**Polity of The United Methodist Church**

**Online (CM-251-OL)****Two Credit Hours**

**May 23 – June 30, 2016**

**1. Instructor Information**

Name: Ken Loyer, Ph.D.

Phone or text: 717-817-1916

E-mail: [kloyer@wesleyseminary.edu](mailto:kloyer@wesleyseminary.edu). The instructor will respond to e-mail within 24 hours, except on Sundays.

**2. Course Description**

The constitution and structural relationships of The United Methodist Church are examined with a particular focus on the workings of the local church. This course fulfills the UM Polity requirement for provisional membership and recognition of orders.

**3. Course Objectives**

1. To help persons sort through the call from God to service in the church with particular attention to the call to order the life of the church
2. To provide persons on their way to becoming ordained deacons, ordained elders, or associate members with a sufficient working knowledge of *The Book of Discipline* and the United Methodist connection
3. To draw connections between the unfolding history of The United Methodist Church and its predecessors and the codification of that history into church law
4. For this version of the course: to reflect on General Conference 2016 and its implications for the ongoing life of the UMC
5. To develop a running comparison of basic church polities for growth in self-identity and “catholic spirit”
6. To participate in an online community of learning with particular attention to honing the skills of sustaining constructive online conversations

**4. Relation to Wesley’s Curricular Objectives**

1. Knowledge of the polity, structure, processes, and resources of the student’s denomination
2. Recognition of the claims of ecclesial authority in the responsibilities of ministry

**5. Text Books and Course Materials**

**Required Texts:**

1. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2013). Available on Kindle. ISBN: 978-1-426-71812-0.
2. Laceye C. Warner, *The Method of Our Mission: United Methodist Polity and Organization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014). ISBN: 978-1-426-76717-3.
3. Joseph T. Reiff, *Born of Conviction: White Methodists and Mississippi's Closed Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). ISBN: 978-0-190-24681-5.
4. Kenneth M. Loyer, *Holy Communion: Celebrating God With Us* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014). ISBN: 978-1-426-79633-3.

**Web sites to know about:**

[www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) The official web site of The United Methodist Church

[www.gbhem.org](http://www.gbhem.org) General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

[www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org) General Council on Finance and Administration

[www.archives.umc.org/interior\_judicial.asp?mid=263](http://www.archives.umc.org/interior_judicial.asp?mid=263) Archives of Judicial Council decisions

**6. How It Works**

1. We will meet live online Thursday mornings from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm on the following days: May 26, June 2, June 16, June 23, June 30. You must be present at the specified times wherever in the world you may be and you must have internet connection and web cam capacity for the entire two hours of each session. A headset and microphone are necessary to participate in the sessions. A smartphone can be used for these sessions. In extreme situations you may join by phone conferencing for a given session.In fairness to the other students you must be able to participate in the live class sessions by video. See “Technical Requirements” below.
2. We will meet 10:00 am to 10:50 am and 11:00 am to 11:50 am. A typical online session will consist of the following: (1) We will open with a discussion of readings and/or current events that amplify polity questions. (2) Next, I will make brief presentations that lay the foundations and set the themes for the group discussions to follow. We will “talk church.” We will rely on text messaging and various other available tools to maintain a high level of interaction. (3) We will close by identifying some best practices from the material covered and exploring implications of the material for ministry today.
3. If you miss a class, you can watch the recording of that session. If you wish to receive credit for participation for that particular session, you must write a reflection based on the recording and submit it by emailing it to the professor within one week of the class session. The reflection should be between 1 to 2 pages in length, double-spaced, and should provide evidence that you have viewed the recording and given thought to the significance of the material covered in class that day.
4. From time to time we will bring in experts by video: delegates, superintendents, or pastors to share polity issues or best practices in leading United Methodist congregations.
5. Each student will participate in Blackboard small groups, where students will have student-led discussions and share reflections on the course readings, sessions, and assignments. Groups may be divided by status (e.g., home conference) or randomly, as determined by the instructor. Each student should make at least one post per week dealing with some aspect of the material pertaining to the class, and students should read and respond to one another’s posts.

**7. Grade Determination**

1. Participation 10% (see no. 8 below, and 3.a and f above)
2. Commissioning or Ordination Questions 10% (see no. 9 below, and 3.a and b above)
3. Polity Paper 20% (see no. 10 below, and 3. a, b, and c above)
4. Polity Paper Presentation 10% (see no. 11 below, and 3. a, b, and c above)
5. Polity Interview 20% (see no. 12 below, and 3. e above)
6. General Conference Report 20% (see no. 13 below, and 3. d above)
7. Ten Important Insights 10% (see no. 14 below, and 3. a and b above)

**8. Participation (10%)**

1. Students are expected to log in and remain logged in for the duration of the class sessions. Attendance is kept electronically. Credit will not be given if student is absent more than 30% of the scheduled class time.
2. An extra point will be awarded for complete attendance of all 5 classes.
3. The expectation is not merely attendance but active participation in class discussions and activities.
4. Synchronous online attendance falls under the same criteria as classroom attendance.

**9. Commissioning or Ordination Questions (10% – due June 9)**

For this assignment, students should answer the following questions for commissioning or ordination, whichever is their next step in the ordination process: for commissioning, questions in *The Book of Discipline 2012* paragraph 324.9.i, j, l, m, p; for ordination, questions in *The Book of Discipline* paragraph 335.a.3, a.5, b.1, c.1-2. Papers with answers to the commissioning or ordination questions listed above should be double-spaced in 12-point font, with 1” margins, and 5 to 8 pages in length.

Students who are not pursuing ordination should review both sets of questions listed above and then submit a paper of 5 to 8 pages, double-spaced in 12-point font, with 1” margins, in response to the following questions: “(1) Given the emphasis on this class in helping persons sort through the call from God to service in the church, why do you think these questions are important for candidates for ministry to answer as they pursue ordination? (2) What is the relationship between the ministry of all Christians and the ministry of the ordained? How are they alike? How are they different? In what ways are both vital to the mission of the church?”

This assignment will likely not give students enough time or space to answer these questions with all the thoroughness and depth expected by their Board of Ordained Ministry, but it should help you make progress toward that goal. By June 9, attach your responses (compiled in a single document) in the section of Blackboard designated by the instructor.

**10. Polity Paper (20% – due June 16)**

In writing the polity paper, each student should choose a polity issue that relates to the student’s own annual conference. For example, a student from the Susquehanna Conference could write about the Growing Effective Churches initiative and how that initiative advances the ministry of the Church in this Conference. Or a student from the New York Conference could choose as a topic the decision of the Board of Ordained Ministry stating that it would not consider sexual orientation in evaluating a clergy candidate, even if that individual has a spouse of the same gender. The paper should identify and describe the facets of UM polity that are implicated in the given situation, and should discuss the instruments of UM polity that have been, or might be, used to settle the issue. Polity papers should be double-spaced in 12-point font, with 1” margins, and 4 to 5 pages in length, and by June 16 should be attached in the appropriate section of Blackboard.

**11. Polity Paper Presentation (10 % – due June 16)**

On June 16, each student will make a presentation, lasting 4 to 5 minutes, on the polity paper topic that she or he explored and the conclusions reached in the study. In your presentation, you should answer such questions as the following: Why did you choose this topic, and what did you learn? What are the implications of the issue for the work of ministry in the UMC? What if any relevance does this issue have for you personally or for the other students in the class?

**12. Polity Interview (20% – due June 23)**

Interview a pastor from another polity in person, by phone, by Skype, or interactive email exchange. The following questions are suggestions for the minimum ground you will want to cover in the interview. Where are the rules kept? How are the rules and procedures developed? What does a person have to do to become a member? Where is the final authority located? How are lay leaders selected and developed? How are pastoral leaders selected, trained, and sent to or called by a congregation? How are transitions in pastoral leadership conducted? What are the special advantages of this polity? If you could change one thing about this polity, what would it be?

Write an account of your polity interview, totaling 2 to 4 pages, double-spaced in 12-point font, with 1” margins. At the top, left-hand margin type: (1) your name, (2) the pastor’s name and church, (3) the address of the church, (4) the polity category of this church: episcopal (i.e., governance by bishops) or congregational (i.e., governance by congregations). Show knowledge of points of comparison and contrast with *The* *Book of Discipline of The UMC*, and attentiveness to your interviewee. By June 23, attach your essay in the appropriate section of Blackboard.

**13. General Conference Report (20% – due June 30)**

Each student will choose a topic covered at General Conference 2016 and give a presentation, lasting 4 to 5 minutes, on that topic. To prepare for the presentation, students are encouraged to utilize pertinent readings from this class along with web sites such as those listed above (see “Web sites to know about”). In your presentation, identify the topic that you have chosen and briefly state why you chose it, describe how General Conference 2016 has responded to this topic, and offer your personal reflections on the significance of the subject at hand and of General Conference’s response. Presentations will be given during class on June 30.

**14. Ten Important Insights (10% – due June 30)**

All students will prepare a list of ten short statements, one sentence each, indicating the most important points they will take away from the class as a whole. (For example: “Polity and mission are mutually informative.” Or—if the instructor’s job is done well—“Polity is not the dull, dry subject that I first imagined it to be.”) This list should be typed and submitted via Blackboard by June 30.

**15. Course Calendar**

May 26 Weekly Module 1 Syllabus and Introduction to Polity

Read: Reiff, *Born of Conviction*

Lecture: Connectionalism, Sanctification, and United

Methodist Polity

Class discussion

Question to be prepared to discuss: What relevance does the

study by Reiff have for United Methodist polity today and why?

June 2 Weekly Module 2 United Methodist Beliefs and Polity

Read: Warner, *Method of Our Mission*, part I

Guest speaker: Rev. Matt Lake ([1] Theology in Relation to

Polity and [2] General Conference 2016)

June 9 Weekly Module 3 Holy Communion and Polity

Read: Loyer, *Holy Communion*

**No online class session**

Due: Commissioning or Ordination Questions

June 16 Weekly Module 4 United Methodist Mission and Polity

Read: Warner, *Method of Our Mission*, part II

Class session: Polity Paper Presentations

Due: Polity Paper

Due: Polity Paper Presentation

June 23 Weekly Module 5 Conferencing and Governance

Read: Warner, *Method of Our Mission*, part III

Guest speaker: Rev. Dr. Lew Parks ([1] Conference and [2] Role

of a DS)

Due: Polity Interview

June 30 Weekly Module 6 General Conference

Read: Warner, *Method of Our Mission*, part IV

Class session: General Conference Reports

Due: General Conference Report

Due: Ten Important Insights

**16. Late Work Policy**

For a late submission of any work due in this course, three points will be deducted for each day late.

**17. Viewing Grades**

Grades will be on Blackboard and can be accessed by clicking “My Grades” in the course menu.

**18. Grade Schema**

94 – 100 = A (Excellent/Outstanding)

90 – 93 = A- (Excellent/Outstanding)

87 – 89 = B+ (Very Good)

84 – 86 = B (Good)

80 – 83 = B- (Adequate)

77 – 79 = C+ (Adequate)

74 – 76 = C (Adequate)

70 – 73 = C- (Substandard)

67 – 60 = D (Inadequate/Poor)

59 – 0 = F (Unacceptable)

**19. Course Policies**

Students are expected to address technical problems immediately (see “Technical Support” below), to observe course etiquette at all times by showing respect to others in class discussions and other forms of communication, and to keep the instructor informed of class-related problems or other problems that may prevent the student from full participation.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and will result in substantial penalties, including the possibility of academic dismissal. Wesley Theological Seminary regards the following as forms of plagiarism or dishonesty:

* + Copying from another student’s paper
  + Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance to or from another student during an examination
  + Using unauthorized material during an examination
  + Borrowing and presenting as one’s own (i.e., without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another, whether from books, a friend, or the Internet.
  + Submitting as one’s own work a paper written (or partially written) by another.

In questions of academic dishonesty (including cheating on exams or papers and plagiarism), the professor will report the circumstances of the case to the Dean. In first instances of proven plagiarism or dishonesty, the student will receive a “Fail” grade for the course. Second instances will result in automatic separation from the Seminary. Please see the Wesley Theological Seminary Catalog for further details.

**Accommodations/Special-Needs Support**

Once admitted to Wesley, students needing accommodations are encouraged to communicate with the Associate Dean for Community Life. Students should submit to the Office of Community Life relevant, current documentation from a qualified professional, which will be evaluated by a consultant with a degree in special education. All accommodations for classes are made by the Office of Community life on behalf of the student.

**Blackboard Tracking**

Blackboard Learn automatically records all student and faculty activities including: the first and last access to the course, the pages accessed, the number of discussion messages read and sent, chat room discussion text, and posted discussion topics. This data can be accessed by the instructor to evaluate class participation and to identify participants having difficulty, or to verify academic honesty.

**Inclusive Language Policy**

Bearing in mind that language reflects, reinforces, and creates social reality, Wesley Theological Seminary expects class conversation and written work to employ language that respects the equal dignity and worth of all human beings. In particular, linguistic sexism and racism are to be avoided.

**SafeAssign**

You may be asked to submit one or more of your writing assignments to Blackboard’s SafeAssign plagiarism prevention service. Assignment content will be checked against Internet sources, academic journal articles, and the papers of other Wesley Theological Seminary students for common or borrowed content. SafeAssign generates a report that highlights any potentially unoriginal text in the submitted paper. The report may be submitted directly to the instructor or the instructor may elect to have students submit initial drafts through SafeAssign so that you will receive the report allowing the opportunity to make adjustments and ensure that all source material has been properly cited.

**Technical Requirements**

**Microsoft Windows 7 or Higher**

* Windows 7, Windows 8, 8.1, or 10
* Intel Pentium 4 2.33 GHz or faster CPU and at least 4 GB memory is recommended
* Up-to-date version of Adobe Flash Player
* Up-to-date version of Microsoft Windows Media Player (or other software that can play videos)
* Up-to-date Word processor and presentation package (Word and PowerPoint 2010 or newer)

**Mac OS/X**

* Mac OS X 10.8x or newer
* Intel processor  and at least 4 GB of RAM
* Up-to-date version of Adobe Flash Player (or see VLC below to play Adobe Flash FLV/F4V files)
* Up-to-date word processor and presentation package (Mac Office 2011 or new or iWorks 09 or newer – must be able to save documents as .doc file)
* One of the following media players:
  + [VideoLAN VLC media player](http://www.videolan.org/vlc/download-macosx.html)
  + [Up To Date Quick Time](https://www.apple.com/quicktime/)

**Technical Support**

Students must attempt to solve technical problems, and contact their instructor when technical problems do arise. If you experience technical problems, please exercise one or all of the following options:

• Blackboard Training Materials

• Call Blackboard Support at 202-885-6091

• Email Blackboard Support at [edtech@wesleyseminary.edu](mailto:edtech@wesleyseminary.edu)

If you have lost your password, or have a problem that is not specifically Blackboard-related, please contact Solutionworx at [support@solutionworx.com](mailto:support@solutionworx.com) or by phone at 703-961-1840.

**Weather Policy**

If the Seminary is open, we will have class. If the Seminary is closed, class is cancelled. If the Seminary is closed, there will be an announcement on the Wesley web site as well as a recorded message at the main switchboard number: 202-885-8600. The instructor will also send the class an email via Blackboard, which uses your Wesley email address.

**20. Other Resources**

* Library hours can be found here:

<https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/en-us/library/generalinformation.aspx>

* Information on access to the library databases from off campus can be found here: <http://wesleyseminary.libguides.com/content.php?pid=137050&sid=2514395>
* Information on the Writing Center can be found here: <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/community-life/academic-and-access-support/writing-center/>