

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH POLITY COURSE SYLLABUS (FALL 2016)

Dates: September 14 - October 19 (6 classes, Wednesdays from 2:00-4:00 p.m.)

Instructor: Tim Purvis (e-mail: t.purvis@utoronto.ca)

Introduction

Okay, let's be honest here.

The phrase "Presbyterian church polity" doesn't typically generate the most enthusiastic of responses. In fact, it probably creates the same general reaction as the words "root canal." Students don't look at their course schedules and say, "Oh boy! I get to take *Presbyterian Church Polity* this term! I'd better go lie down before I'm overcome with joy!" Polity can be dry, dull, boring. Having to take a church polity course feels more like the Presbyterian equivalent of hazing or boot camp.

I get that.

So while I can't promise this will be the most scintillating course you've ever taken, or that there won't be some stretches where the going will be tough slogging because it means having to read through some material that will never be made into a major motion picture ("*The Book of Forms* – coming to a theatre near you!"), I can promise that what we'll learn will help you in both the theory and practice of how the Presbyterian system of church governance works. Emphasis on *practice* – through shared stories, anecdotes, and case studies we'll learn how our polity functions in actual, real life situations.

But first, by way of introduction, a bit more about me. My name is Tim Purvis, and I'm currently the minister at Westview and Faith Presbyterian Churches in the Presbytery of East Toronto. I was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PCC by the Presbytery of West Toronto in 1985 (you can do the math to figure out how long ago that was). I've never served as a Clerk of Presbytery or any of the higher courts of the church, but I have over the years been involved in numerous special committees and commissions dealing with a variety of difficult and challenging matters. In the process I've learned a few things about our polity and how it works.

Course Outline:

- Unit 1 (Sep. 14) - Origins of Church Law and Practice: Biblical and Theological Foundations
- Unit 2 (Sep. 21) - Basic Rules for Church Courts - **Assignment #1 (Due Sep. 28)**
- Unit 3 (Sep. 28) - System of Church Courts, Part 1: Session, Congregation, and Board of Managers - **Assignment #2 (Due Oct. 5)**
- Unit 4 (Oct. 5) - System of Church Courts, Part 2: Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly - **Assignment #3 (Due Oct. 12)**
- Unit 5 (Oct. 12) - Judicial Process and Church Discipline
- Unit 6 (Oct. 19) - Conflict of Interest and Ethical Issues; Church Policies (e.g., SASH, Leading With Care) - **Major Paper (Due Nov. 9)**

Course Requirements:

- Class attendance and participation in discussions
- Assignments (three quizzes on the *Book of Forms*, one major paper of 4-6 pages double-spaced)

Bibliography:

- *The Book of Forms* (available online at presbyterian.ca/general-assembly-resources/)
- *Acts & Proceedings of the 142nd (2016) General Assembly* (available online at <http://presbyterian.ca/acts-and-proceedings/>)
- *Calling a Minister: Guidelines for Presbyteries, Interim Moderators, and Search Committees* (available online at presbyterian.ca/resources-ministry/)
- Policy for the Dissolution of Pastoral Ties (available online at presbyterian.ca/policies/)
- Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy (available online at presbyterian.ca/policies/)
- *Growing In Christ: Seeing the Image of God in Our Neighbour* (PCC's Policy on Racial Harassment - available online at presbyterian.ca/policies/)
- *Leading With Care: A Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults* (available online at presbyterian.ca/policies/)
- *Being a Presbyterian in Canada Today* (Stephen Hayes)
- *Eldership in Today's Church* (Stephen Hayes)
- *This Presbyterian Church of Ours* (John Congram)