

UU Congregational Polity
SKSM - Fall 2011
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Course Description

This is a course in the history and development of Congregational Polity in the Unitarian Universalist tradition. How did Congregational Polity evolve and what were the differences in the Unitarian and Universalist approaches to governance? How have we handled issues of centralized authority and bureaucracy? We'll look at how religious communities make decisions, support their leaders and define ministry. With ministry we will ask about power, gender and ethics, the call, and the meaning and context for worship and rites of passage.

Course Objectives

The purpose of the course is to prepare students planning to seek UU ministerial fellowship status and UU ministry settlement to be familiar with the history and practice of congregational polity in the UUA and among its member congregations, with an eye to contemporary applications.

Online Course Expectations

Weekly Postings:

As with any class, I expect you to complete the readings before the start of that week's unit (our effective class "start time,") and to contribute thoughtfully on them in "class," that is, in your Moodle postings. Your weekly postings should consist of one longer substantive post reflecting on that week's themes, *and* at least one response to another student's post. You may write and respond to either the specific discussion forum question, or you may write a longer post addressing the week's topic from an angle of your choosing. (These would be started in the "open forum" for each unit.)

I hope we can move away from a fairly standard online course technique of requiring everyone to write answers to questions each week that demonstrate that you have done the readings. It is my experience that this leads to rather dull and obligatory conversation, and I would like our virtual time together to be livelier than that, and consist of "real" engagement—hence, post when you are engaged, rather than out of obligation.

To make sure you are getting what you need to out of the readings, check out each unit's "Learning Outcomes for Readings." You can self-test your comprehension of the reading against these, and, if you need any additional help, post your question or dilemma to the Help Forum.

Chats:

Several times during the semester we'll make use of Moodle's "chat" feature, in order to engage with each other in a more spontaneous way than permitted by the regular forum postings. These will take place at various times in order to allow for our different schedules. Participation in one chat is required; participation in all is not expected due to time (and time-zone) constraints.

Final Project:

10 page term paper or sermon or term paper on one of the weekly topics researched and reflected upon in greater depth, with an emphasis upon how this topic fits into our overall understanding of the UU concept of the church community

Course Texts

Required

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together: Polity and Participation in Unitarian Universalist Churches*. Boston: UUA, 1989. [ISBN 1558961291, \$10]

Charles Howe, *The Larger Faith, A Short History of American Universalism*. Skinner House Books, 1993. [ISBN 9781558963085, \$16.00]

Walter Herz, *Redeeming Time: Endowing Your Church with the Power of Covenant*. Skinner House Books, 1998. [ISBN 1558963812, \$16]

Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (eds), *Soul Work*. Boston, Skinner House, 2003. [ISBN 9781558964457, \$20]

Required but Free Online

(If you have a mobile device (such as a smartphone, tablet computer, or e-reader) transferring these to your device, rather than just reading on your computer screen, will make for a more enjoyable experience!)

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, available online for free at <http://archive.uua.org/cde/congpolity.pdf>

Alice Blair Wesley, *Our Covenant, The 200-01 Minns Lectures*. Available online at: <http://www.minnslectures.org/archive/wesley/wesley.htm>

Available for purchase in paperback format: Meadville-Lombard, 2000. [ISBN 9780970247926, \$12.95] (The online version is a little distracting to read, given the frequent use of words in boldface text).

Course Texts - Strongly Suggested For Purchase or Perusal

Alice Blair Wesley and Peter Hughes, *The Cambridge Platform: Contemporary Readers' Edition* [ISBN 9781558965379, \$8.00]

Conrad Wright, *A Stream Of Light: A Short History Of American Unitarianism*, Skinner House, 1989.

Scott W. Alexander, ed. *Salted With Fire: Unitarian Universalist Strategies for Sharing Faith and Growing Congregations*, Skinner House Books,

David Robinson, *The Unitarians And The Universalists*, Greenwood Press, 1985.

UUA Commission on Appraisal Website: <http://www.uua.org/documents/coa>

Course Outline

Unit 1: What is Polity

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, Introduction (pp 1-5)

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 1 -2, "A Doctrine of the Church for Liberals" and "Walking Together"

UUA statement on Vision, Mission, and Covenant, at

<http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/visionmissioncovenant.pdf>, pp. 1-17

Redeeming Time, Introduction, "In the Beginning," "The Wise Weakness of the Congregational

Way,” and “Congregational Polity and the Covenant”

Suggested Reading

James Luther Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, Chapter 13 “The Enduring Validity of Congregational Polity.”

Unit 2: European and Puritan Antecedents

Tim Jenson, “From Mythos to Merger,” in *Redeeming Time*

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, p. 1-31

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 7, “Social Cohesion and the Uses of the Past.”

“Act of Religious Tolerance” - Diet of Torda (Posted)

“The Cambridge Platform” (Posted)

Sidney Mead, “The Nation with the Soul of a Church” (Posted)

Williston Walker, *Creeks and Platforms of Congregationalism*, pp 1-17, “Robert Browne’s Statement of Congregational Principles”, pp 28-32, “The London Conference of 1589” -- Google books

Suggested Reading

Charles Howe, *For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe*

David B. Parke, *The Epic of Unitarianism*, Chapters 1 and 2

Henry Wilder Foote, “The Significance and Influence of the Cambridge Platform (Posted)

Week 3: Unitarians and Church Governance through 1865

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, pp. 33-65

Channing, “Remarks on Association” (Posted)

Frederick Henry Hedge, “The Broad Church” (Posted)

Henry Whitney Bellows, “The Suspense of Faith” (Posted)

Week 4: Universalists and Church Governance through 1865

Howe, *The Larger Faith*, Chs. 3, 4.

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, pp. 21-25, 44-50

Suggested Reading

Robert Cummins, A United Church (Posted)

Emerson Lalone, Shall We Have More Centralization? (Posted)

Robert Cummins, Freedom is Still the Issue? (Posted)

Richard Woodman, The Decline of Universalism (Posted)

Unit 5: Polity in Transitional Times (Late 19th c-UUA’s formation)

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, pp. 67-100 (covers the period 1865-1898)

Commission on Appraisal, *Unitarians Face a New Age* (1936) (Available at http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/36_unitariansfaceanewage.pdf)

Howe, *The Larger Faith*, Chs. 5 & 6

Suggested Reading

Sidney Mead, “An Address to Unitarians” (Posted)

Ed Atkinson, "The Battle of Syracuse" (Posted)

Unit 6: The UUA

Conrad Wright, *Congregational Polity*, pp. 101-172 (focus especially on 145-178)

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 6, "UU Denominational Structure"

UUA Commission on Appraisal, *The Unitarian Universalist Merger* (link:

http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/75_unitarianuniversalistmerger.pdf)

Suggested Reading

Commission on Appraisal, *The Free Church in a Changing World*, 1963

Faith and Practice in UU Churches by Joseph Barth (Posted)

Brief History of UU Governance in *Final Report of the Commission on Governance*

Unit 7 – Covenant and the Challenges of a Voluntary Faith

Alice Blair Wesley, *Our Covenant*, entire

James Luther Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, Chapter 28 "The Indispensable Discipline of Social Responsibility: Voluntary Associations"

Rebecca Parker, in *Redeeming Time*, "What They Dreamed Be Ours to Do: Lessons from the History of Covenant."

Suggested Readings

James Luther Adams, *A Transcription of Three Lectures, 1977*

James Luther Adams, *Voluntary Associations*, Chapter 10, "The Voluntary Principle in the Forming of American Religion," Chapter 12, "Mediating Structures and the Separation of Powers," Chapter 15, "Some Notes on the Ministry of the Clergy and the Laity."

Alice Blair Wesley, "The Basic Doctrines of a Covenantal Association"

Alice Blair Wesley, *Myths of Time and History*, "The Pilgrims and the Spirit of the Covenant of the Free Church."

Unit 8 – A Community of Individual Members

Robert Bellah, "Unitarian Universalism in Societal Perspective," from GA 1998 (Available at http://www.robertbellah.com/lectures_7.htm)

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 5, "Autonomy and Fellowship"

Commission on Appraisal, *Belonging: The Meaning of Membership*, available at (link here: <http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/belonging.pdf>)

Scott W. Alexander, (ed), *Salted with Fire*, Chapter 21, Barbara Wells,

"Responsibility and Commitment: Why Just Signing the Book Is Never Enough"

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 11, "Individualism in Historic Perspective"

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, "In Search of a Usable Past"

Unit 9 - Worshipping in Community

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 3, "Worshipping Together," and Chapter 4, "Another Look at Corporate Worship"

William F. Schulz (ed), *Transforming Words*, Chapter 1, David O. Rankin, "From the Masthead to the Hatches: The Sources of Authority in the Liberal Pulpit," and Chapter 5, Judith Hoehler,

“The Preacher as Prophet”

Unit 10 – Rituals of Fellowship

Emily Mace, “A Church for All Souls” (from *Cosmopolitan Communion*s) (posted)

Stephen Furrer, “History and Practice of Baptism” (posted)

Mark Harris, “How We Welcome our Children” (posted)

Suzelle Lynch, “Keeping the Ones We Raise,” *Salted With Fire* (posted)

Unit 11 – Ordination and Ministry

Conrad Wright, *Walking Together*, Chapter 10, “The Role of the Clergy in the Shaping of Public Policy”

James Luther Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, Chapter 6, “Hidden Evils and Hidden Resources,” and Chapter 27, “Fishing with Nets”

Commission On Appraisal, *Our Professional Ministry*, 1992, pp. 1-11, 26-39, 98-102. Available online at:

http://www.uua.org/documents/coa/92_ourprofessionalministry.pdf

Earl Holt, “Ordination Sermon” (Posted)

Cynthia Grant Tucker, “Women and the UU Ministry: An Historical Overview” (Posted)

John Bennett, “Who’s in Charge”? UUA Pamphlet (Posted)

Suggested Reading

Earl Holt, “The Traditions and Meanings of Congregational Ordination in America” (Posted)

Judith Walker-Riggs, “Congregational Polity: Some History” (Posted)

Earl Holt, “Does Congregational Polity Sanction Any Vice? Yes” (Posted)

Unit 12 – Contemporary Issues: Race

Mark Morrison-Reed, *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination*, Chapter 1, “Two American Faiths”

Selections from *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue*

Rebecca Parker, “Not Somewhere Else But Here”

Rosemary Bray McNatt, “The Problem of Theology and the Work of Anti-Racism”

Patricia Jiminez, “Theology and Anti-Racism: Latino and Latina Perspectives”

Suggested Reading

Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal, *Empowerment: One Denomination's Quest for Racial Justice*. (In UUA, *Unitarian Universalism and the Quest for Racial Justice*)

Victor Carpenter, *The Black Empowerment Controversy and the UUA, 1967-1970*. (In UUA, *Unitarian Universalism and the Quest for Racial Justice*)

James Luther Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, Chapter 31, “The Shock of Recognition: The Black Revolution and Greek Tragedy”

Thandeka, “The Paradox of Racial Oppression,” in *Soul Work*, pp 127-144

Unit 13 – Contemporary Issues: Class

Mark Harris, Minns Lecture #5: “A Faith for a Few?” (Posted)

Gilbert, Richard S., *How Much Do We Deserve?* Adapted for UU World. Link here:
<http://www.uuworld.org/2001/05/feature3.html>

Rebecca Parker, "Rising to the Challenge of Our Times," in *Redeeming Time*

Unit 14 – Concluding Conversations

UUA Commission on Appraisal, *Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity*, online at
<http://www.uua.org/governance/polity/index.shtml>