

RTS

O R L A N D O



HYBRID COURSE SYLLABUS

02PT5325 CHURCH POLITY

John Muether

Winter Term 2026

PROFESSOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

NAME: John Muether

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COURSE DATES

COURSE DATES: December 1, 2025 – February 13, 2026

IN CLASS DATES: January 12 – January 14, 2026

COURSE COMPLETION DATE: February 7, 2026

SUMMARY OF DUE DATES:

- December 13 at 12 noon EST
 - Submit reading response 1 (Waters)
- December 27 at 12 noon EST
 - Submit reading response 2 (Calvin)
- January 3 at 12 noon EST
 - Submit BCO scenario 1
- January 10 at 12 noon EST
 - Submit reading response 3 (Witherow)
- January 24 at 12 noon EST
 - Final exam to be completed
- January 31 at 12 noon EST
 - Submit reading response 4 (BCO assessment)
- February 7 at 12 noon EST
 - Submit BOCO scenario 2
- February 13 at 12 noon EST
 - All readings are to be completed and reading report due

COURSE OVERVIEW

DESCRIPTION:

Students examine the biblical data relative to church government and survey the Book of Church Order of the PCA (and other American Presbyterian denominations). The organization and function of church courts, including discipline and appeals, are considered, and parliamentary procedure is emphasized.

GOALS:

- *Comprehension*
 - To understand the biblical witness on church polity
 - To understand the development of forms of polity in church history
- *Competence*
 - To sharpen gifts in pastoral leadership through a basic knowledge of polity
- *Character*
 - To pursue the peace, purity, and unity of the church through a greater esteem of its good order.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

READING

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (Any edition permitted; McNeill-Battles edition recommended). Read the following sections IV.3.1-16 and IV.4.1-2, IV.4:10-14. (If you are unfamiliar with the *Institutes*, “IV.3.1-16” refers to *Book 4, Chapter 3, Sections 1-16*, etc.)

Presbyterian Church in America. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*. Atlanta: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2025.

Note: available electronically in English and Korean; non-PCA students may substitute the BCO of their particular denomination.

Smyth, Thomas. *An Ecclesiastical Catechism of the Presbyterian Church*. 7th ed. Fellsmere, FL: Reformation Christian Ministries, 2007.

Waters, Guy. *How Jesus Runs the Church*. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011.

Witherow, Thomas. *The Apostolic Church, Which Is It? An Enquiry at the Oracles of God As to Whether Any Existing Form of Church Government Is of Divine Right*. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990.

Note: This was first published in 1856; many editions available and any edition will do.

READING RESPONSES

There are four online reading responses, totaling 50% of the final grade.

- Response 1 (Waters reading) is due on December 13 (10 points)
- Response 2 (Calvin reading) is due on December 27 (10 points)
- Response 3 (Witherow reading) is due on January 10 (10 points)
- Response 4 (Book of Church Order Assessment) is due on February 7 (20 points)

BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER SCENARIOS

Students will have two exercises that require them to search the PCA BCO (or another Presbyterian BCO) and discover how to handle a conflict/discipline matter before a church session. Each scenario exercise is worth 10 points, totaling 20% of the final grade.

- Scenario 1 is due on January 3
- Scenario 2 is due on February 7

FINAL EXAM

A short-answer exam on 20–25 key terms and expressions in Presbyterian polity, as discussed in the class lectures. This is a closed book examination, to be distributed after the last day of class, and due within one week. Two-hour time limit, worth 30 points (30% of the final grade)

DUE DATE: Saturday, January 24, 2026.

READING REPORT

Students will complete a reading report indicating the percentage of the required reading completed.

GRADING POLICY

- Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day unless prior permission for late submission was granted.
- The published RTS grading scale is used in this course. See the RTS Catalog.

COURSE SCHEDULE

ONLINE SCHEDULE

December 1 – December 13

- Read Waters and complete the reading response described on Canvas by December 13.

December 15 – December 27

- Read Calvin (*Institutes of the Christian Religions*: Book 4, III. 4-16; IV. 1-2, 10, 14, 15) and complete the reading response described on Canvas by December 27.

December 29 – January 10

- BCO scenario 1 is due on January 3.
- Read Witherow, *Apostolic Church, Which is It?* and complete the reading response described on Canvas by January 10.
- Sometime before on-campus classes, skim through Smyth's *Ecclesiastical Catechism* to gain general familiarity with its contents and arrangement.

January 12 – January 16

- On-campus classes

January 19 – January 24

- Take the Final Exam by January 24.

January 26 – January 31

- BCO reading response/assessment due by January 31.

February 2 – February 13

- BCO scenario 2 is due on February 7.
- Reading report and all other work for the course is to be completed and submitted by February 13.

IN CLASS SCHEDULE

January 12 – 14, 2026

1. Introduction to the Class
 - a. What is Church Power?
 - b. What is Church Office?
2. The Apostolic Church: Competing forms of Polity
 - a. Biblical Evidence
 - b. Historical Development
 - c. American Presbyterianism: Distinguishing Characteristics
3. Surveying the PCA and other Books of Church Order
 - a. Form of Government
 - b. Rules of Discipline

PRESBYTERIAN POLITY: A VERY BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bannerman, James. *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960. [First published in 1869.]
- Brown, Mark R., ed. *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers*. Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- Cannada, Robert C., and W. Jack Williamson. *The Historic Polity of the PCA*. Jackson, Miss: First Presbyterian Church, 1997.
- Cowan, Steven B., ed. *Who Runs the Church? Four Views on Church Government*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Hall, David W. *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1995.
- Hall, David W., and Joseph H. Hall. *Paradigms in Polity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Hodge, Charles. *Discussions in Church Polity: From the Contributions of the "Princeton Review."* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878.
- Hodge, J. Aspinwall. *What Is Presbyterian Law? As Defined by the Church Courts*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1882.
- Lucas, Sean Michael. *On Being Presbyterian: Our Beliefs, Practices, and Stories*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2006.
- _____. *What Is Church Government?* Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009.
- Miller, Samuel. *The Ruling Elder*. Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1984.
- Robinson, Stuart. *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel*. Willow Grove, PA: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009. [First published in 1858.]
- Smyth, Thomas. *An Ecclesiastical Catechism of the Presbyterian Church*. 7th ed. Fellsmere, FL: Reformation Christian Ministries, 2007.
- Waters, Guy. *How Jesus Runs the Church*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011.
- _____. *Well Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022.
- Witherow, Thomas. *The Apostolic Church, Which Is It? An Enquiry at the Oracles of God As to Whether Any Existing Form of Church Government Is of Divine Right*. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990. [First published in 1856; many editions available.]

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: 02PT5325 Church Polity

Professor: Muether

Campus: Orlando Hybrid

Date: Winter 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <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>		<u>Rubric</u> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
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.	Moderate	Interacts with topics of polity by writing a paper based on Scriptural and theological 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	Must engage in the Scriptural arguments for particular forms of polity.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	The case is made that Reformed theology yields Reformed polity.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	Discusses the importance of church discipline in the life of Christian discipleship.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	None	
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	Gracious study of the strengths of other church polities.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	None	
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Minimal	Survey of PCA and other Books of Church Order in the area of worship.
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 church members and the need for shepherding is stressed.
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Studies the connectionalism with broader church and other denominations.