
REFORMED  THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
GLOBAL



CHURCH POLITY
DR. KENNETH J. McMULLEN



Course Overview

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Course Description:

PT5325 Church Polity, 1 hours
ARP Specialist: Dr. Kenneth McMullen
OPC Specialist: Mr. John Muether
PCA Specialist: Rev. Fred Greco

“Students examine the biblical data relative to church government, the Book of Church Order, and creedal subscription. The organization and function of church courts, including discipline and appeals, are considered, and parliamentary procedure is emphasized.”

Course Objectives:

- To show the foundational principles of church governance in the Old and New Testaments and how that governance is grounded in the headship of Christ over His church.
- To consider the nature and function of the permanent offices of the church.
- To explore the biblical basis and ramifications of church membership.
- To explore the biblical principles, goals, and pastoral expression of church discipline in the local body.
- To consider the biblical need for a connectional church in a structure of authoritative church courts.
- To understand the use of established procedures and policies for running session meetings as well as other meetings within the governing procedures of the ARP, OPC, or PCA. This includes learning the basic functions of Robert’s Rules of Order.
- To begin to understand the nature of church vows and various views concerning subscription of church officers to denominational creeds and doctrinal standards.
- To expose students to various print resources suitable for instructing other believers in matters related to church polity.

Required Textbooks:

Adams, Jay Edward. *Handbook of Church Discipline*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.

Brown, Mark R. [*Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Offices*](#). Libertyville, IL: Reformed Forum.

Capill, Murray A. *The Elder-led Church: How and Eldership team Shepherds a Healthy Flock*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2024.

Leeman, Jonathan. *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Lucas, Sean Michael. *What is Church Government?* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2025.

Robert, Henry M., III. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief*. Lebanon, IN: PublicAffairs, 2020.
- Most recent edition -

Strauch, Alexander. *Meetings That Work: A Guide to Effective Elders' Meetings*. Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis & Roth, 2016.

Van Dam, Cornelis. *The Deacon: The Biblical Roots and the Ministry of Mercy Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021.

Van Dam, Cornelis. *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2024.

Various primary source readings that will be distributed to the student in the Learning Management System (LMS).

[These books may also be available in ebook format through various retailers]

Online Student Handbook:

The Online Student Handbook (can be [downloaded here](#)) has been designed to assist you in successfully navigating the Distance Education experience, whether you are taking a single course or pursuing a certificate or degree program. In it you will find valuable information, step-by-step instructions, study helps, and essential forms to guide you through every aspect of your distance education opportunity from registration to graduation. Please use this resource as your first-stop reference manual.

Summary of Requirements:

1. Listen to all recorded Lectures
2. Complete all Readings
3. Participate in Forum Discussions (with other students and the professor)
4. Submit Church Conflict/Discipline Paper
5. Submit Report from Attendance at a Local Presbytery Meeting
6. Submit Research Paper
7. Submit ARP/OPC/PCA Standards Worksheet
8. Submit Reading Requirement
9. Submit Mentor Report or Course Application Paper

Meet the Professor



ARP Specialist: Dr. Kenneth McMullen:

[Dr. Kenneth McMullen](#), Associate Professor of Theological Bibliography and Research, also serves as the Library Director at RTS Charlotte. Ken, an ordained pastor in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, brings his experience as a pastor to RTS, having served churches in Burlington, NC, and near St. Louis, MO. He received the MDiv degree from Erskine Theological Seminary, the M.L.I.S. degree from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and the DMin degree from Reformed Theological Seminary. Ken teaches Theological Research and Writing, ARP Church Polity, ARP Church History at RTS Charlotte.



OPC Specialist: Mr. John Muether:

[John Muether](#) joined RTS-Orlando as Library Director in 1989. Mr. Muether also serves as Professor of Church History, teaching core courses on education in the church, Christian engagement with culture and church government as well as elective courses on various topics. Prior to joining RTS, Mr. Muether served on the library staff at Harvard Divinity School and directed the libraries at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, and Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.



PCA Specialist: Rev. Fred Greco:

[Rev. Fred Greco](#) currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Christ Church in Katy, TX (West Houston). He grew up in the Buffalo, NY area, along with his wife, Deb. Fred studied Classics and History at the University of Buffalo, and then moved on to graduate studies, earning an MA in Classics at the University of Chicago. He then earned a J.D. at the University of Michigan Law School and practiced as a corporate attorney specializing in commercial finance and real estate law in Cleveland, Ohio. Since becoming a minister in 2006, he has served in the PCA in many different capacities, chairing various committees, and is the current Chairman of the Standing Judicial Commission of the PCA. He has written for Tabletalk, the Gospel Reformation Network, and other outlets, especially on topics related to the Church and Church Polity. He serves as a board member for a Reformed seminary in China.

Grades

Forum Discussions (15%):

The student is required to interact in two (2) forums:

1. Student-Professor Posts (15 total posts)
 - A. Personal Introduction Forum: The student is required to post a brief personal introduction to the professor/class. Suggested details include your vocation, where you live, your church background, why you chose RTS, and what you hope to gain through the course (1 required post).
 - B. 5 Topical Discussion Q&A Forums: The student is required to answer each topical discussion question with one (1) response. The professor will acknowledge the student's answer and will follow up with a subsequent question to which the student must also answer with one (1) response. Each topical discussion question, therefore, requires two (2) total posts/responses from the student (Total of 5 forums x 2 posts = 10 total posts). The professor and/or TA reserves the right not to award points in the case where the intended structure of substantive back and forth interaction has not been followed.
 - C. Student-Professor Forum: The student is required to post four (4) times in this forum. Posts in this forum should focus on course-related content such as research paper topics, lectures and reading assignments, or other academic issues related to the course.
2. Student-Student Forum (5 total posts)

A post may be either a new topic or a response to an already existing topic.

Research Paper (30%):

Completed paper should be 10-12 pages, double-spaced; the bibliography does not apply to the page minimum. For this assignment, use the resources listed in each lesson's Recommended Reading section and any others you desire. No formal thesis statement is required. This is more of a research and reflection paper.

You will need to write on one of the following topics:

1. Differing views in the Presbyterian tradition on the number and nature of the offices of the church. Note some implications of each view.
2. Compare and contrast the various kinds of church governance (presbyterian, episcopal, and congregational). Note the biblical basis claimed for each, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each.
3. The biblical basis and application of church discipline in a Presbyterian context.
4. The implications of Christ's kingly office for church polity.

See section titled "[Research Paper Instructions](#)" in this syllabus.

Church Conflict/Discipline Project (15%):

Completed paper should be 4-6 pages, double-spaced. You will need to decide upon a church conflict problem (real or hypothetical) to deal with (get approval of topic from the professor first).

For the problem, you need to show:

1. A summary of the issues involved. [Note: do NOT use real names of people if this is based on an actual situation.]
2. Outline a plan of action with supporting Biblical basis – from the beginning of the matter to the conclusion.
3. List a short bibliography of sources consulted for the action plan.

Denominational Standards Worksheet (10%):

You are to take the Denominational Standards Questionnaire and provide an answer to each question based on the denominational standards you are studying for this course (ARP, OPC, or PCA). In other words, the content of your answers must come entirely from the governing documents, NOT from the Bible, other sources, or your own opinions. Answers may be brief but need to answer the questions adequately and clearly. In addition to providing a summary answer, you also need to provide the precise location(s) for the answers in the governing documents of the denomination you selected.

Reading Report (10%):

The student must complete all of the required reading. Reading assignments are broken down week by week within the LMS. The Reading Report will indicate the amount of required reading that has been completed during the semester and must be filled out and submitted at the end of the course.

Presbytery Report (10%):

You will need to attend a local presbytery meeting for at least 3 hours. It can either be a presbytery of which you are a part, or another NAPARC presbytery.

For this assignment:

1. List the name of the presbytery (including the denomination), date, and location.
2. List the name of the moderator and clerk for that meeting.
3. Summarize 2 significant matters of discussion. What was the basic outcome of each matter?
4. Summarize 2 or 3 particular things which you learned about Roberts' Rules and/or the way in which business was conducted. Take note of the degree to which business was handled formally or informally.

Review Quiz(5%):

There will be a short objective quiz focused on the denomination-specific track lectures

that a student chose. The quiz will only cover the two denomination-specific lectures. Further details can be found in Canvas.

Mentor Report OR Course Application Paper (5%):

If you are enrolled in an **RTS Global** degree or certificate program submit a mentor report. Every portion of the form (goals, summaries, assessments, and signatures) should be filled out completely by both the student and the mentor to receive full credit. You can download the Mentor Report form in your Canvas classroom. See specific instructions for this assignment in Canvas.

If you are receiving your degree through another **RTS campus** (Orlando, Jackson, Charlotte, et. al.), or special student (e.g. from another seminary), submit a 250-word summary of how you perceive what you have learned in this course will fit into the objectives you have for your ministry, your educational goals, or other objectives you wish to achieve in life. Course Application Papers (CAP) that fall well-short of 250 words will receive a grade deduction. See specific instructions for this assignment in Canvas.

Assignments:

Best practice for your time management is for you to submit all assignments at the end of the week in which they fall, using the upload links provided in the LMS. All work must be submitted by midnight of the course end date, per your course start letter. You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time; no late submissions are permitted. Any student who needs an extension must get approval from the Registrar prior to that time.

Contact Information:

Reformed Theological Seminary, Global Education
2101 Carmel Road
Charlotte, NC 28226
Campus: (704) 366-4853
Toll Free: (800) 227-2013
E-mail: dess@rts.edu
Web site: rts.edu/campuses/online/



Lessons

Lesson One

What is Polity?

Lesson Two

Types of Polity

Lesson Three

The Historical Development of Presbyterian
Polity

Lesson Four

Defining Church Offices

Lesson Five

The Offices in the Local Church

Lesson Six

Church Membership

Lesson Seven

Church Discipline

Lesson Eight

Courts of the Church

Lesson Nine:

Moderating Church Meetings

Lesson Ten

Local Church Policy

Lessons 11-12 are denominational specific.

Research Paper Instructions

For this assignment, use the resources listed in this syllabus and any others you desire. No formal thesis statement is required. This is more of a research and reflection paper. You will need to write on one of the following topics:

1. Differing views in the Presbyterian tradition on the number and nature of the offices of the church. Note some implications of each view.
 2. Compare and contrast the various kinds of church governance (presbyterian, episcopal, and congregational). Note the biblical basis claimed for each, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each.
 3. The biblical basis and application of church discipline in a Presbyterian context.
 4. The implications of Christ's kingly office for church polity.
- Don't forget your bibliography on a separate sheet – this does NOT count toward your 10-12 pages.
 - A minimum of 10 sources, at least one of which is an academic journal article .
 - Use footnotes, not endnotes. Err on the side of too many footnotes rather than on plagiarism.

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

Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses & Dissertations*. c2018, 9th ed. University of Chicago Press.

Style guide for research papers:

Follow the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* ed. by Kate Turabian (currently the 9th edition as of 2025).

- Use formal footnotes and a bibliography per *Turabian* (chapter 17 – notes/bibliography style).
- 12 pt. font only – Times New Roman, Arial, or a similar standard font type.
- Double spacing.
- Margins: top & bottom 1 inch; sides 1.25 inches
- NO HANDWRITTEN PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.
- All papers should be uploaded in Canvas.
- No extensions will be granted except in very extenuating circumstances.

Use of AI for research is strongly discouraged as it is often filled with fabricated information. Any use of AI in the writing of this paper is not acceptable. See the full AI policy in the [Global Student Handbook](#).

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: PT 5325 / ARP Church Polity
 Professor: Rev. Kenneth McMullen

| MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes <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> | | Rubric <input type="checkbox"/> Strong <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal <input type="checkbox"/> None | Mini-Justification |
|--|---|--|--|
| 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. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm. | Moderate (written) | Students must be able to articulate various views on polity by writing a research paper. |
| 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.) | Moderate | Students must investigate Scriptural and theological foundations for church polity. |
| Reformed Theology | Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards. | Moderate | Students are asked to read various Reformed confessions and creeds as they relate to church polity. |
| Sanctification | Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification. | Minimal | Students are encouraged to grow in their love for Christ and His Church rather than merely seeing polity as a technical issue. |
| 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 | Students learn the process and value of being part of a wider denomination, both historically and in contemporary practice. |
| 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.) | Minimal | One section of the course deals with effective church discipline properly applied. |
| 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. | Moderate | Students learn ARP polity and other governing standards. Students study local church governance and discipline. |