

**Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.  
Fall 2025**

**PT5325 Church Polity 1 Hr.  
Friday, 8:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M.  
Saturday, 8:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.  
Sept 26-27, 2025**

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**Description (as per RTS Catalogue)**

“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.” (p.74)

**Course Objectives**

- (1)** To understand and to articulate the biblical foundations of presbyterian church government
- (2)** To grasp the principles informing the form of government and discipline in the *Book of Church Order* (BCO) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
- (3)** To learn the details of the BCO
- (4)** To acquire practical acquaintance with parliamentary procedure.

**Required Texts**

- (1)** The Holy Bible, preferably in a recent translation. Students who are competent in Hellenistic Greek are strongly encouraged to bring their Greek New Testaments to class.
- (2)** *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.; Lawrenceville, Ga.: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2025).
- (3)** Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (P&R 2011).
- (4)** Henry M. Robert III et al., *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief* (3d ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2020).

**Recommended Texts**

- (1)** Henry M. Robert, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (12<sup>th</sup> ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2020).
- (2)** *The Westminster Confession of Faith Together With the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism with the Scripture Proofs* (3d ed.; Atlanta: CE&P, 1990).
- (3)** Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God As An Essential Element of the Gospel* (1858; repr. Willow Grove, Penn.: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009).

(4) Thomas E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (2d ed.; 1892; repr. Greenville, S.C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2005).

## **Assignments & Requirements**

(1) BCO Outline. Students will submit on Canvas an outline of the *BCO*. The outline must be the student's original work; students are not permitted to consult other outlines. The outline must cover the entirety of the *BCO*, but must be no longer than twenty-five (25) pages. This outline is **due Friday, October 31, 5 P.M. 30% of Final Grade**

(2) A Final Exam will be taken after our last session and will be cumulative. The final exam will cover Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church*, and will ask you how much of the assigned readings (i.e., Waters, *Roberts ... In Brief*) you completed. The final exam is due not later than **Saturday, October 11, 5 P.M.** Please arrange your schedule accordingly. **No Late Exams Will Be Accepted. 50% of Final Grade**

(3) Memorization of Eph 4:1-16. You must recite these verses (in any translation) to a fellow student in the course. That student must indicate to the course TA in writing that you have successfully completed the assignment (i.e. that you have recited Eph 4:1-16, from memory, without error). This statement should be as follows – “[Name (the one recited)] recited [Bible verse(s)] to me, [your name], on [date].” This assignment is due **Saturday, October 31, 5 P.M. 10% of Final Grade**

(4) Attend a Meeting of a Church Court. Students will attend at least one (1) meeting of a church court in its entirety. The court may be either session or presbytery. Students will then meet with at least one (1) member of that court after the meeting, and discuss that meeting with that elder, using the suggested questions supplied below. The meeting should last around a half hour. Students will submit to the course TA a statement indicating the extent to which he has fulfilled these requirements. This statement should be as follows – “I, [Name], attended [the session meeting of X church or the Presbytery meeting at X church] on [date]. After the meeting, I spoke with [RE/TE name].” This statement is **due Saturday, October 31, 5 P.M., 10% of Final Grade**

## **Attendance**

Class attendance is required for PT 5325. If a student anticipates an unavoidable absence, he should notify the instructor in advance. Each hour of unexcused absence subjects the student to reduction of his final grade by one-half of a letter grade. **Students missing more than three hours will fail the course.**

## **Grading Scale**

The grading scale for this course is the seminary's grading scale. You may find it listed at the *RTS Catalog*, p.44.

## **Plagiarism**

Please review the seminary's policy on plagiarism. Plagiarized work will subject the student to failure in the course and possible disciplinary action.

## **In-Class Computer Use**

Computers and tablets are not permitted in this course. Cell phones must be set to silent and stowed. If for some extraordinary reason you need to take a call, you may either wait until the break or leave the classroom.

### **Approximate Course Schedule**

Please note that this schedule is approximate and subject to change at any time. The instructor's announced changes in class will be the final word on the nature and date of assignments. They are the student's sole responsibility to note and to implement.

26 September      **In-Class Topic:** Church Government  
                         **Reading:** Waters (All)

27 September      **In-Class Topic:** Functioning of Church Courts, Parliamentary  
                         Procedure  
                         **Reading:** *Roberts Rules ... In Brief* (All)

**Follow-Up Meeting  
With a Member-Elder  
Regarding a Meeting of a Church Court**

The following are sample questions to help you in your follow-up meeting. They are not exhaustive, and you are not restricted to them. They are ways to help prime the pump of your conversation.

1. How is the docket put together?
  - What order does it follow?
  - Why does it follow this order? Could it follow another order?
  - Who is involved in putting it together?
  - When is it sent out to the court? How is it sent out to the court?
2. How did you prepare for this meeting?
  - How would you advise me to prepare for session meetings? presbytery meetings? General Assembly?
  - Looking back, what would you have done at the beginning of your ministry to help you to have benefited more from your participation in the courts of the church?
3. Did this meeting reflect a standard business load for this court?
  - Why or why not?
  - What factors can make the load heavier? lighter?
4. Which are the committees of this court?
  - What are they tasked with doing? (discuss each one)
  - What is the rationale behind this committee structure? In your opinion, is it an effective structure? Could it be improved? If so, how?
  - Have you ever served on such a committee? Chaired such a committee? What were your experiences? What did you (not) enjoy? What surprised you most about the work you did on this committee? Would you like to do it again? Did you find it helpful to you in your ministry? If so, how? Did your experiences in ministry help you contribute to the work of that committee?
  - How would you describe the relationship between the court's committees and the court itself? Is there trust between the committees and the court? Why or why not? What are some ways that a court can help to foster trust between its committees and the court? What are some things that can break down trust between a court and its committees?
5. What, for you, was the highlight of this meeting of the court? Why?
6. What, for you, was the most challenging or difficult moment of this meeting of the court? Why?

7. Do you think that you and your fellow-elders left this meeting of the court encouraged? Why or why not? What are some ways that church courts can be places where elders leave encouraged? In your experience, what are some things about meetings of church courts that can discourage member elders? How can these matters be addressed constructively?

8. What advice would you give to me if I were to moderate a meeting of a church court?



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

Course: PT 5325: Church Polity  
 Professor: Guy Waters  
 Campus: RTS Washington, DC  
 Date: Fall 2025

<b>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</b> <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> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		<b>Rubric</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong</li> <li>• Moderate</li> <li>• Minimal</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<b>Mini-Justification</b>
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	1. Principles of Presbyterian polity 2. Biblical foundations for Presbyterian polity 3. Principles of parliamentary procedure
<b>Scripture</b>	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.)	Strong	Emphasis on biblical basis for Presbyterian polity
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Concerted study of classical Reformed and Presbyterian ecclesiology
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	Application of church government to evangelism and missions is made in class
<b>Worldview</b>	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.	Minimal	Course subject matter primarily delimited to church government
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	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	Alterate polities presented charitably, fairly
<b>Pastoral Ministry</b>	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.	Moderate	Role of elders, courts of church in shepherding, discipline is stressed; Students read <i>Directory for Worship</i> in the BCO