CL 553 United Methodist Polity and Discipline

Tom Thomas Jr.
EXL CL553 SYLLABUS
UNITED METHODIST POLITY AND DISCIPLINE
SPRING TERM 2004 (Two Hours Credit)
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Note: This syllabus may be amended prior to the beginning of class. Asbury Theological Seminary does not permit the duplication of this syllabus. (last updated 10/30/03)

GETTING ACQUAINTED

1. Welcome from Tom Thomas

WELCOME to UNITED METHODIST POLITY and DISCIPLINE!* You will know you are in the right course if you at least realize The Book of Discipline is not a guide to getting your child to behave. Whether you have been a United Methodist for years or just a short time, do not feel bad if you are not familiar with the term "polity." Most of us are not.

Some years ago when my local church parishioners knew I was teaching polity (to find out more about me, click on ...), they asked, "What is polity? Is it church politics?" We will talk about what polity is and why every church has it.


Polity deals with some of the most foundational and paramount questions of our Church. Our concerns range over the same questions:

What is the unifying truth or ultimate purpose which determines how the people of God organize themselves? For what common purpose? How is the local church ordered to fulfill Jesus' mandate and mission? How will we recognize who is in Christ's fellowship and who is out? How is one admitted or rejected? Under what circumstances? Who is authorized to determine it? Who exercises oversight over the process? How are these leaders selected? What doctrine is constitutive of our church? How do we as the Body of Christ express ourselves and our convictions on the clamant moral, ethical, and social issues of the day?
I'm going to try to work hard at not letting you have the experience I overheard one student having. One time when polity was offered as an intensive week course, he was overheard saying, "The one redeeming feature of this course was that it only lasted one week." I want you to discover what we have been discovering in previous classes: polity is a living and engaging concern in our beloved United Methodist Church. Further, it is absolutely bristling with fascinating issues related to United Methodist polity! What a charge to keep we have!

*United Methodist Polity and Discipline (CL553) is a required course for all United Methodist students who are seeking ordination as a deacon or elder in the United Methodist Church.

2. Virtual Education
I'll be honest with you, teaching this course over the internet brings a new challenge to me. Some of you are pro's. Others, like me are more beginners. We'll need extra mercy, patience, and help as we circumnavigate cyberspace. Asbury's development of this new media for education is making easier your pursuit of your ministerial studies. Let us help each other keep the technical difficulties in perspective. They are minor compared to the offsetting great advantages. ExL is on the cutting edge of seminary education. We are already a part of the future. In fact, it is so advanced, I am not there yet!

Because of the internet, we can interact with one another asynchronously. (The word sounds like the title of a new Sting album.) We can share thoughts that are continuous even though we communicate at different times and from widely different geographic sites.

3. Communicating with Each Other
You can access the course by clicking on the CL553-TT folder on your First Class Client desktop. This folder will open a menu with the following options:

   COURSE CENTER: This contains the syllabus, course material, and general guidelines.

   DISCUSSION CENTER: In the Discussion Center, most of our class "conversation" will take place. This center is like a class mailbox in which all class members and the professor have access to everything
posted here. **Post no private correspondence here!** At the end of two weeks (which is at the end of a Module), our discussions will be saved in the Archive Center for storage. If you want to revisit at any time during the course a discussion we have had during the semester, visit the Archive Center.

**CL553 OFFICE:** The Office is the icon you may click for personal correspondence with the professor. Only I have access to messages sent here. Most homework assignments, any test, papers, and private correspondence should be sent here. No other class member is able to access anything sent to this office.

**CHAT CENTER:** This is the icon for out of "class" talk. It is the virtual hallway or campus quad where informal conversation may be held. The CHAT CENTER is not to be used for any course related material or assignment discussion. The Chat Center should be used only by three or less participants for **non-course related** discussion. When the Chat is over, conversations will be automatically deleted.

**RESOURCE CENTER:** The Resource Center holds specific links to a wealth of theological and other valuable resources and aids. By clicking this icon, you have full access to the B. L. Fisher Library and the religious and theological data bases of ATLA, EBSCO HOST, and many others. Be sure you use the link of the B. L. Fisher library and not the link from the web. Further, you have access here to your Student Information page, where you may register and get your grades.

**CLASS TEAMS:** Because some of our work throughout the semester will be done in teams, our class will be grouped into teams. A folder for each team will be placed in our classroom. You may belong to one of the following teams:

- Team Wesley
- Team Asbury
- Team Coke
- Team Cartwright
- Team Amanda Smith

4. **Our Agreement Together**

Let us each agree to pray for each one weekly. For the cause of our Lord Jesus, we want to succeed! If you have a prayer request to share, please post it in the Discussion Center.
I will plan to be in my "office" with computer on at the scheduled time to receive email. I will receive your email and respond to them in the order in which they were received.

I will have access to all Discussion Center and Team discussions. I will listen and observe discussions and will respond and interact from time to time.

I will notify you if for some reason I will not be able to keep my scheduled "office" hours. I will likely be in southern California for a period of time to attend Board of Ordained Ministry interviews of ordination candidates.

In our homework assignments, class discussions, and research paper, let us use correct spelling and proper grammatical and syntactical English.

5. OFFICE HOURS (Eastern time)
   Tuesday 8:00pm to 9:00pm
   Thursday 11:00am to 12:00noon

6. HELP!
The people who are able to help you with any of your questions regarding EXL are listed below. For technical and school administrative matters regarding this course, contact the following for your particular need:

   a. For **General Information** about ExL, contact:
      Kevin Osborn
      exl_director@asburyseminary.edu

   b. For **Technical Support** with ExL, contact:
      Jared Porter
      exl_support@asburyseminary.edu

   c. For **Library Assistance**

      1. Regarding Book and/or Article Requests, contact:
         Hannah Kirsch at hannah_kirsch@asburyseminary.edu
2. Interlibrary Loan Information, contact:
   Dot James at dorothy_james@asburyseminary.edu

3. Obtaining Library Materials and Reference Assistance
   Email: [mailto:Ats_Reference@asburyseminary.edu]
   Ats_Reference@asburyseminary.edu
   Toll-Free Reference Help Line: 1-866-454-2733

ExL students are encouraged to make use of local libraries whenever possible; however, library services are also available to students through Asbury’s B. L. Fisher Library. All requests for books and journal articles should be e-mailed to the Reference Desk. The Reference workers (Hannah, Robbie, and Joy) are also available to assist ExL students with reference requests, use of the online databases, or formation of research strategies.

To request material from the B.L. Fisher Library, begin by searching the library catalog or one of the restricted journal databases available on the library’s website (http://www.asburyseminary.edu/library - choose “library catalog” or “restricted databases”). Then, send an email to the reference desk citing the sources that you would like to request. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Wilmore campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

Requests normally take 1-2 business days to process. Books are mailed media rate and normally require 5 business days for shipping (longer for addresses in the West). This service is free. Students who need items delivered more quickly may pay for priority or express mail services. Articles and excerpts from reference materials may be scanned and delivered via email for 10 cents per page, or photocopied and mailed media rate for 5 cents per page. Plan ahead and allow enough time for processing and shipping of your requests! We look forward to helping you!

For questions regarding the syllabus or our course CL553, post them to me in the Discussion Center. If you have a particular question, it is likely others in the class will have a similar question and will benefit from our exchange. I want to “iron out any wrinkles” that may inhibit the learning process.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. Purpose of the Course
   This course seeks to acquaint you with how the United Methodist Church orders and structures itself in its total life, doctrine, ministry and mission. The course purposes to fulfill the denominational requirement for polity for you who are seeking ordination in the United Methodist Church.
2. Learning Objectives:
   **The course seeks to enable you to:**
   a. Have a working understanding of church order and practice and the practical discipline of the United Methodist Church and *The Book of Discipline*. This course seeks also to ready you who will pastor to administer the Discipline as an ordained minister in a local United Methodist church.
   b. Appreciate, where relevant, the biblical and theological assumptions and historical developments that have given rise to and support our church’s structure.
   c. Offer, in a spirit of affirmation, candid critique and visioning for the future of our United Methodist polity.
   d. Become more conversant through Course Center discussion with the live issues relating to United Methodist polity.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Class Participation:** Active class participation is absolutely vital to this on-line course. Posting your two Observation/Reflections (see below) weekly to your Team and/or to me and participating in Team discussions are integral to learning in this on-line format. Realizing if anything can go wrong it may, you are allowed one unexcused absence. The only excused absence and the only criteria for delinquencies on due assignments is bed-ridden illness, genuine emergencies such as hospitalization, or death! Make-up work not arranged with the professor will result in no credit for that assignment. *(Value of the final grade: 5%)*

2. **Read the entire Book of Discipline.** Indeed, you will read the first 400 pages more thoroughly than the material in the last 200 pages, which pertains to the structure of Boards and Agencies. Your Module assignments as stated below ask you to post by the stated due-date two Observation/Reflections each week or four every two weeks. *(Submitting two a week will help me turn-around your work).*

   An Observation/Reflection is a statement or avowal from your week's reading in the Discipline which lights up or strikes you provoking your reflective comment. You will note the statement and give the reference from the Discipline from where it is found. Developing from your Observation is your Reflection. The Reflection is your thought and
commentary which follows from that which you observed. Please keep each Observation/Reflection to 150 words or less. Please post them to my Office CL553x-tt and, if instructed to do so, also to your Team Folder. When asked to do so, please respond with a comment of no more than 75 words to at least one other Team member's Observation/Reflection. (Value of the final grade: 25%)

3. Read Polity, Practice and the Mission of The United Methodist Church by Thomas Frank. Please write a summary no more than 150 words of each chapter by the due date listed under each Module. Please post it to my Office CL553x-tt only. (Value of the final grade: 17%)

4. Attend one Church Council meeting of a local United Methodist church and observe what organizational structure is being used. Using The Book of Discipline Para. 242, 243.1, 243.2 and 246.2 to guide you, briefly describe in a paragraph the church’s organizational plan. (Value of final grade: 3% --3 points)

5. Submit a Ten to Twelve Page Research Paper in hard copy mailed to Dr. HO Tom Thomas, 3088 Busy Bee Road, South Hill, VA. 23970 on any subject or issue related to United Methodist polity DUE POSTMARKED MAY 3, 2004. Please submit to my Office CL553x-tt by Monday March 8, 2004 for approval a paragraph stating the proposed subject of your paper. The following format is the standard format to be used. The research paper seeks to encourage debate on the subject chosen. Point reductions will occur for omitting elements in the below format:**(Value of the final grade: 50%)

Format of the Research Paper
1. Typed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper, double spaced with one-inch margins.
2. Format:
   a. Title Page (Title, name, professor's name, course, and date)
   b. Introduction: Briefly give an introductory explanation of what you intend to do in the paper.
   c. Main Body. In writing your paper:
      • State the issue and the historical development which have precipitated the issue.
      • Analyze conflicting views or positions regarding the issue by stating each one's biblical, theological, philosophical,
and scientific premises. Note how terms are defined and used.

- Argue for a position or build a case of resolution. Persuade the reader, giving reasons why this is the reasonable argument. Demonstrate the strength of your case.

d. Conclusion  
e. Footnotes: Be careful to acknowledge sources either in footnotes (placed at the bottom of each page) or endnotes (placed at the back of the paper).

f. Bibliography: **Consult a minimum of five bibliographic sources {over and above the use of the Holy Scriptures, *The Discipline (if needed)*, Frank’s *Polity*, and the English dictionary}.** Please include in the bibliography only those sources which you have consulted in your research paper.

3. Additional Comments:

- Copy edit (correct and revise) the first draft. Spell-check and read over for correct grammar, syntax, proper expressions, and logical flow. Expect to write two drafts before finalizing the third. Proof-read the final draft.
- Failure to have the completed research paper postmarked by May 3rd results in a 5% point reduction for each week late.

** For additional information on form, please consult Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1973).

5. Required Texts*

These textbooks may be obtained from the Asbury Theological Seminary Bookstore. You may email the bookstore at exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu or call at 866-855-8252.

a) *The Book of Discipline* (2000 edition) (United Methodist Publishing House). Though this is the last year of this edition, the 2000 Edition of *The Book of Discipline* is the edition you must use for this course.

b) Thomas Edward Frank, *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, **2003 edition**). Please obtain the 2003 edition which should be stocked in the Asbury Bookstore. This is required reading. Please refer to the
Module Overview in the syllabus for due dates for the reading of each chapter.

c) Tuell, Jack M., The Organization of the United Methodist Church, Abingdon, 2003( the latest edition). You are not required to read this book for this course; however, you will want to have this book for reference and for a clearly organized presentation of our polity from an experienced bishop with a legal background.

*See the BIBLIOGRAPHY for RELATED TEXTS and OTHER RESOURCES which may help you, among other things, with your research paper.

**MODULE OVERVIEW** *(Subject to modification)*

**MODULE 1**
**Start Date: Feb. 10; Due Date: Feb. 21 Midnight**

Week #1 - Introduction: To One another and to Polity
1. WATCH INTRODUCTORY VIDEO
2. READINGS
   a. Lecture #1
   b. Thomas Frank, *Polity, Practice and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*, Chapter 1
3. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Introductory Greeting - Please share with your Team members something about yourself (under 75 words) that you enjoy telling which will help Team members become acquainted with you.
   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned Chapter 1 of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

Week #2 - Historical Considerations in the Formation of UM Polity
1. READINGS
   a. Lecture #2
   b. The Discipline: pp. v-20
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 2
2. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Post two Observations/Reflections each within 150 words per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

   c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team members in the Team Folder your response to the following question: If you from 'scratch' were organizing a small group of believers into a church (with no ties to any denomination), what most basic concerns and structural needs must you account for in ordering yourselves to be Christ's church? Please interact with one another.

MODULE 2
Start Date: Feb. 24; Due Date: March 6 midnight

Week #3 – U. M. Church's Constitution and Doctrinal Standards
   1. READINGS
      a. Lecture #3
      b. The Discipline: pp. 21-74
      c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 3
   2. ASSIGNMENTS
      a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post one Observation/Reflection per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) with your Team members in the Team Folder and respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection. Post both Observations/Reflections to me in my Office CL553x- tt.
b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

Week #4 - Our Theological Task and Social Principles
1. READINGS
   a. Lecture #4
   b. The Discipline: pp. 74-86, 95-122
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 4
2. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Post both Observations/Reflections (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

3. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team members in the Team Folder your response to the following question: what are the pro's and con's of Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, and Episcopacy? Please interact with one another.

MODULE 3
Start Date: March 09; Due Date: March 20 midnight
RESEARCH PAPER DUE POSTMARKED TUESDAY May 3, 2003

Week #5 - The Ministry of All Christians
1. READINGS
   a. Lecture #5
   b. The Discipline: pp. 87-94, 123-152
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 5
2. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members in the Team Folder your response to the following question: what makes your call to ordained ministry distinct from the call to general ministry?

Week #6 The Local Church

1. READINGS
   a. Lecture #6
   b. The Discipline: pp. 152-181
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 6

2. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
   c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members in the Team Folder specific ways you might use to ensure that persons on the Church Council will be persons of genuine Christian character who love the church and are morally disciplined.

MODULE 4
Start date: Mar. 23; Due date: March 27 midnight
(Please not this Module is ONE WEEK LONG)

Week #7 The Ministry of the Ordained

1. WATCH VIDEO: Dr. Al Gwinn, Chairperson of the KY Board of Ordained Ministry and Pastor of First UMC, Lexington
2. READINGS
   a. Lecture #7
   b. The Discipline: pp. 181-265
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 7
3. ASSIGNMENTS
a. Post *two* Observations/Reflections per instructions above (under **Course Requirements** 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

c. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

d. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members one thing in Dr. Gwinn's presentation that affirms you, and one thing that challenges you as potential ordained minister.

### READING WEEK March 29- April 2

**MODULE 5**

*Start date: Apr. 6; Due date: Apr. 17 midnight*

**RESEARCH PAPER DUE POSTMARKED TUESDAY May 3, 2003** (Less than 4 weeks away)

Week #8 The Superintendency

1. **READINGS**
   a. Lecture #9
   b. The Discipline: pp. 267-294
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 8

2. **ASSIGNMENTS**
   a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post *one* Observation/Reflection per instructions above (under **Course Requirements** 2.) with your Team members in the Team Folder and respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection. Post *both* Observations/Reflections to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my OfficeCL553x-tt.
a. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members in the Team Folder your response to the following questions: how can bishops be made more accountable to the will of the church and the Discipline?

MODULE 6
Start date: Apr. 20; Due date: May 1 midnight

RESEARCH PAPER DUE POSTMARKED TUESDAY May 3, 2003
EXTRA CREDIT DUE POSTMARKED FRIDAY MAY 15, 2003

Week #9 - The Conferences - General, Jurisdictional, and Central
1. WATCH VIDEO: Maxie Dunnam, President of Asbury Theological Seminary
2. READINGS
   a. Lecture #10
   b. The Discipline: pp. 295-349
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 9
3. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
   b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.
   c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members your response to the following question: in what ways are you encouraged by General Conference's actions of May 2000? What concern(s) do you have for General Conference 2004?

Week #10 - The Annual Conferences and General Agencies
1. WATCH VIDEO: Jim Heidinger, Good News Magazine
2. READINGS
   a. Lecture #11
   b. The Discipline: pp. 349-425
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 10
3. ASSIGNMENTS
a. Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members your response to the following question: when you hear the term "connectionalism", what do you conceive is meant by the term?

MODULE 7
Start date: May 4; Due date: May 15 midnight
EXTRA CREDIT DUE POSTMARKED FRIDAY MAY 15, 2003

Week #11 - Church Property
1. READINGS
   a. Lecture #12
   b. The Discipline: pp. 426-685
   c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 11

2. ASSIGNMENTS
   a. Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

b. Frank Assignment – Summarize the assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post among your Team your response to the following question: how important is the "trust clause" to United Methodism connection?

Week #12 - Judicial Administration
1. READINGS
   a. Lecture #13
   b. The Discipline: pp. 687-799
c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 12 and Conclusion

2. ASSIGNMENTS
a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post one Observation/Reflection per instructions above (under Course Requirements 2.) with your Team members in the Team Folder and respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection. Post both Observations/Reflections to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

b. Frank Assignment – Summarize each assigned chapter of Frank in 150 words or less and post to me in my Office CL553x-tt.

c. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post among your Team your response to the following questions: what are the three most crucial issues facing Methodism today?

PLEASE NOTE: The Readings listed for each date should be completed prior to posting your responses

Summary of Grading Procedure

A = 93-100  B = 80-92  C = 70-79  D = below 70

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-  .70
F  0.00  Unacceptable work: failure of course objectives
Extra Credit
For extra credit, using three of the publications listed below, identify five current issues relating to United Methodist polity. On paper, state the issue exemplified and submit it with a supporting copy of the article from which the issue is drawn to the professor by May 9th. (Value is 2% -- 2 points.)

UM Publications:
United Methodist Reporter
Circuit Rider
Interpreter
Quarterly Review
Newscope
Good News magazine
www.umc.org

BIBLIOGRAPHY

REQUIRED TEXTS

RELATED TEXTS

OTHER RESOURCES
Oden, Thomas C., The Rebirth of Orthodoxy, San Francisco: Harper
Oden, Thomas C., The Trust Clause Governing Use of Property in the United Methodist Church, Oklahoma City: The Scriptorium. This publication may be accessed at www.ChristianityToday.com/ctmag/special/oden-property.pdf
“John Wesley: Concept of “Connection” and Theological Pluralism,” Wesleyan Theological Journal, 36, no. 2 (Fall 2001), pp. 88-104.