

**Course Syllabus**

**Course Title:**  Baptist History and Polity

**Semester:** J-Term 2023

**Instructor:** Pastor Randy Powell

**Instructor contact:** 616-552-2103 (cell), rpowell@actsministryschool.com

**Course Description**

This course explores the origins, development and basic beliefs of Baptists, emphasizing an appreciation for the importance of knowing our rich Baptist heritage. There will be an examination of the association, regional and national structures of ABC-USA and of the typical organization styles and policies of the local church. As opportunity presents itself, concepts of congregational transformation and spiritual formation will be incorporated in the course.

**Course Objectives**

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the primary forces and movements within Church History that influenced the formation of the Baptist Movement.
2. Have an understanding of the nature of the growth of the Baptist Movement from individual congregations to associations, to societies, and finally denominations.
3. Know and appreciate the Baptist distinctives.
4. Understand how Baptist polity affects church governance.

**Online Classroom Format**

All class sessions will be held online using Google Meet. All course materials, including the submission & grading of assignments, will take place on Google Classroom. Please watch the [tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88idNZxeZbo) on navigating Google Classroom, if you are unfamiliar with the platform.

**Required Texts**

*A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice: Second Revised Edition*

By Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson

*Readings in Baptist History: Four Centuries of Selected Documents*

By Joseph Early Jr.

**Other Required Materials**

A (Very) Brief History of the Baptist Church – By Clayton Kraby

<https://reasonabletheology.org/a-very-brief-history-of-the-baptist-church/>

The Origins and Development of Baptist Thought and Practice

<https://www.abc-usa.org/what-we-believe/our-history/>

The London Baptist Confession

<https://www.chapellibrary.org/pdf/books/lbcw.pdf>

**Course Requirements**

1. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/7/23**: Watch all pre-recorded sessions. It would be beneficial to take notes while doing so and to write down any follow-up questions and requests for clarification that the materials bring to mind.

1. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/7/23**: Choose one person, one event, and one organization/idea from the “For Further Study Topic List” below, do additional research to learn more about it, and prepare a two-to-three-minute verbal presentation (no written summary required) to share with the class for each topic.
   1. Link to sign-up for Person: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C094EAAAB22A2FBC25-forfurther>
   2. Link to sign-up for Event: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C094EAAAB22A2FBC25-forfurther1>
   3. Link to sign-up for Organization/Idea: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C094EAAAB22A2FBC25-forfurther2>
2. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/7/23**: Read the forwards, preface, and chapters 1-2 and 8-12 of *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, *Second Revised Edition*.
3. **PRIOR to the start of the first class 1/7/23**: Read Chapters 1-4, 6, 12, 14, 16, 22-23, 25, 29-30, 35, and 40 of *Readings in Baptist History*
4. **PRIOR to the start of the first class on 1/7/23**: Read the online materials listed above under “Other Required Materials”
5. **PRIOR to the start of the second class on 1/21/23**: Read chapters 3-7 of *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, *Second Revised Edition*.
6. **Between the first and second class (1/8-1/20)**: Respond to all 5 Message Board prompts below with: (1) An original opinion of no less than five sentences, (2) and at least two responses of 1-2 sentences each to the postings of others in the class. In all message board posts an effort to take the issues seriously and to treat the postings of your fellow classmates with kindness and grace when you respond to them is required; if either are lacking, credit will not be given toward the required post total {5 original, 10 responses to the posts of others}.
   1. Re-baptize? The question of how to treat infant baptism. Respect what was done before, or ‘get it right’? (See ABC statement, p. 107 in *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*) In brief, what is the theological rationale for your view?
   2. Open Communion? Can I take communion at that kind of church? Are they welcome to take communion with us? In brief, what is the theological rationale for your view?
   3. Scenario: The UMC moves its pastors every few years within a district (goal is 6-7 years spent at each church), what are the pros and what are the cons of itinerant pastors? How does this compare to our Baptist at-will view of pastoral leadership?
   4. Scenario: Your local Baptist Church has been asked to participate in a Thanksgiving worship service with area churches including a Seventh-Day Adventist Church, what is the theologically sound response? Why? How would your answer change, if it does, if a Jehovah’s Witness or Mormon congregation wanted to participate?
   5. Scenario: Your local Baptist Church has been asked to join a food/clothing/or housing initiative in your community, those supporting it (donations and volunteering) will include Muslims, Hindus, and the non-religious, what is the theologically sound response? Why?
7. **By the end of Tuesday (1/24/23) following the 2nd class**: Write about your experience in moving toward ministry, how was it helped and/or hindered by the Baptist laissez-faire method of leadership recruitment, training, and retention? Did you have adequate guidance and mentorship? How did you make decisions when responding to your perceived calling to serve?
   1. This is a personal journey and will be read only by Pastor Powell, not shared for in-class comment
   2. 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.
8. **By the end of Tuesday (1/24/23) following the 2nd class:** Utilizing the opening paragraph of page 57 from *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* as a writing prompt: Make the case for how well the Baptist tradition, in general, has achieved the balance between: (1) avoiding constricting control and (2) chaotic disorder. Draw upon your own experience in a local Baptist church, and with Baptist associations and denominations (ABCUSA or otherwise) to inform this opinion.
   1. This is primarily calling for reflection upon your own experience and understanding, not a research paper about other people, other churches, etc.
   2. 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.
9. **By the end of Tuesday (1/24/23) following the 2nd class:** Write about an **ecumenical effort**, whether of worship or service, that would fit the situation in which your Baptist Church is situated. What gap in fellowship, outreach, or witness could be filled, how difficult would acceptance be within your church and within the community at large?
   1. This is primarily an effort of dreaming about what could be created or enhanced in the context in which you serve. Share enough of the details of your church and community to place your potential ecumenical effort in context (a paragraph or two should suffice).
   2. 2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.

**Grading**

A final grade will be calculated based on the following:

Class participation – 10%

Reading assignments (self-reported) – 20%

Watching Pre-recorded videos (includes the “For Further Study” Prep) – 20%

Message Boards, 10% your posts, 10% responses to those of others – 20%

Three papers, 10% each – 30%

Grades to be assigned at the end of class shall be:

A+ = 97-100 A = 93-96

B+ = 89-92 B = 85-88

C+ = 81-84 C = 77-80

D+ = 73-76 D = 69-72

Not Passing = 68 and below

**Academic Policies**

Plagiarism policy:

A.C.T.S. defines Plagiarism as “using someone’s ideas, words, or data, without proper acknowledgement, as one’s own original work.”To avoid plagiarism, you must 1) cite the original author every time you use his or her exact written or spoken word (by enclosing them with quotation marks if fewer than four lines or indenting as a block quote if four or more lines) or 2) paraphrase someone’s written or spoken words and recognize the author/source in the body of the text or as a footnote. Plagiarism is an act of dishonesty and violation of academic integrity.

If an Instructor determines that an act of plagiarism has occurred, after talking with the student, the Academic Dean will be notified. Possible consequences will be considered, including: a failing grade for the work, a failing grade for the entire course, asking the student to redo the assignment, etc.

Late Assignment policy:

* Because the reading assignments and pre-recorded videos enable students to productively participate in the class sessions, completing them after-the-fact will not be accepted for credit.
* Likewise, the discussion board posts will enhance the second class on 1/21, therefore no late completion will be accepted.
* The three writing assignments will be accepted through the end of the Tuesday (1/24/23) following the 2nd session. They will not be accepted later than this given that grades for the class need to be turned in at the end of the week.
* Summation: No late work for this class will be accepted.

**Course schedule**

1/7 Class #1a 9-12 AM

1/7 Class #1b 1-3 PM

1/21 Class #2a 9-12 AM

1/21 Class #2b 1-3 PM