

RCA Church Polity Self-Led Study Module

Do this reading and watch these videos at your own pace. Use the exercises to help you think through the materials. When you're ready, contact me, and we will have a discussion about RCA Polity

Required Reading:

Book of Church Order (BCO). Available [online](#) or purchase a paper copy on Amazon.

Allan J. Janssen, *Constitutional Theology: Notes on the Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America*, 2nd ed. (Reformed Church Press, 2019) ISBN: 978-1-950572-04-5.

Matthew J. van Maastricht, *Foundations of Reformed Church Polity: The Rhyme and Reason of the Order* (Reformed Church Press, 2022) ISBN: 9781950572243

Unit 1

Read:

BCO, Preamble (pp. 1–5)

Van Maastricht

[“A Historical Examination of the Relationship Among RCA Assemblies” Commission on History, 2007](#)

Watch: [“Introduction to Church Polity”](#), [“BCO Code and Background”](#)

Reflect:

- Is a church order prescriptive, descriptive, or a bit of both?
- Is the church order a theological reflection partner, a rule book, or something to get around or find loopholes in? And why?
- What is the connection between a church order and what we believe about the church?
- What is the relationship between the various assemblies?

Unit 2

Read:

BCO, Chapter 1, Part I (pp. 11–29)

Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, Chapter 1, Part I

[“Extra-Canonical Tests for Church Membership and Ministry” Commission on History, 2007](#)

Watch: [“The Consistory”](#)

Reflect:

- Some argue that the pastor should be the "visionary leader" of the congregation and should cast the vision for the church. Is this a good perspective? Why or why not?
- Sometimes deacons are treated as "junior elders" or as elders-in-training. Is this a good way to understand the office of deacon, and what does the BCO have to say about this?
- Are consistory members supposed to follow the will of the congregation in making decisions? Why or why not?
- What is the relationship between the consistory and the minister(s)?

Unit 3

Read:

BCO, Chapter 1, Part II (pp. 31–63)

Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, Chapter 1, Part II

Watch: [“The Classis”](#)

Reflect:

- Some view the classis as an important partner in ministry and that the classis plays an important role in the organization of the church. Others view the classis as inefficient and nosy at best, and hindering ministry at worst and that the classis should mind its own business and stay out of the churches. How do you navigate these two positions, and what are your thoughts on the role of the classis?
- Some think that commissioned pastor is an equal and alternate way to enter into a ministry career. Some think that commissioned pastors should have the same rights and privileges of a minister, including the ability to be installed as a pastor of a church and to accept a pastoral position anywhere in the denomination. It has also been argued that commissioned pastors are essentially a fifth office. What do you think of all this and why? What is at stake?
- In what way is the classis the strongest assembly in the RCA?

Unit 4

Read:

BCO, Chapter 1, Parts III and IV

Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, Chapter 1, Parts III and IV

[“An Examination of Historical Precedent for Setting RCA Policy.” Commission on History, 2007](#)

Watch: [“The Synods”](#)

Reflect:

- Some argue that the Regional Synod is superfluous and should be eliminated. What do you think? Should the regional synod be eliminated, why or why not? What would be the benefits and drawbacks of the elimination of the regional synod, and what would some of the implications be?
- What does “General superintendence” and “appellate jurisdiction” mean about the original authority of the General Synod?
- How is the General Synod’s authority limited?

Unit 5

Read:

Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, Chapter 2 BCO, Chapter 2

[“Wolbrink Appeal” Commission on Judicial Business, 2012](#)

Watch: [“The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures”](#)

Reflect:

- What is church discipline ultimately about?
- How can discipline be administered effectively (which also means the disciplinary ends or restoration are able to be achieved) in a world with looser social and ecclesiastical ties?
- What is the nature of an appeal and how is it different than an original hearing of the case?