

**UCC History & Polity**  
**The New York School of Ministry**  
**Spring, 2017**  
**With the Reverend Steven D. Johnson, Ph. D.**

**Syllabus**

**Overview:** This course will survey important issues in the history, theology, and polity of the United Church of Christ, including the essential elements identified by the Polity Teacher's Network in 2013. It will be assumed that all students have completed American Church History.

**Required Texts:** *Theology and Identity*, Revised Edition, edited by Daniel L. Johnson & Charles Hambrick-Stowe, United Church Press, copyright 2007.  
*New Ecclesiology & Polity*, by Clyde Steckel, The Pilgrim Press, copyright 2009.  
*History and Program*, Revised Edition, by Margaret Rowland Post, United Church Press, copyright 2007.  
*Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, edited by Barbara Brown Zikmund, United Church Press, copyright 1984.  
*That We May All Finally Be One*, by Mary Susan Gast, The Pilgrim Press, copyright 2016.  
*The Evolution of a UCC Style*, by Randi Jones Walker, United Church press, copyright 2005.

**Presentation:** This class will be provided using the Zoom platform. All students must have access to a computer that can connect to Zoom with both camera and microphone. Classes will be held on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 9 PM. Sessions will be recorded for students who cannot make the Wednesday sessions. There will be a discussion session with Dr. Johnson for any students who aren't able to participate in any Wednesday session. Timing and duration of discussion sessions will be negotiated in advance by Dr. Johnson and the students involved.

**Basic Components and Expectations:** All students will be expected to read chapters from the required texts in advance of the discussion schedule listed below. All students will be expected to participate in class discussions on Wednesday or as arranged with the Instructor. Each student will be required to write 3 papers. The first paper, due May 1, will demonstrate an understanding of one of the "hidden histories" or the United Church of Christ (but not from the assigned readings). It is recommended that the topic of this paper be one of the histories from the book of the same name not covered in this class, though you may feel free to explore some other "hidden history" or personal interest. A second paper will demonstrate an understanding of the polity of the United Church of Christ broadly considered. It will be due May 24. Students will also write a third paper on Ministry within the context of the United Church of Christ. This will be due June 7, 2016. Students will be expected to provide approximately 20 pages of written material distributed between the three papers.

**Expectations for papers:** Due dates for papers will be adhered to. To receive a B in the class you must provide me with a total of at least 18 pages of written work. You must proof read each exam and paper before submission. Though this is not an English class, poor spelling and grammar make it much more difficult for me to determine what you mean to say. I suggest you get someone else to read your paper before you send it to me. Where pertinent, I expect you to

use inclusive language in your writing. When you are talking about people in general and not the male of the species in specific you will avoid using the word “men.” When writing about God you will not always use the pronoun “he” nor always refer to God as “Father.” You must balance masculine images with feminine images. You may avoid such images altogether. This does not include direct quotations. Then you are expected to use the words of the original author, including their biases.

You are to submit your papers to me in either a Word document or an rtf file. You will submit them as an email attachment sent to me.

Grades will be based on my assessment of your grasp of the material we cover and your ability to apply that material to your present situation. You cannot receive an A in this course if you cannot demonstrate in your writing that you understand the implications of the events and ideas we study for the situation of the United Church of Christ or your local congregation today. Broadly speaking grades will indicate the following:

F: If you don’t understand why you failed then we do have a problem.

D: You did not meet the minimum requirements of this class. That could mean that your answers were too short or hard to understand. It could mean that you didn’t participate as actively in the discussion session as is required. Most likely, it means some combination of these things.

C: You did the bare minimum of work required. You demonstrated an adequate grasp of the materials we covered, but showed little understanding of how that material applies in your situation.

B: You fulfilled all the requirements of this class fully. Your written work was clear and understandable. It demonstrated that you have a firm grasp of the material we have studied. You were an active participant in our discussions and went beyond the bare minimums on a regular basis.

A: You exceeded the requirements of this class. Your written work was not only clear and understandable, but also demonstrated true insight into the implications of the polity of the United Church of Christ for your personal context. You participated actively in our discussions. You demonstrated a mastery of the material through your written work.

Dates on the following Discussion Schedule are probable but may change due to changes in my wife’s work schedule. She is an Interim Minister in the United Church of Christ and we are anticipating changes in early 2017.

Discussion Schedule:

Wednesday, April 5: Please read *Theology and Identity*, pages 67-77, and *New Ecclesiology & Polity*, pages 11-70. We will discuss general ideas regarding polity, with an emphasis on differing types of polity, including episcopal, Presbyterian, and congregational.

Wednesday, April 19: Please read *History and Program*, pages 11-69, and *Hidden Histories*, pages 81-94. Other chapters from *Hidden Histories* are recommended but not required. You may use one of the other chapters as the basis for your “hidden histories” paper. We will review the history of the UCC, with an emphasis on the last 60 years.

Wednesday, April 26: Please read *Theology and Identity*, pages 3-62, and *History and Program*, page 9. I recommend that you also read pages 103-200 of *Theology and Identity* at some point, but it is not required. We will discuss the role of theology in the United Church of Christ, with particular attention to the Statement of Faith.

May 1: Hidden history paper due.

Wednesday, May 3: Please read *That We May All Finally Be One*, pages 1-61. We will the place of the local church in the polity of the UCC. We will discuss the responsibilities of local church to the members and to the broader church.

Wednesday, May 10: Please read *That We May All Finally Be One*, pages 65-79, and *New Ecclesiology & Polity*, pages 71-109. We will discuss the responsibilities of Associations and Conferences within the United Church of Christ.

Wednesday, May 17: Please read *History and Program*, pages 70-82, *New Ecclesiology & Polity*, pages 110-139, and *That We May All Finally Be One*, pages 80-111. We will discuss the responsibilities of design of the national setting of the UCC, including General Synod and the national offices.

Wednesday, May 24: Please read *That We May All Finally Be One*, pages 115-155, and *Theology and Identity*, pages 79-88. We will discuss the nature of ministry within the United Church of Christ and the relationship of ministers to the local congregation, association, and conference. Your paper on the polity of the United Church of Christ is due.

Wednesday, May 31: Please read *That We May All Finally Be One*, pages 165-211, and *The Evolution of a UCC Style*, pages 25-52. We will discuss “core” commitments and values of the United Church of Christ, including the call to be a multi-cultural, multi-racial, open and affirming church that is accessible to all.

June 7: All papers are due. (See above)