

POLITY AND ORDINANCES OF THE BRETHREN CHURCH

Course Instructor & Facilitator: G. Emery Hurd

Updated August 2021

1. **Course Description:** This course examines the polity of the church from a Brethren and Believers' Church perspective. It provides an overview of the organizational structure of the Brethren Church at the local, regional, and national levels. Consideration is given to both the doctrine and practice of the ordinances. It will familiarize the student with all the documents used by the Brethren Church to define, govern, and practice its polity at all levels.
2. **Textbooks and Other Materials:** The following textbooks are required for the course:
 - Eberly, William R., ed. *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1991.
 - The Readings Packet which will be available on the course website and broken into 10 sections, with a reference to the two break weeks, where no reading is expected.
 - All documents referenced in the syllabus, which will be available on the course website.
3. **Attendance and Participation Policy:** Attendance at all class sessions is expected unless the facilitators have been notified in advance. Students should be on time and should stay through the duration of all classes. Missing more than one class, unless approved in advance, will result in need for students to retake the course later. Students are expected to read the documents referenced in the syllabus before each class and participate in class discussions. Failure to come prepared for classes will result in students needing to retake the course.
4. **Writing Policy:** All papers must employ proper English and notation in accord with the most recent edition of Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. In cases where Turabian needs to be supplemented the most recent edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* should be consulted. Alternately, APA or MPA writing standards may be used if usage is consistent throughout the course.

5. Class Schedule

WEEK	TOPIC(S)	SUB-TOPIC(S)	READINGS
1 September 28, 2021 11:30am – 1:00pm EDT	Historical and Theological Development of Brethren Church Polity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brethren Concept of the Church: The Peoplehood Formula Theological Application to Brethren Polity Historical Overview of Brethren Polity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Packet Section 1 <i>The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack</i> (Eberly)
2 October 5, 2021 11:30am – 1:00 pm EDT	Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus Decision-making & Communal Discernment Conflict Resolution Congregational Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Packet Section 2 Brethren Hermeneutical Community (Colijn) Vitality Life Cycle NCD
3 October 12, 2021 11:30am – 1:00 pm EDT	Local Church Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Models of Church Government Limited Congregationalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Packet Section 3 Brethren Church and Elder Boards Leading without Power – Van Yperen
4- Break October 19, 2021		•	•
5 October 26, 2021 11:30 Am – 1:00pm EDT	Regional Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of Regions The Regional Leadership Team The Regional Resource Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Packet Section 4 Regionalization Articles
6 November 2, 2021 11:30 am 1:00 pm EDT	National Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Organization General Conference Structure of National Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “A Manual of Procedure” (recent edition) National- Regional Flowchart
7 – Break November 9, 2021		•	•

WEEK	TOPIC(S)	SUB-TOPIC(S)	READINGS
8 November 16, 2021 11:30 Am – 1:00 Pm EDT	Ordinances of The Brethren Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction to Ordinances ● Baptism ● Confession of Faith ● Laying on of Hands ● Reception into Membership ● Communion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feetwashing ○ Love Feast ○ Bread & Cup ○ Holy Kiss ● Anointing with Oil ● Dedication of Children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading Packet Section 5 ● “Brethren Pastor’s Handbook” (recent edition)
9 November 23, 2021 11:30 am – 1:00 pm EST	Eldership in the Brethren Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Biblical Understandings of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Elder ○ Deacon ○ Pastor ○ Moderator ● Licensure and Ordination Process ● Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Brethren Pastor’s Handbook” (recent edition) ● “Manual of Pastoral and Congregational Procedures” (recent edition) ● “NBO Ordination Manual” (recent edition) ● Other NBO documents ● Brethren concept of elder
10 November 30, 2021 11:30 am – 1:00 pm EST	Future of The Brethren Church		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Mission, Vision & Values of The Brethren Church”
Final Paper January 7, 2022			

6. **Final Paper:** In a 5–7-page paper, respond to the following questions:
- Describe Brethren limited congregational polity. How does it differ from pure congregational polity, on the one hand, and Presbyterian or episcopal polity, on the other? What is needed for limited congregational polity to work effectively?
 - Discuss a model for local church organization. How are Brethren principles and values expressed in the model you describe?
 - Describe consensus decision making. Give an example of what a consensus process might look like in a local congregation.
 - Discuss the relative roles of elder, local church, region, and denomination in Brethren polity.
 - Describe what roles and authority Brethren documents have in the context of Brethren polity and limited congregationalism.

7. **Selected Bibliography or References**

Barthel, Tara Klena and David V. Edling. *Redeeming Church Conflict: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012

Bowman, Isaac D. *Gospel Church Polity*. Leesburg, NJ: By the author, n.d.

Bowman, S. Loren. "Polity." In *Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today*, 79-96. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986.

Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*. Chicago, IL: Moody, 2012

Cosgrove, Charles H and Dennis D Hatfield. *Church Conflict: The Hidden Systems Behind the Fights*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.

Cowen, Gerald P. *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government*. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2003.

Eberly, William R., ed. *The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1991.

Eller, Vernard. "Beliefs." In *The Church of the Brethren: Past and Present*, 39-51. Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1971.

_____. *In Place of Sacraments*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

Engle, Paul E., ed. *Who Runs the Church? Four Views on Church Government*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004

Halverstadt, Hugh F. *Managing Church Conflict*. Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991

“A Manual of Procedure for The Brethren Church.” Ashland, OH: The Brethren Church (current edition).

Nead, Peter. *Theological Writings on Various Subjects*. Poland, OH: Dunker Reprints, 1985.

Oxenrider, Jack L. “The Historical Role of the Brethren Elder.” *Ashland Theological Journal* 15 (Fall 1982): 59-72.

_____. “An Organizational Design for the Brethren Church.” *The Brethren Evangelist* 104 (June/October 1982): 6-7; 7; 12-14; 4-6; 9-11 respectively.

Parker, I. D. “Church Polity.” In *Two Centuries of the Church of the Brethren*, 153-169. Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1908.

Sande, Ken. *The Peacemaker*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997

Shultz, Joseph R. *The Soul of the Symbols: A Theological Study of Holy Communion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966.

Stoffer, Dale R. *Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines, 1650-2015*. Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, 2018. Read indexed pages for anointing, baptism, communion, feetwashing, Lord’s supper, love feast, ordinances, sacraments, church government.

_____. “Beliefs.” In *Church of the Brethren: Yesterday and Today*, 43-60. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986.

_____, ed. *The Lord’s Supper: Believers Church Perspectives*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997.

_____. “What Is Brethren Church Polity? (And Why Should I Care?).” *The Brethren Evangelist* 110 (June 1988): 8-9.

Yoder, C. F. *God’s Means of Grace*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1908.