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## CL 553 United Methodist Polity and Discipline

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**SYLLABUS FOR CL553**  
**UNITED METHODIST POLITY AND DISCIPLINE**  
**JANUARY TERM 2005 (Two Hours Credit)**  
**Rev. Richard L. Dunagin, Ph. D.**

Class Dates: January 10 – 14, 2005  
Class Times: 1:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.  
Enrollment Limitation: 30 Students

**BEFORE CLASS STARTS**

Select the topic for your term paper (as described below under “Course Requirements”). Papers are DUE the second day of class, and oral presentations will be required on Day 2-5, so start now.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

From the Asbury catalogue: *A thorough study of the polity and discipline of The United Methodist Church. The student is equipped to meet the requirements of the Discipline for admission-on-trial into the various conferences. Required of all candidates for the United Methodist ministry. CL554 can be added for additional credit.*

What this means is that we will thoroughly study the polity (structure and governance) and discipline of The United Methodist Church. You will become acquainted with how our church orders and structures itself in its total life, doctrine, ministry and mission. The goal is to equip you to understand *The Discipline* and serve faithfully and fruitfully as a United Methodist minister.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Having completed this course, students should:

- a. Develop a working understanding of church order and practice in the United Methodist Church.
- b. Become ready to serve effectively as ordained ministers in local United Methodist congregations, properly administering the *Discipline*.

- c. Appreciate the biblical and theological assumptions and historical developments that have given rise to, and support our church's structure.
- d. Offer candid critique and visioning for the future of our United Methodist polity.
- e. Become more conversant with the live issues relating to United Methodist polity.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **1. Complete assigned readings and be prepared to answer questions presented by the professor during class. (Value of the final grade: 20%)**

#### **Required**

- a. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2004.
- b. Frank, Thomas Edward. *Polity, Practice and the Mission of The United Methodist Church*, Updated Edition. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.

#### **Recommended, not Required**

Tuell, Jack M. *The Organization of the United Methodist Church*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

### **2. Submit a Research Paper (8-10 double-spaced pages) on any of the following topic areas: (Value of the final grade: 30%)**

- a. Interview at least two ordained pastors who have moved in the last five years and at least one bishop or district superintendent from the same conference. In addition, interview at least one member of a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee in order to answer the following question: "What is the real basis for placing these pastors in their appointments?" Your paper should compare and contrast the ideal system as specified in the *Discipline* with the lived out system as it is actually experienced by the participants. Also note differences in perspective from the various parties.
- b. We are becoming more and more a global church. For example, at the General Conference of 2004, we received in excess of 1 million new members by incorporating an autonomous African church into our denomination. What are the implications of our growing globalization – theological, financial and social?
- c. Substantial changes were made at the General Conference of 2004 in the way we select members to general boards and agencies. Who initiated these changes and why? What strategy did they use to change the *Discipline*? What will be the likely theological, financial and social implications? Who opposed the changes?
- d. At General Conference 2004, Rev. Bill Henson spoke at a prayer breakfast where he suggested that it may be time for our denomination to enter discussions on an "amicable split." Why did he suggest this? Who opposed his suggestion and on what basis? What is your proposed solution for our church in dealing with "irreconcilable differences," and

why? If members of your congregation, after reading in the newspaper that the United Methodist Church is poised for a split, approached you for an explanation, what would you say?

e. The Danmann trial in the spring of 2004 revealed the deep division that exists within the United Methodist Church over the subject of homosexuality. It also revealed the regionalism of our polity and the difficulty of enforcing general church standards on areas of the church that do not wish to adhere to the majority will. What strategies might be proposed to enforce general church policies in the western jurisdiction and elsewhere? What legislation, if any, would you propose to the General Conference of 2008, and why? Beyond legislation, what else might you suggest the church doing?

**Your paper is due NO LATER THAN THE BEGINNING OF CLASS TIME ON DAY 2.** Please format your paper using Carole Slade's *Form and Style: Research Papers, Reports, Theses*, 10th edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

You will note that there is a mixture of skills employed for the different papers. You may enjoy doing "detective work" as called for in letters a. and c., and partially in d. Or you may find the more strictly academic style more suitable to your temperament. For your own personal growth, you might select topic that utilizes differing styles, but this is strictly up to you. Helpful hint: Start early, and especially so if you are to interview others for your paper.

**3. In conjunction with other students, make an oral classroom presentation of your research topic.** (Value of the final grade: 20%)

**4. Final Exam.** (Value of the final grade: 30%)

## **TOPIC LISTINGS AND SEQUENCE** (Subject to modification)

**Day 1**      **INTRODUCTIONS:** to the class and professor; to the course's contents, contexts, requirements and some definitions.

### **"Introduction, History & The Constitution"**

- a. *Discipline* - Historical Statement and The Constitution (Part I).
- b. Frank - Chapters 1 & 2.

### **"Doctrinal Standards, Theological Task, Social Principles"**

- a. *Discipline* - Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task (Part II), Social Principals (Part IV).
- b. Frank - Chapters 3 & 4.

**Day 2**

**“The Ministry of All Christians & the Local Church”**

- a. *Discipline* - The Ministry of All Christians (Part III), The Local Church (Part V, Chapter One).
- b. Frank - Chapters 5 & 6.

**Class Presentations**

**Day 3**

**“The Ministry of the Ordained”**

- a. *Discipline* - The Ministry of the Ordained (Part V, Chapter Two).
- b. Frank - Chapter 7.

**“The Superintendency”**

- a. *Discipline* - The Superintendency (Part V, Chapter Three).
- b. Frank - Chapter 8.

**Class Presentations**

**Day 4**

**“The Conferences & General Agencies”**

- a. *Discipline* - The Conferences (Part V, Chapter Four), Administrative Order (Part V, Chapter Five).
- b. Frank - Chapters 9 & 10.

**Class Presentations**

**Day 5**

**“The Church Property”**

- a. *Discipline* - Church Property (Part V, Chapter Six).
- b. Frank - Chapter 11.

**“Judicial Administration & Conclusion”**

- a. *Discipline* - Judicial Administration (Part V, Chapter Seven).
- b. Frank - Chapters 12 & Conclusion.

**Class Presentations**

**Final Exam**

**GRADING**

**Asbury Theological Seminary uses a 4.00-point grading system according to the following:**

**A = 4.00 Exceptional work: outstanding/surpassing achievement of course objectives**

**A- = 3.70**

**B+** = 3.30

**B** = 3.00 **Good work: substantial achievement of course objectives**

**B-** = 2.70

**C+** = 2.30

**C** = 2.00 **Acceptable work: essential achievement of course objectives**

**C-** = 1.70

**D+** = 1.30

**D** = 1.00 **Marginal Work: minimal/inadequate achievement of course objectives**

**D-** = 0.70

**F** = 0.00 **Unacceptable work: failure of course objectives**

**Papers will be graded using the following categories:**

1. Accurately covering all relevant material
2. Tight, well reasoned line of argument
3. Conclusion is clear and follows from the evidence presented
4. Objections are noted and dealt with
5. Clear structure and flow to paper
6. Well written sentences and good grammar throughout