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CL 553 United Methodist Polity and Discipline

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**EXL CL553 SYLLABUS
 UNITED METHODIST POLITY AND DISCIPLINE
 SPRING TERM 2003 (Two Hours Credit)
 H.O. Tom Thomas, Jr., Ph. D.**

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 11/5/02)

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.

Several years ago when my local church parishioners knew I was leaving to teach polity (to find our 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.

The very first questions of John Wesley's first Methodist conference in London in 1744 comprehended polity: 1. "What to teach? 2. How to teach? 3. What to do? i.e. How to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice."

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 is a brand, new experience for me. Some of you are pro's. Others, like me are 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 new 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. Tests, 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 of ten persons will be grouped into three teams. A folder for each team will be placed in our classroom. You will belong to one of the following teams:

Team Wesley

Team Asbury

Team Coke

4. Our Agreement Together

Let us each agree to pray for each one weekly. For the cause of our Lord Jesus, we want you 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)

Monday 2:30pm to 4:30pm

Friday 1:00pm to 2:00pm

6. HELP!

The people who are most able to help you with any of your questions regarding EXL are listed below. Their mission is to be helpful to you. For technical and school administrative matters regarding this course, contact the following for your particular need:

a. **ExL Director:** For questions about the EXL program itself contact **Kevin Osborn** at exl_director@asburyseminary.edu
For any other questions, feel free to contact **Amy Jo Adams**, the **ExL Coach**, at exl_coach@asburyseminary.edu

b. **Technical Support:** For technical difficulties and all manner of completing issues, **Andy Adams** has saved many persons 'bacon'. Contact him at exl_support@asburyseminary.edu

c. **General and Reference Library Assistance:** Contact **Hannah Kirsch** at hannah_kirsch@asburyseminary.edu

d. **Inter-Library Loan Assistance:** Contact **Dot James** at dot_james@asburyseminary.edu

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 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 and

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 four **Observation/Reflections every two weeks.** An **Observation/Reflection** is a statement from your week's reading in the **Discipline** which strikes you or lights up for you and deserves a reflective comment from you. 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 on that which you observed. Please keep each **Observation/Reflection** to 150 words or less. Please post them to your Team Folder **and** to my Office CL553x-tt. 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: 20%)**

4. Submit a Ten-Page Research Paper on an issue related to United Methodist polity **DUE POSTMARKED MAY 1, 2003.** Please check with the professor about your proposed topic before proceeding with the paper. The following format **must** be followed or a point reduction results.** **(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: Please include 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 turn in completed research paper on May 1st 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 Walt at exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu or call him at 859-858-4242.

- a) The Book of Discipline (2000 edition) (United Methodist Publishing House). The 2000 Edition of The Book of Discipline is now available. That is the version we will be using for the class. All page numbers for your Discipline assignments reflect the 2000 edition.
- b) Thomas Edward Frank, Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). 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, 1997. 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

MODULE OVERVIEW (*Subject to modification*)

MODULE 1

Start Date: Feb. 10; Due Date: Feb. 20 Midnight

Week #1 - Introduction: To One another and to Polity

1. WATCH INTRODUCTORY VIDEO
2. READINGS
 - a. Lecture #1
3. ASSIGNMENTS
 - a. Introductory Greeting - Please share with your Team members something about yourself (under 75 words) that you like to tell which will help Team member become acquainted with you.

Week #2 - Historical Considerations in the Formation of UM Polity

1. READINGS
 - a. Lecture #2
 - b. The Discipline: pp. v-20
 - c. Thomas Frank: Chapters 1 and 2
2. ASSIGNMENTS
 - a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above with your Team members in the Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - b. Frank Assignment – Summarize each 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: If you from 'scratch' were organizing a small

group of believers into a church (with no ties 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 two Observations/Reflections per instructions above with your Team member in the Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
- 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. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above with your Team member in the Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.

- 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 10; Due Date: March 20 midnight

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. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/ Reflections per instructions above with your Team Members in the Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - 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. Collaborative Discussion Assignments -Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above with

your Team Members in the Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.

- 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 will 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. 24, 2003; Due date: April 3, 2003 midnight

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. 181-228
 - c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 7
3. ASSIGNMENTS
 - a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions above with your Team members in the Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - 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 your Members one thing in Dr. Gwinn's presentation that affirms you and one thing that challenges you as potential ordained minister.

Week #8 The Ministry of the Ordained (continued)

1. READINGS
 - a. Lecture #8
 - b. The Discipline: pp. 228-265
2. ASSIGNMENTS
 - a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions with your Team members in the Team Folder and to me in my Office PM 604x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - b. TEAM DISCUSSION - In 75 words, post to your Team Members in the Team Folder your response to the following questions: how vital to a faithful and fruitful ministry is a seminary education - particularly one at ATS?

MODULE 5

Start date: Apr. 7, 2003; Due date: Apr. 17, 2003 midnight

Week#9 READING WEEK

Week #10 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 two Observations/Reflections per instructions with your Team Members in your Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - 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 to your Team 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. 21, 2003; Due date: May 1, 2003 midnight

Week #11 - 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. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions with your Team Members in your Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - 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 your response to the following question: in what ways are you encouraged by General Conference's actions of May 2000? What concern(s) did General Conference raise for you?

Week #12 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. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions with your Team members in your Team Folder and to me in my

Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.

- 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 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 5, 2003; Due date: May 15, 2003 midnight

RESEARCH PAPER DUE POSTMARKED TUESDAY May 5, 2003

EXTRA CREDIT DUE POSTMARKED FRIDAY MAY 15, 2003

Week #13 - Church Property

1. READINGS

- a. Lecture #12
- b. The Discipline: pp. 426-685
- c. Thomas Frank: Chapter 11

2. ASSIGNMENTS

- a. Collaborative Discussion Assignments - Post two Observations/Reflections per instructions with your Team members in your Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
- 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 questions: how important is the "trust clause" to United Methodism connection?

Week #14 - 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 two Observations/Reflections per instructions with your Team members in your Team Folder and to me in my Office CL553x-tt. Please respond with comment in under 75 words to at least one other Team Member's Observation/Reflection.
 - 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**

The Book of Discipline 2000. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2000.

Thomas Edward Frank, Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Tuell, Jack M., The Organization of the United Methodist Church. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.

RELATED TEXTS

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Harmon, Nolan B, The Organization of the Methodist Church. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Heitzenrater, Richard, Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

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OTHER RESOURCES

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