



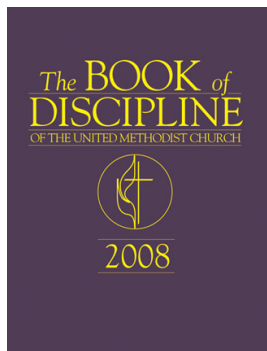
# Course of Study

Experiential and Collaborative Learning

## United Methodist Polity 2008–12 COURSE SYLLABUS

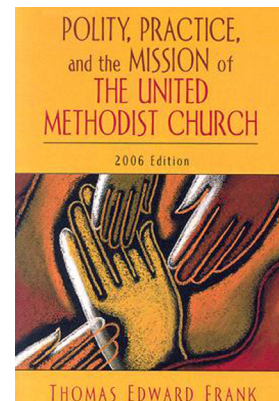
### **Required Texts**

Books can be ordered through Cokesbury online at [cokesbury.com](http://cokesbury.com), by telephone at 800-672-1789 or through Amazon online at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Other major booksellers, like Barnes and Noble ([bn.com](http://bn.com)) and Borders ([bordersstores.com](http://bordersstores.com)), may also carry these books in stores and online.



***The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2008.*** Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-68764-785-9.

***Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church.*** 2006 Edition. Thomas Edward Frank. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-68733-531-2.





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## **United Methodist Polity 2008–12**

### **COURSE SYLLABUS**

#### ***Introduction***

This course in United Methodist Polity is designed to engage students in a dialogue on the nature of the church and its ministry, the organization of the church and its theology, and the history of the church that has formed us as the community of faith we are today. Through this study students will examine the Constitution of The United Methodist Church, its Doctrinal Standards and Theological Task, the Ministry of All Christians, the Social Principles, and its Organization and Administration. Students will be introduced to Ordained and Licensed Ministry, Superintendency and Episcopacy, the mission and organization of the Local Church, District and Annual Conferences, Jurisdictional, Regional and General Conferences. They will review the work of the General Boards and Agencies and come to understand the church's Judicial Process.

Through this course in United Methodist Polity students will gain insight into the tradition and practice of The United Methodist Church and be prepared to participate in the decision-making process the church prescribes for ordering the life of the community. It also will prepare students for a variety of leadership roles they may assume as lay or clergy leaders of the church. This course is approved by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and may be applied to the requirements for full conference membership and ordination as a Deacon or an Elder. It is equivalent to a course taken at an approved school of theology for 2 semester hours of credit.

As you work through this course on United Methodist Polity, you will be asked to complete a series of assignments that will introduce you to a variety of topics related to the organization, mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church. Topics are to be reviewed in the order in which they are presented in the course with written assignments submitted for review by the instructor and at times other members of the class. Students may complete these assignments at their own pace, assuming that all work will be done within a year of registration for the course.

In addition to the reading and writing assignments, each section has a discussion topic where students are asked to post their responses to a question in an online forum for dialogue with the instructor and any other students enrolled in the class. Forum responses will be evaluated on the basis of the quality and frequency of responses.

#### ***Objectives:***

By the end of this course, you will have increased your knowledge concerning:

- The Nature of Polity
- Fundamental Documents
- Authority
- The Annual Conference



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- Supervision and Accountability
- The Ministry
- Church Membership
- Governing the Local Church
- Church Property
- The Judicial System
- The General Boards and Agencies

### **Module 1: The Nature of Polity**

Purpose: To understand the nature of church polity and the factors which determine polity, to gain an overview of the Discipline, and to relate theology to polity.

#### **Readings for Section 1:**

- Factors Determining Polity (PDF).
- Study the organization of the contents of the *Book of Discipline* and note the range of topics covered
- The "Historical Statement," *Book of Discipline* (pp 9-20)
- Part II "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task," *Book of Discipline* ¶¶101-104 (pp 41-86)
- Thomas Frank's textbook: Forward, Introduction, Chapters 1-4 (pp 15-158)

Assignment 1.1: The Primary Characteristics of United Methodist Polity. Polity is defined as the way the church orders itself to carry out its mission in the world. Write a paper (5-8 pages) focusing on the distinctive primary characteristics of our United Methodist Polity such as itinerancy, episcopacy, conferencing, the ministry of all Christians, etc. As a part of your research identify the theological understandings and critical decisions that led to the development of these characteristics of United Methodist polity. Also, show how both historical events and doctrine have influenced the present day polity (organization and structure) of The United Methodist Church.

#### **Total Value: 7 Points**

Assignment 1.2: Primary Characteristics of United Methodist Polity. In your writing assignment, you listed a number of characteristics of United Methodist polity that you identified through your readings and your experience within the church. Of all the characteristics you identified, which one would you choose as the most significant characteristic for the 21st Century? Post that characteristic to the forum along with a statement on why you believe it to be most significant.

#### **Total Value: 3 Points**



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#### **Module 2: Fundamental Documents**

Purpose: To gain an understanding of the basic law of The United Methodist Church as set forth in the constitution and of the societal goals toward which the church is to be striving as contained in the Social Principles.

##### **Readings for Section 2:**

- The Constitution and Social Principles Resource (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶ 1-61
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶ 160-166
- *Thomas Frank's textbook*, pp 115-158
- 2008 Constitutional Amendments (PDF)
- "Worldwide decision: United Methodists to vote on amending constitution" (UM Reporter website)
- "Constitutional Amendments on Ministry: An Open Letter" (Word document)

Assignment 2.1: Proposed Constitutional Amendments. Based on your reading in the Discipline, Frank, and online, write a 2-page paper discussing the proposed constitutional amendments. What is the process for amending the Constitution? How will the amendments affect the church's structure, polity, and ministry if passed?

##### **Total Value: 2 Points**

Assignment 2.2: The Social Principles. As you read through the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church found in the Book of Discipline, you will find some principles with which you agree and some with which you disagree. Indeed, there may be some you even find offensive. With which of these principles do you find the greatest agreement, and which do you find most problematic? Why?

##### **Total Value: 3 Points**

#### **Module 3: Authority**

Purpose: To gain an understanding of the basis and nature of authority in The United Methodist Church, the manner in which authority is dispersed among a variety of church bodies and officials and the authority of the General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

##### **Readings for Section 3:**

- Authority and Conferences (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline* ¶¶13-16 and ¶¶501-510 on General Conference
- *Book of Discipline* ¶¶23-27 and ¶¶511-535 on Jurisdictional Conference



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- Chapter 9 of Thomas Frank's Textbook (pp 255-284)
- *Book of Discipline* ¶¶28-31 and ¶¶540-565 on Central (Regional) conference

Assignment 3.1: Where is the center of authority in The United Methodist Church?

Assignment 3.2: General and Jurisdictional Conferences. Write a paper (five pages) on the role and function of the General and Jurisdictional Conferences. Describe in some detail how leadership is selected at the General and Jurisdictional Conference level of the church.

#### **Total Value: 5 Points**

Assignment 3.3: The Role of the Central Conferences. Write a paper (two pages) on the role and function of the Central Conferences. Be sure to clarify how they are similar to and different from Jurisdictional and Annual Conferences.

#### **Total Value: 2 Points**

Assignment 3.4: Center of Authority for a Global Church. In your opinion, should the center of authority continue to be General Conference as we develop as a global United Methodist Church? Should General Conference function as a Constitutional Convention for the entire church while each Regional or Central Conference determines its own standards for ministry and church membership? Is there some other place to center authority for the sake of a global church in which no region of the world church dominates the other regions or Central Conferences?

#### **Total Value: 3 Points**

### **Module 4: The Annual Conference**

Purpose: To gain an understanding of the role of the annual conference in The United Methodist Church, including organization, method of operation and place in the connectional system.

#### **Readings for Section 4:**

- The Role of the Annual Conference (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶601-656
- Frank's textbook, Chapter 10 (pp 285-298)

Assignment 4.1: The Role of the Annual Conference. Prepare a paper (four pages) on the role of the annual conference in The United Methodist connectional system. Show the relationship of the annual conference



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to the ordained and licensed clergy members, the local churches and the entire denomination. Describe the process by which leadership is selected in the annual conference.

**Total Value: 4 Points**

Assignment 4.2: Describe the Organization of Your Annual Conference. Prepare a diagram, a chart, or a description of the organization of your annual conference. Include the administrative, programmatic, and judicial components of your annual conference structure.

**Total Value: 1 Point**

Assignment 4.3: Annual Conference as the Basic Body of The United Methodist Church. ¶33. Article II of the Constitution states that "The annual conference is the basic body in the Church." In a day and age when the local church is seen to be the basic body of the Church, do you believe the annual conference continues to function in this way? Why or why not?

**Total Value: 3 Points**

### ***Module 5: Supervision and Accountability***

Purpose: To present the United Methodist system of supervision as it is exercised by the bishop and the district superintendent, to examine the nature and function of the office of the bishop and district superintendent and to consider the system of mutual accountability which exists in the church.

**Readings for Section 5:**

- The Role of the Bishop and District Superintendent (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶401-435
- Frank's textbook, Chapter 8 (pp 229-253)

Assignment 5.1: The Role of the Bishop and District Superintendent. Write a paper (five pages) on the role of the bishop and the district superintendent in the functioning of The United Methodist Church. Show how these officials relate to ordained and licensed ministers, to local churches, and function to make the connectional system work.

**Total Value: 5 Points**

Assignment 5.2: The Bishop's Authority to Appoint All Clergy. It is the responsibility of the bishop to appoint all clergy members of the annual conference and the responsibility of the clergy to accept the appointment of the bishop. Those who do not may forfeit their membership in the annual conference. Is the authority



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of the bishop to make all clergy appointments an asset or a liability for the ministry of the UMC? Is there a better way to deploy clergy for ministry in the church and the world?

**Total Value: 3 Points**

### **Module 6: The Ministry**

Purpose: To present the United Methodist understanding of ministry, including the ministry of all Christians, ordained ministry as a deacon and elder, licensed ministry, and the process by which one is admitted into conference membership.

#### **Readings for Section 6:**

- The United Methodist Understanding of Ministry (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶120-142 and ¶¶301-352 (pp 203-269)
- Frank's polity text, Chapter 5 (pp 159-171) and Chapter 7 (pp 195-227)
- The conclusion to Thomas Frank's polity text (pp 321-328)

Assignment 6.1: Ordination and Licensing. Write a paper (five pages) on the United Methodist understanding of ordination as deacon and elder, license as a local pastor, and the processes by which ordination and license are attained.

**Total Value: 5 Points**

Assignment 6.2: Reflection on Itinerancy. Do you agree or disagree with Thomas Frank's reflections on itinerancy outlined on pages 322 and 323? When you are ready to state your opinion, click on "Add a New Discussion Topic" and add your responses to the forum on Itinerancy.

**Total Value: 3 Points**

### **Module 7: Church Membership**

Purpose: To provide an understanding of the United Methodist meaning of church membership including the requirements for membership, the ways in which persons are admitted into the church and the methods by which membership is terminated.

#### **Readings for Section 7:**

- Understanding Church Membership (PDF)



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- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶214-242 (pp 140-157)
- Thomas Frank's polity text, Chapter 6 (pp 173-194)

Assignment 7.1: United Methodist Understanding of Church Membership. Write a paper (four pages) on The United Methodist understanding of church membership. Illustrate this understanding by the requirements for membership, the decision as to whom shall be admitted into church membership, the different ways membership is attained and terminated.

**Total Value: 4 Points**

Assignment 7.2: Changing Understanding of the Local Church. What issues does Frank see in the changing understanding of the local church? And what effect do they have on The United Methodist Church? How do you respond to his observations?

**Total Value: 3 Points**

### **Module 8: Governing the Local Church**

Purpose: To present the way the local United Methodist Church is governed, including the role of the Charge Conference, the Church Council and the three required administrative committees.

#### **Readings for Section 8:**

- Charge Conference, Church Council and Administrative Committees (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶243-252 (pp 158-170)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶258 (pp 179-188)

Assignment 8.1: Governing a Local Church. Write a paper (four pages) on the role of the charge conference and the church council in the governing of a local United Methodist Church. Describe how leadership is selected in the local church.

**Total Value: 4 Points**

Assignment 8.2: Role of the Pastor in Governance of Local Church. Most pastors are not members of the local church where they serve but clergy members of the annual conference. Discuss the role of the pastor in charge in the governance of the local church. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this role?

**Total Value: 3 Points**



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### **Module 9: The Program of the Local Church**

Purpose: To present the manner in which the programs of the local church are determined and administered, including the program work of the Church Council, the work areas and the age level, family and specialized ministry coordinators.

#### **Readings for Section 9:**

- Church Council, Coordinators, and Program Agencies (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶252-257 (pp 168-179)

Assignment 9.1: The Program of the Local Church. Write a paper (three pages) on the functions of the local Church Council and the program of the local church.

#### **Total Value: 3 Points**

Assignment 9.2: Prepare a Description of the Structure of Your Local Church. Prepare a diagram, chart, or other description of the structure of your local church.

#### **Total Value: 1 Point**

Assignment 9.3: Program Changes Needed for Effective Ministry. As you look at the program organization of your local church, what program changes would you propose to make the ministry of the church more effective? Why would you propose such changes?

#### **Total Value: 3 Points**

### **Module 10: Church Property**

Purpose: To present the United Methodist understanding of the ownership of church property, including the trust clause in deeds.

#### **Readings for Section 10:**

- Trust Clause, Board of Trustees (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶2501-2505 (pp 703-706)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶2524-2551 (pp 717-741)
- Frank's polity text, Chapter 11 (pp 299-309)



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Assignment 10.1: The United Methodist Understanding of Church Property. Write a paper (four pages) on the United Methodist understanding of church property, including the trust clause and the role of the Board of Trustees.

**Total Value: 4 Point**

Assignment 10.2: Trust Clause for Church Property. The Discipline requires that all church property be deeded in the name of The United Methodist Church rather than a local congregation. This has often led to conflicts between congregations that want to leave the UMC and take the property with them. What are your thoughts on this issue? Should local church property be deeded to the congregation or to The United Methodist Church?

**Total Value: 3 Points**

### **Module 11: The Judicial System**

Purpose: To enable the student to gain an understanding of the United Methodist judicial system, including the method of bringing charges against clergy and laypersons, the process of investigation, trial and appeals, and the role of the Judicial Council.

#### **Readings for Section 11:**

- Judicial Process, Judicial Council (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶55-58 (p 38)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶361-363 (pp 283-291)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶2701-2719 (pp 750-781)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶362.2 (p 287) and ¶2701 (pp 750-754)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶2601-2612 (pp 743-750)
- Judicial Council Rules of Practice and Procedure (UMC.org website)

Assignment 11.1: The Trial of an Ordained Minister. Write a paper (three pages) on the process by which an ordained minister may be brought to trial. Include the role of the bishop, the Board of Ordained Ministry, Council for the Church, the Committee on Investigation, the Trial Court and the Committee on Appeals.

**Total Value: 3 Points**

Assignment 11.2: Fair Process. Compare and contrast the Fair Process provisions for Administrative and Judicial Hearings (two pages).

**Total Value: 2 Points**



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Assignment 11.3: The Role of the Judicial Council. Write a paper on the Role of the Judicial Council including duties and responsibilities, membership, jurisdiction and powers, and decisions.

**Total Value: 3 Points**

Assignment 11.4: Trial of Lay Members. ¶¶2703.4, 2704.4, 2706.5b(4), and 2714 all apply to the judicial process for trial of lay members of a local church. This raises some very interesting questions: 1. Is such a trial process necessary? 2. What benefit is there for having this in the Discipline? When would such a process be useful?

**Total Value: 3 Points**

### ***Module 12: The General Boards and Agencies***

Purpose: To acquaint the student with the general boards and agencies, including the types of agencies, the nature of the service and functions they perform and their relationship to the annual conferences and the local churches.

#### **Readings for Section 12:**

- Role of General Boards and Agencies (PDF)
- *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶701-2406 (pp 473-702)

Assignment 12.1: The General Boards and Agencies. This section entitled "Administrative Order" is the longest chapter in the Discipline. Look over this section and in one short paragraph (50 to 100 per agency), state the major task of each of the following:

- General Council on Finance and Administration
- The Connectional Table
- General Board of Church and Society
- General Board of Discipleship
- Division on Ministries with Young People
- General Board of Global Ministries
- General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
- General Board of Pension and Health Benefits
- The United Methodist Publishing House
- General Commission on Archives and History
- General Commission on Communication
- General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns
- General Commission on Religion and Race



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- General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
- Standing Commission on Central Conference Affairs
- General Commission on United Methodist Men
- Ecumenical Organizations
- Just Peace

**Total Value: 8 Points**

Assignment 12.2: Church Bureaucracy. There are many who say the church is weighed down with a bureaucratic structure that limits what the church can do in mission and ministry. There are others who are calling on the church to extend the work of its boards and agencies to function on a global scale. How do you view the bureaucracy of the church? Should the boards and agencies be reduced in size or expanded to meet the needs of a global church?

**Total Value: 3 Points**