CL 553 United Methodist Polity and Discipline

Richard L. Dunagin

Follow this and additional works at: http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi

Recommended Citation
http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi/1301
Welcome from Richard Dunagin

I want to welcome you to one of the most practical courses you will ever take – if you plan to become a United Methodist minister.* This was probably not your first thought when you registered for CL 553. Indeed, when I took a similar version in the early 1970s I considered it a rather painful fulfillment of an obscure requirement. I've certainly changed my tune since then, and not just because I'm teaching the course now! Why is it so important? I can explain best by sharing some of my own story with you.

When I was converted, it was in a United Methodist congregation. It was in the United Methodist Church that I met my wife, received my call to ministry, have lived out my career, raised my children and found my deepest friends. Obviously, the Church is extremely important to me!

But how does the church function? And why?
❖ As a new believer, when the pastor I loved most moved to another church, I was hurt and puzzled. Why did he leave? How did that come about?
❖ I also wondered why we got the new pastor who was appointed next? And how could I have given my input in the whole process?
❖ On another front, when the news media report that United Methodists have now embraced a new and controversial position on some social issue, I wonder how did my church come up with that? And is the news report even accurate?
❖ My congregation wants to build a new sanctuary; what requirements must we fulfill, and what are the procedures we must follow? And why?

These and many other issues are readily answerable. We have a resource from...
which to draw -- *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.* It is this resource that we will study over the course of this semester. We will study both the formation and contents of the *Discipline* and learn how to maneuver in the complex world of the United Methodist Church. **If you are to serve at any level in the United Methodist Church, you will need this material throughout your ministry.** It will pay you great dividends to grasp it as thoroughly as possible.

*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. I will assume anyone taking this course is United Methodist.*

**Virtual Education**

I want to let you know that this is only the second time I have taught this course over the internet. You may be far more proficient than I in online education, or perhaps you too are a beginner. I am online virtually (no pun intended) every day, yet teaching in this manner presents a unique challenge, especially since I cannot receive all the non-verbal communication that face-to-face encounters provide. Likewise, many of us will never hear each other's voices, though it is certainly permissible to call me should the occasion arise. (See phone numbers below.)

I love a challenge; I hope you do too! But I also hope you will extend grace to me even as I pledge myself to do likewise for you on things technical. Together, we will learn how to communicate asynchronously, and hopefully we will become better ministers of the gospel for our common learning and sharing.

**Communicating with Each Other**

You can access the course by clicking on the CL 553 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. *Please note: Do not post any private correspondence here!* If you want to address me privately, send an email to me. At the end of each Module (usually two weeks), our discussions will be saved in the Archive Center for storage. If you want to revisit a discussion we have had during the semester, you can retrieve it in 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. This is the place to send your papers and private correspondence. 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. For additional information on resources, please see below in the “Help!” section.

**TELEPHONE CONTACT:** Should you ever need to speak directly with me, my daytime phone is 972.242.0602, and my home phone is 972.378.4122. If you do not reach me, please leave a message, and I will call you back.

**LEARNING COVENANT**

**WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT OF ME:**

L I will pray for you regularly and especially when you make specific requests.
L I will respond to emails you send to my Office in the order in which they were received.
L I will respond immediately to emails that have "URGENT" in the subject line. (Please don't cry 'Wolf!' when there is no true emergency.)
L I will monitor all discussions in the Discussion Center and interact with many, but not all of them.
L I will notify you if for some reason I will not be able to keep my scheduled "Office" hours.

**WHAT I EXPECT OF YOU:**

L Pray regularly for your fellow class members and your instructor.
OFFICE HOURS (Eastern time)

Monday 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Purpose of the Course

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.

2. Learning 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 an ordained minister in a local United Methodist congregation, 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. Class Participation

Active class participation is absolutely vital to on-line education. Posting your Observation/Reflections (see below) for each module and participating in class discussions are both integral elements of this on-line learning experience. You should actually learn as much from your peers as you do from the professor or the textbooks; therefore, your grade is heavily weighted to the quality and quantity of your on-line peer-to-peer interaction.

2. Assigned Texts

   **Required**

   **Recommended, not Required**

3. Reading and responding to the texts  (Value of the final grade: 50%)

You will be given a reading assignment for each Module (see schedule below). On the first day of the Module, you will be assigned questions that arise from your readings, and you are to post (to the class folder) your answers to those questions by the end of the first week. These are short answer questions. Short is defined here as 300 words or less for all questions in a module combined. (Use the Properties function on your word processor to gauge how many words you are using.) At the end of the first week, you will be asked to respond to at least two of your classmate's postings with a comment of no more than 100 words. Obviously, all readings for a module should be completed prior to posting your reflections and responses. Note: this is an exercise in critical thinking. Thus, regurgitating just what the book has stated is not adequately answering the questions. And simply praising a fellow student's answers is not sufficient as a response. What we are looking for is an extension of knowledge and insight into its application.

4. Submit Two (2) Research Papers (5-7 double-spaced pages)
on any of the following topic areas: (Value of the final grade: 25% each, or a total of 50%)

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 Hinson 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?

f. You may develop your own original topic for one of your two papers. Original topics must be approved by the professor.
Your first paper is due NO LATER THAN MIDNIGHT (ET) APRIL 10, 2005 and your second paper is due NO LATER THAN MIDNIGHT (ET) MAY 8, 2005. Please format your papers 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 topics that utilize differing styles, but this is strictly up to you. Helpful hint: Start early, and if you finish early, all the better. You can have the time back during the last critical days at the end of the semester to study for finals and write papers in other courses.

**MODULE OVERVIEW**

**MODULE 1: "Introduction, History & The Constitution"**

1. **Write** a one-page summary including the following and **Post** to the Class Folder:
   - Introduce yourself and your family, including where you live.
   - Describe your present occupation.
   - Describe your present ministry.
   - Share one interesting fact about you that is pretty unique.

2. **Read**
   - b. Frank - Chapters 1 & 2.

3. **Assignment**
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to at least one other class member in 100 words or less.

**Due February 12.**

**Respond to others by February 19.**

**MODULE 2: "Doctrinal Standards, Theological Task, Social Principles**

1. **Read**
   - b. Frank - Chapters 3 & 4.

2. **Assignments**
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to at least two other class members in 100 words or less.
each.

Post by February 26. Respond to others by March 5.

**MODULE 3: "The Ministry of All Christians & the Local Church"**

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

2. Assignment
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to at least two other class members in 100 words or less each.

Post by March 12. Respond to others by March 19.
(Spring Reading Week: March 21-25)

**MODULE 4: "The Ministry of the Ordained & Superintendency"**

1. Read
   a. *Discipline* - The Ministry of the Ordained (Part V, Chapter Two), The Superintendency (Part V, Chapter Three).
   b. Frank - Chapters 7 & 8.

2. Assignments
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to at least two other class members in 100 words or less each.

Post by April 2. Respond to others by April 9.
Term Paper One Due: April 10.

**MODULE 5: "The Conferences"**

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

2. Assignment
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to at least two other class members in 100 words or less each.

Post by April 16. Respond to others by April 23.

**MODULE 6: "Church Property"**
1. Read
   a. *Discipline* - Church Property (Part V, Chapter Six).
   b. Frank - Chapter 11.

2. Assignments
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to
   at least two other class members in 100 words or less each.

   Post by April 30  
   Respond to others by May 7.

   Term Paper Two Due: May 8.

MODULE 7: "Judicial Administration & Conclusion"

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

2. Assignments
   Answer questions posted by professor for this module. Respond to
   at least two other class members in 100 words or less each.

   Post by May 14  
   Respond to others by May 19.

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

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:

FOR QUESTIONS REGARDING THE COURSE SYLLABUS

Please Post such queries 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.

ExL CONTACT INFORMATION

For general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program, contact Dale Hale:

ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu
Phone: (859) 858-2393

For technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media contact Information Commons:

Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu
Phone: (859) 858-2233
Toll-free: (866) 454-2733

ACCESSING INFORMATION COMMONS MATERIALS

1. General Questions:
   - The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here: http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/hours.shtml.
2. **Materials Requests:**
   - To search the library catalog for available materials, click here: [http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml](http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml)
   - ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/reference books from Asbury Seminary’s Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.
   - ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

3. **Research Questions:**
   - ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help choosing a paper topic, determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

4. **Online Databases:**
   - To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to [http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml](http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml) and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0’s to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).