Church Polity
10/22/2015

Section I

Constitutional Heritage

F-1.0304 describes the great ends of the Church. If a church is fulfilling its purpose, all the great ends will be evident and at work.

REQUIRED RESPONSES *(Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)*

1. Cite (e.g., X-0.0000) at least three (3) citations from the Rules of Discipline which show how three (3) distinct great ends of the Church are embodied.
2. Drawing on your work in Required Response 1, write an essay for the orientation of new pastors showing that even in discipline proceedings the great ends of the Church are at work.

Answer

Part I

1) The preservation of the truth

"After careful deliberation, the session or permanent judicial commission shall vote on each charge separately and record the vote in its minutes. In order to find the accused guilty of a charge, the session or permanent judicial commission must find that the pertinent facts within that charge have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Proof beyond a reasonable doubt occurs when the comparison and consideration of all the evidence compels an abiding conviction that the material facts necessary to prove the charge are true" (D-11.0403).

"If the accused in a disciplinary case is unable to secure counsel, the session or permanent judicial commission shall appoint counsel for the accused. Reasonable expenses for defense shall be authorized and reimbursed by the council in which the case originated" (D-11.0301).

"An inquiry shall be made by an investigating committee designated by the council having jurisdiction over the member to determine whether charges should be filed" (D-10.0201).

"No complaint in a remedial case shall be sustained unless it has been proved by a preponderance
of the evidence. Preponderance means such evidence as, when weighed with that opposed to it, has more convincing force and the greater probability of truth. After careful deliberation the commission shall vote on each irregularity or delinquency assigned in the complaint and record the vote in its minutes" (D-7.0402a).

2) The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God

"The purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ; to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the individual within the life of the believing community" (D-1.0101).

"A person under the censure of removal from ordered ministry or from membership may be restored by the council imposing the censure when the council is fully satisfied that the action is justified and the person makes a reaffirmation of faith for membership restoration or is reordained for restoration to ordered ministry. The forms of the restoration are described in D-12.0202 and D-12.0203" (D-12.0201).

3) The maintenance of divine worship

"While administrative leave is in effect, a teaching elder may not perform any pastoral, administrative, educational, or supervisory duties, and may not officiate at any functions such as Baptism, funerals, or weddings" (D-10.0106).

"During the period of temporary exclusion from ordered ministry, the person found guilty shall refrain from the exercise of any function of ordered ministry" (D-12.0104d)

Part II

One ecclesial characteristic that sets the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) apart from other denominations is its polity. The Book of Order is a comprehensive tome that includes an extensive section concerning proper disciplinary procedures appropriately called the Rules of Discipline. Often times, new pastors are concerned that the Rules of Discipline require a certain suspension of the Christian grace and mercy. Fortunately, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Rules of Discipline are saturated with Christ-like dispositions and are written in such a way that they manifest the six great ends of the Church (F-1.0304). More specifically, in the PC (U.S.A)’s disciplinary measures, one can see at work (1) the preservation of truth, (2) the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God, and (3) the maintenance of divine worship.

As followers of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Truth Incarnate (John 14:6), truth telling and transparency are of primary interest to the Church. We can see the importance of truth all throughout the Rules of Discipline. For example, in disciplinary cases, “proof beyond a reasonable doubt” after a careful and deliberate assessment of the evidence is required for a guilty verdict (D-11.0403). The church will never allow a case (both remedial and disciplinary) to proceed without a fair consideration of the claims of both the accuser and the accused (D-7.0402a). The rules also stipulate that both parties have the right to counsel, and that council will be provided by the Church should the accused not have the means to acquire it on their own (D-11.0301). In most cases, the
Church devotes time, people, and money in order to organize an investigating committee, the sole purpose of which is to intensely scrutinize the evidence and claims pertinent to a case. All of these measures exist in order that truth may prevail.

Another expressed purpose served by the denomination's disciplinary policy is the nurturing of the spiritual community. The Rules of Discipline articulate this goal in the preamble when it reads, "The purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ; to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the individual within the life of the believing community" (D-1.0101). The Body of Christ is the holy communion of saints, the membership of which is not to be taken lightly. Our polity takes our identity as God's people very seriously. Yet, it is precisely because it is the Body of Christ that it also recognizes the importance and necessity of mercy. There is plenty of room for repentance and restitution (D-12.0201). The Book of Order delicately balances the gravity of our communal identity with the inherent grace of that identity.

As ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, the job of the pastor is to lead the congregation in holy worship. This is an immensely important task, for without you and your ministry, the Church would not witness as the Church. Therefore, it is also important that this role be taken seriously. This is reflected in the Book of Order's rules regarding the extended dismissal of ordained ministers. In the cases of disciplinary proceedings, the ordained minister is suspended from presiding over the worship of the congregation (D-10.0106). Particularly, if they are found guilty of a grievance offense, they must refrain from their ministerial duties (D-12.0104d). This is not punishment for the sake of punishment, nor is it an indictment of the minister's inherent worth in Christ Jesus. It is rather a measure to ensure that worship remains pure and holy. A minister who is not fit to preach the word or preside over the sacraments is detrimental to the wellbeing of the church. The Book of Order insures that the church's worship will continue in a healthy and true manner.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Book of Order is not polity for the sake of polity. It is polity that guides the church in its mission. Even in its disciplinary rules, our polity seeks the power and wisdom Holy Spirit in all things. Just as with veteran pastors, those who are newly ordained to this great tradition must always read the Book of Order with an eye toward the working of the Spirit of Christ Jesus – even in the midst of messy situations.

## Reader Responses

| S | This is an excellent response, demonstrating a clear understanding of the Book of Order as well as polished communication skills. Because the response is so well-written, mention will be made of 2 sentences that could be even better. The first sentence of the second paragraph "As followers of Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Truth incarnate,..." needs to have the Church as the next words and subject of the sentence. In other words, "truth telling and transparency" are not followers of Jesus. Also, in the fifth line of that paragraph, council needs to be counsel. |
| S | Three Great Ends of the Church are identified and multiple citations are given for each. |
Section II

Constitutional Order for the Particular Church

You are the solo pastor of Farmville Presbyterian Church. You are meeting with the stewardship committee as part of the planning for next year’s budget. The following comments are made:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eben:</th>
<th>What if we just divide the church budget by the number of active members and ask everyone to give that much?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>Aren’t we supposed to give a percentage of what we earn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunter:</td>
<td>I don’t want to make people feel guilty about this. Let’s emphasize that we are to be cheerful givers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheldon:</td>
<td>Money isn’t the only part of stewardship. We should be asking for time and talent commitments too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REQUIRED RESPONSES (Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)

1. Identify and briefly discuss three (3) issues raised by the members of the stewardship committee, citing (e.g., X-0.0000) at least one (1) Book of Order reference for each.
2. Drawing on your work in Required Response 1, write a blog post about tithing and stewardship.
Answer

Part I

There are three pertinent issues being raised in this discussion:

1) Ruth’s question alludes the subject of tithing. Tithing, the contribution of a certain percentage (typically ten percent) of one’s total income, is a biblically rooted practice that is encouraged by the Book of Order. In the Directory of Worship, it reads, “Tithing is a primary expression of the Christian discipline of stewardship” (W-5.5004). However, the Book of Order also reminds us that we are called to give generously in support of the church’s ministries (W-2.5003b). Ten percent is a good start, but it is not a hard and fast rule, and it is certainly not to be imposed as a maximum limit on our giving.

2) Gunter articulates the tension between the responsibility and the attitude of the giver. The insecurity over making people feel guilty is justified, and there is something to be said about being a cheerful giver. However, self-giving is not something that we should do only when we feel good. The Book of Order reminds us that offering oneself is a central characteristic of the Christian life. We give out of the gift that we have received from God in the Lord Jesus Christ (W-2.5001). In Him, we are called to love, and in Him we see that love involves giving all that we have (and all that we are) in the service of God. Here, love is not a feeling, but rather it is an action. We give as we are led by the Spirit of love and thanksgiving, not by our emotions. Giving is a discipline of the faith (W5.5004), and therefore may not (and need not) always be cheerful.

3) Sheldon recognizes giving as a holistic activity. This is very much in line with what we find in the Book of Order, where it reads, “The Christian life is an offering of one’s self to God. In worship the people are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ, are claimed and set free by him, and are led to respond by offering to him their lives, their particular gifts and abilities, and their material goods” (W-2.5001; emphasis and underline mine). The stewardship committee of Farmville Church would be wise to remember to not reduce giving to solely the giving of material goods. On the other hand, our polity is careful not to pit these various gifts against one another. We do not give our time and talents in substitution for our monetary and material assets. Furthermore, we have a dedicated time in the worship service for the offering of physical gifts (W-2.5003c). Just as our presence and energy in worship are embodied offerings to God, so too our material gifts must also be physically, demonstrably offered. (And after all, this conversation is taking place in the planning of a budget.)

Part II

Ah... Fall... the time of the year when the trees become colorful, the hoodies reappear, and church’s anxiously plan their budgets and stewardship sermon series. Around this time every year, the church revisits similar questions about giving: “How much?” “Why?” “Can I just volunteer instead?” So in honor of stewardship season, I thought it might be helpful to use this platform to address the beautiful practice of Christian giving.

We give, not out of obligation and fear, because it is who we are. The revelation and grace of God compels a response, and in the Kingdom that response is thanksgiving and reciprocal love. While thanksgiving and love could be interpreted as warm feelings, they are much more dynamic words in the Christian life. They are actions that point to what is true: We give thanks and love whether or not we experience the corresponding feelings.
Offering oneself is a spiritual discipline that we practice and grow in by the grace of God. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), but God doesn’t wait for us to be cheerful to give. In fact, I know many people at Farmville who testify that they became cheerful as they gave! Us Christians are givers because we’re the children of the Giver. As we give, we become more and more in the image of THE Cheerful Giver.

We in the P.C. (U.S.A) believe that giving is a holistic response to the gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. This means that we offer, not just our money, but our whole selves. This includes our money but also so much more. Our Book of Order actually puts it best when it says, “The Christian life is an offering of one’s self to God. In worship the people are presented with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ, are claimed and set free by him, and are led to respond by offering to him their lives, their particular gifts and abilities, and their material goods” (W-2.5001; emphasis and underline mine). God has made us stewards of particular talents, energies, gifts, and testimonies in order to share them with the Beloved community and the world.

But... having said all that... let’s talk about money. Just because we can give more than money doesn’t mean we can give less. All too often we use the truth of the call to give our whole selves as an excuse to not give money. (“I fed eighty homeless people this week! I gave enough.”) “All that we are” includes our material wealth. In order to be faithful stewards of our resources, our giving must include tangible goods insofar as it is possible.

But then the obvious question is, “Well, how much is enough?” Typically, this is where the subject of tithing comes up. Tithing refers to the giving of ten percent of one’s income. This is a fine biblical practice that our denomination still endorses to this day. But in our twenty first century, capitalist society, “the ten percent rule” has been misused far too often. Some of us are inclined to see it as the maximum threshold for Christian giving. Others are so bound to this percent that we see it as just another obligatory requirement on top of all the other bills and payments we have to make in our lives. This can’t be what it’s all about right?

Well, I submit to you that this concept of tithing is so twisted because we’re using it to answer the wrong question. “How much is enough?” betrays a bare minimum mentality. But in Christ, God calls us to be radically generous! (“Give all you have to the poor!”) What that generosity looks like from person to person depends on their income, social situation, and call of the Holy Spirit. But I can tell you that, in a society in which we spend about 96% of our income on ourselves (http://www.creditloan.com/blog/how-the-average-us-consumer-spends-their-paycheck/), ten percent isn’t a bad place to start! But don’t stop there! We should always be looking to go bigger when it comes to giving, because Jesus always goes bigger...

Being a Christian means being a steward of God’s gracious gifts to you. In this stewardship season, don’t be afraid to go all out and be the best steward you can be!

Reader Responses

S

This is an excellent response, showing understanding of the Book of Order and strong pastoral awareness. The blog post is well-written and takes an interesting position of cheerful giving. The segue into tithing as an answer to the question “How much is enough?” is also a creative, yet natural way to discuss this topic. The inclusion of the credit loan statistic is helpful as well.

There are a few editing corrections to note. In line one, church’s should be churches. In the third paragraph, second line, Us Christians should be We Christians. In the fourth paragraph, P.C.(U.S.A.) should be PC(USA).
Section III

Constitutional Order as a Tool for Ministry

You are the pastor of Third Presbyterian Church, and your confirmation class is discussing the categories of membership when the following discussion occurs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tracy:</th>
<th>I’m not sure I have been baptized. I better get baptized again just to be sure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jayna:</td>
<td>I think my grandparents are affiliate members because they spend most of the year in Wisconsin. Will I be an affiliate member, too, even though I live here all year long?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda:</td>
<td>I was dunked when I was baptized two years ago by Pastor Shaq. Does that count?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerardo:</td>
<td>What if I’m not ready to join the church? Does that mean I can’t come to youth group anymore?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi:</td>
<td>When I was little we went to the Methodist Church down the street. Can I just do that certificate of transfer thing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 REQUIRED RESPONSES (Total responses for this Section not to exceed 1,200 words.)

1. Identify and briefly discuss three (3) different issues related to church membership, each raised by a different member of the class. Cite at least one (1) Book of Order reference (e.g., X-0.0000) for each issue raised.
2. Drawing on your work in Required Response 1, respond to each of the three (3) class members you identified.

**Answer**

**Part I**

1) Tracy raises the issue of the appropriateness of rebaptism. The Book of Order stands firmly in the Reformed tradition when it states that “God's faithfulness signified in baptism is constant and sure”, and this is why baptism is received once (W-2.3007.) If she has been baptized, I cannot baptize her again. Not only is it not allowed by the Book of Order, but it is theologically impossible (You can't die and rise with Christ twice). Therefore, it is important that we first determine whether or not she was baptized. If she was baptized into the denomination, there should be some sort of record that we can reference (W-2.3012d). If we find that she has been baptized before, I would suggest a reaffirmation of faith (G-1.0303c).

2) Linda raises the issue of the efficacy of immersion versus sprinkling. Though many congregations sprinkle or pour in baptism, the Directory of Worship recognizes immersion as a valid form of baptism (W-3.3605). Assuming that the simple baptismal formula was spoken over Linda (W-3.3606), her baptism by Pastor Shaq is perfectly acceptable. She is a baptized member of the Church (G-1.0401).

3) Gerardo raises the issue of the relationship between membership and participation. According to the Book of Order, one need not be a member of the Church (in any capacity) in order to participate in the life and worship of the Church. If he is not ready to "join the church," Gerardo may still attend youth group as an "other participant" (G-1.0404). However, the fact that he's in the confirmation class suggests that he is already a baptized member of the Church (G-1.0401). If he has been baptized, then he has already joined the church and should be encouraged to accept that reality.

**Part II**

Tracy: I really appreciate your zeal and appreciation for the sacrament of baptism. However, I want to caution you against getting rebaptized "just to make sure." Baptism signifies the once and for all adoption into the Church family. Whether you were a baby or it happened yesterday, if you've had water poured over you and the words spoken over you then you have been baptized. And if you have been baptized, then you have already died and risen with Christ, and I can't kill you again! So for that reason, I suggest that we first ask your parent(s) if there is some sort of record of your baptism lying around. Have you always been a member here? If so, you must be on the rolls as a baptized member. Someone has got to remember whether or not you've been baptized, and even if they don't, Jesus will remember for you! So let's make totally sure that you haven't been baptized before going through with the rite. I can say that if you have been baptized, but can't remember it and want to make a meaningful profession of faith, Third Presbyterian Church would be happy to invite you to remember the meaning of your baptism by reaffirming your faith. In fact, you'll be doing that in confirmation service. So, let's go ask around and make sure you're a baptized member.

Linda: Yep! Your baptism under Pastor Shaq (awesome name, by the way!) is an appropriate form of baptism. As long as it was in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then it is A-OK. In fact, it's been the preferred method of millions of adult converts throughout Church history. The
copious amount of water that you were dunked in symbolizes the copious amount of love and grace with which God has drenched you! So yes, Linda... it counts.

Gerardo: The simple answer to your youth group question is no: You can certainly continue coming to youth group. And I pray that you do because your presence is so valuable to us, not to mention the fact that your friends are happier when you’re here. You need not be a baptized and professing member of the church to go to youth group. But I want to draw attention to your first question for a minute (What if I don’t want to join the church?). Are you baptized, Gerardo? If so, then you’re already in! You need not continue in this confirmation class, but you’ve already joined the family thanks to your baptism. So as you enjoy youth group – and worship, play, and learn to the glory of God – I urge you to continue being an part of this community and, perhaps, one day claim your stake in Third Presbyterian Church as an active member.

Reader Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U</th>
<th>In response 1 for Tracy, re-baptism is covered correctly. However, to suggest reaffirmation of faith is not correct. In response 1 for Linda, the efficacy of immersion baptism is covered correctly. However, there may be another element to Linda’s question, namely, the validity of a baptism by another pastor in another congregation/denomination. That question would be covered by W-2.301 One Body, One Baptist. In response 1 for Gerardo, there appears to be some confusion regarding Gerardo’s concern. He wants to continue with youth group, but is debating making the commitment to active membership. As he is debating his own ability to say yes or no to membership, he may not want to know then that he is already in the church as a baptized member. In response 2, the invitation to Tracy to remember her baptism by reaffirming her faith is not accurate. See W-2.3009 Remembering our Baptism. Regarding the responses to Linda and Gerardo, please see the comments under response 1.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| S | Required Response 1

1) Tracy’s issue is clearly identified and three citations are given. The discussion is excellent, but would have been strengthened with a suggestion that her parents could likely provide the information about whether she has been baptized. Also, the statement that if she has been baptized “I would suggest a reaffirmation of faith (G-1.0303e)” is incorrect, it would be an “affirmation of faith.”

2) The discussion of Linda’s issue is clear and concise with two citations offered.

3) Gerardo’s issue is identified and an appropriate citation is given. The discussion assumes that the members of the Communicant’s Class have all been baptized.

Required Response 2

1) An excellent response is given to Tracy.

2) Linda was nicely affirmed that her baptism by immersion was valid.

3) The response to Gerardo’s question is accurate and straightforward; he may certainly continue to be involved at church. What is confusing is the assumption that members of the Communicant’s class have already been baptized, (as was
suggested to Linda), and that if Gerardo is a "Baptized Member" he should not be in the Communicant's Class. It would be interesting to know if an earlier edition of the Book of Order talks about a Communicant's Class and discussed this issue.

Overall Evaluation

General Comments for Examinee and/or Presbytery

Please include here any comments about the examination as a whole or notes for the presbytery committee/commission overseeing the examinee's preparation for ministry.

Reader Responses

This exam demonstrates a good understanding of the Book of Order and solid pastoral skills. Communication skills are strong as well. However, membership categories, especially as they apply to confirmation classes, need to be reviewed.

The paper shows an excellent understanding of the polity of the church and a readiness to begin ministry as a pastor.