

Wednesday, May 17

Wednesday, May 24

Reading

Lucas
BCO, Chapters 6, 56-58
McGraw

Roberts Rules
BCO, Chapters 1-5, 7-26
Taylor

Engle Book Report

BCO, Chapters 27-46

Adams Book Report

Knight, Rayburn

Waters Book Report

Defense of Polity Paper

Church Court Response Paper