

**MN555 Polity and Program of the PC (USA)
Summer 2024**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an overview of Presbyterian Church (USA) polity, both in principle and in practice. Particular emphasis will be given to the use of the constitution in the local congregation and governing bodies. The class will include lectures, discussion posts, case studies, and outside assignments.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the course are to:

- Equip students to become competent moderators of Session
- Help students become knowledgeable interpreters of Presbyterian polity for the local congregation
- Increase student's awareness of the denomination's broader missional purposes
- Instill in students an appreciation for Presbyterian connectional polity

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular and thoughtful participation in class discussions;
2. Timely completion of the assigned readings;
3. Attendance at a presbytery meeting (or one session meeting, with permission) during the course;
4. An analysis of an observed governing body meeting;
5. Completion of the final essays;
6. Course evaluation will be based on class participation and quality of submitted work.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, The Book of Confessions, 2023-2025* (with index).
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part II, The Book of Order, 2023-2025*.
- Goodwillier, Gregory A., *A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* (This is a PDF document at http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/parliamentary_procedure.pdf)
- Gray, Joan S. and Joyce Tucker, *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders* (Fourth Edition)
- Hooker, Paul K., *Faith, Hope, Love, and Witness: The PC(USA) Form of Government* (Leader's Guide and Participant's Book, *Being Reformed Series*) ... (If available from pcusa.org.)
- Wilton, Carlos E., *Principles of Presbyterian Polity*

RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER STUDY

Beattie, Frank A., *Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church*
Chapman, William E., *History and Theology in the Book of Order: Blood on Every Page*
Leith, John., *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*
Olsen, Charles, *Transforming Church Boards into Spiritual Communities*
Robert, Henry M., *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, (most recent edition)
Rogers, Jack., *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions*

Weekly assignments:

Our primary reading will come from the *Book of Order 2023 – 2025* which is abbreviated in the assignments below as *B.O.* You will also see the section within the *B.O.* indicated with the constitutional rubric (ex. F-1.01), not traditional page numbers. If you use the online version of the *B.O.*, then the constitutional form is essential. Most of our other readings come from Joan Gray and Joyce Tucker's *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders, 4th edition* and Carlos E. Wilton, *Principles of Presbyterian Polity*. The abbreviations for that material will be 'Gray and Tucker' with a page range (ex. Gray and Tucker, pp. xi – 10) or 'Wilton' with a similar page designation.

Week One – May 20 – May 27... "Polity Basics"

Introduction to the *B.O.*, Preface, Number System, and Table of Contents

View website www.pcusa.org/rulingelders (consider subscribing)

Gray and Tucker, pp. Forward – 10

Wilton, pp. xi – 16
Paul Hooker, *Faith, Hope, Love, and Witness*, pp. 5 – 18
B.O. – Preface – F-1.01 – F-1.0404 and Appendix A

Week Two – May 28 – June 3 ...”Principles of Order and Government” – Part One
Wilton, pp. 17 - 96
B.O., F-2.01 – F-3.04

Week Three – June 4 – June 10...”Principles of Order and Government” – Part Two
Wilton, pp. 97 – 139, 158 – 165

Week Four – June 11 – June 17...”Form of Government” – Part One
Hooker, pp. 19 - 32
Gray and Tucker, pp. 11 – 46
B.O., G-1.01 – G-2.1103

Week Five – June 18 – June 24...”Form of Government” – Part Two
Hooker, pp. 33 – 39
Gray and Tucker, pp. 47 - 99
B.O., G-3.0101 – G-3.0503

Week Six – June 25 – July 1...”Form of Government” – Part Three
Hooker, pp. 40 - 46
Gray and Tucker, pp. 100 - 129
B.O., G-4.01 – G-6.06 and Appendices B and C

Week Seven – July 2 – July 8...”Directory for Worship”
Gray and Tucker, pp. 144 - 161
B.O., W-1.01 – W-5.0401

Week Eight – July 9 – July 12...”Discipline”
Goodwillier, Gregory, *A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*
Wilton, pp. 140 - 157
Gray and Tucker, pp. 130 - 143
B.O., D-1.0000 - D-14.0502 and the *Form for Judicial Process* (@www.pcusa.org/polity resources)

Written assignments:

These two written assignments are due no later than the last day of the course, **Friday, July 12, 2024, by 6 p.m. (Central Daylight Time)**.

1. You have attended a presbytery meeting and taken notes about what you have observed. Based on the materials that we have studied this semester, write out a two-page summary of the main actions you have witnessed and cite the appropriate section from the *Book of Order 2023 – 2025* that applies. State whether you believe that everything was done “decently and in order” or if there were errors made at the meeting.
2. An influential member of your church has come to you and shared that she is concerned for her spiritual well-being because of some unfortunate events in her life. She recalls being baptized as a child in a Baptist church but has no record. Now she wants you to baptize her on Pentecost, which is three weeks away. In two pages, how do you respond to her? Provide the specific portions of the *Book of Order 2023 – 2025* that apply.

Christian Educators should substitute the following question for #2 above.

3. The Christian Education Committee of your church has asked you to prepare a four-part series of Sunday late afternoon studies of the *Book of Order* for new Elders. Each Sunday study group is scheduled for up to two hours. There are six new Elders in your church. Write out an outline for the four classes. Include comments that provide your rationale for choosing the material that you select. Be sure to cite specific sections of the *Book of Order 2023 – 2025*.

Course design:

1. Each week’s assignments and information will be posted by Thursday evening, 6 p.m. (CDT), unless otherwise noted.
2. Lectures, verbal and/or written, will be provided to underscore key points in the weekly readings and to offer a broader context for the principles involved.
3. The lectures can be a study aid but cannot replace the readings. You will be assigned to a discussion group. The deadline for initial discussion group posts is Monday, 6 p.m. (CDT), with responses due by Thursday, 6 p.m. (CDT). I will usually offer comments by Saturday, 6 p.m. (CDT). The first week of class is an exception. By the second week, we will be in our normal rotation for posts and responses.

4. There are two required written assignments listed above. Note the **due date of July 12**. If you submit them sooner, then I will be glad to receive them and call you blessed.

Group discussion:

These are the minimum requirements:

1. Write a post in response to the assigned discussion question(s) for the week. Each post should be no less than two paragraphs long. Your posts should: answer the question asked, demonstrate what you have learned, and include your personal viewpoint on the topic. The deadline for initial posts is Monday, 6 p.m. (CDT) (see #3 above). This pattern begins the second week of class.
2. Write a response to ONE of the initial posts to a person in your discussion group. Your response should be at least one paragraph in length. The response should contribute to the discussion and not simply restate the initial post or say, "I agree" or "I disagree." You may question and disagree so long as your post is stated in an academically and socially appropriate manner. Deadline for responses is Thursday, 6 p.m. (CDT) (see #3 above).
3. **You may read posts and responses in the other discussion group. However, you may only post within your discussion group. Assigned groups are posted on the main page of our course.** You are encouraged to exchange ideas and comments with any other participants as well as your group.
4. Once you have made your required posts and read everything, including the lecture for the week, then you are finished with that material. All weeks of the course will remain open, if you choose to review, for the semester.

Additional administrative items:

1. Late Policy – this online course is designed for interaction, so deadlines are important. If you fall behind, then you cannot participate as fully in the course. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by the instructor before deadlines. There is grace for genuine emergencies.
2. Plagiarism – definitions and consequences are stated in the current Student Handbook. A good rule of thumb is "ask if you are in doubt."
3. Inclusive Language – it is a course expectation that you will use inclusive language in all posts, assignments, and communications.
4. Electronic Communications – you are expected to check the UDTs course site regularly for course updates. All official emails will come through the UD system.

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5. At the beginning, mid-point, and end of our course, I will offer group Zoom sessions.
6. Subject to Change Clause – this syllabus, course calendar, and other attending materials are subject to change during the semester by the instructor.