

History and Polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
(A course offered via Zoom)
Disciples Seminary Foundation
Claremont, California

Instructor: Rev. Belva Brown Jordan¹
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Class Dates and Sessions²

August 11-14, 2021

The class sessions will meet via Zoom:

- Wednesday, Thursday and Friday: 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.
- Saturday: 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon; 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Certification

Successful completion and certification of this class fulfills the Disciples History and Polity course requirements for the following Regions: Pacific Southwest Region, Oregon-Southwest Idaho, Northern Lights, and Arizona. Persons seeking ordination (i.e. “under care”) must take the course for certification. (If the student is from another Region other than the ones listed, s/he should confirm first with her/his Regional Minister[s] before registering as to what they expect.) Disciples Seminary Foundation will issue electronically a certificate of completion upon successful completion, and instructor confirmation, of all course requirements and assignments. (for the required, written assignments, see below for more information.)

Continuing Education Units

This course may be taken by clergy seeking to earn continuing education units (CEUs). S/he will earn 1.5 units total for full attendance, less CEUs for partial attendance. Again, taking the course for CEUs does not fulfill the requirements for ordination in the Regions listed above. The student must take it for certification. (Written assignments are not required for CEUs.)

Course Overview

This course surveys the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), from its founding two centuries ago to its contemporary witness, expressions, challenges and promises. Emphasis is placed on the context of North American Christianity, the interaction of the church with the wider culture, and the denomination’s cooperation with, and resistance to, colonialism and racism. Hence, the course provides a critical examination of the history. Alongside this approach, the course is simultaneously pastoral in its intent, focusing on the usefulness of Disciples history for understanding the denomination’s current contours, strengths, and areas of needed reform. The course explores the present functioning of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in its congregational, regional, general, and ecumenical expressions. An

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² In order to receive a certificate of completion, students must attend all sessions.

analysis of the theological roots and posture of the Disciples tradition (and Restoration traditions) is offered, as well as a discussion of the missional status, directions and projections of Disciples as a movement. This class is taught in English, although the student is permitted, if s/he chooses, to read the required readings in another language, if available.

Student Learning Outcomes

The larger purpose of this course is to nourish Disciples leaders for the church and the world. Hence, by successfully completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Chronicle, understand, and critique the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and be able to place themselves and their communities within this larger history;
2. Articulate the theological roots of the Disciples of Christ and expound on theological concepts and postures shaping the Disciples common witness today.
3. Explain distinctive theological features of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to laity;
4. Describe, and know how to operate effectively within the structures of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); and
5. Reframe critically, through an anti-racist lens, the way the Disciples story is told.

Expectations

In order to complete the course successfully and receive a certificate of completion or continuing education units, a student must:

1. Attend ALL class sessions. (CEUs will be given based on attendance.)
2. Complete the readings and be prepared to discuss them. The lectures and in-class discussions are based on the assumption that the participants have read the materials.
3. Participate in class lectures, presentations, and discussions. We are all teachers and learners.
4. Express personal experiences and perspectives in context with class materials.

Assignments and Evaluation

The intended goal of these assignments is to bring together a deepened understanding of Disciples history, polity, theology, and witness, and a personal self-reflection in light of this denominational understanding. All written assignments for students seeking certification are due on **Monday, September 13, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. (PST)**. There are two written assignments required for the successful completion of this course. The student may choose two (2) of the three (3) options listed here:

1. A timeline of Disciples history from its beginnings to the present. The timeline must include the student's own history as it relates to the larger Disciples story.
2. A short essay (4-6 pages) exploring three (3) key theological concepts or postures that have shaped and/or continue to shape Disciples identity and witness. The paper must include a personal reflection on how these ideas are relevant to the student's ministry and self-understanding as a Christian
3. Design a new program on ministry. The program must articulate how it reflects Disciples theological posture and witness, and describe how it fits within, and effectively

utilizes, the denominational structures (congregational, regional, general, and ecumenical expressions) as resources for the program of ministry.

Required Textbooks³

- Jha, Sandhya. 2009. *Room at the Table: Struggle for Unity and Equality in Disciples History*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009
- Osborn, Ronald E. 1979. *The Faith We Affirm: Basic Beliefs of Disciples of Christ*. St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 1979.
- Toulouse, Mark G., et.al. 2011. *Renewing Christian Unity: A Concise History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2011.

Required Articles⁴

- D.A. Foster, et.al., editors. 20014. *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Eerdmans, 2004): “Hispanics in the Movement” [pp. 395-399] & “African Americans in the Movement” [pp.11-15].
- “The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.” disciples.org. Revised July 2017. URL = <https://disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/TheDesign-1.pdf>
- Lee, Timothy,. 2012. “In View of Existing Conditions: A Brief History of the North American Pacific/Asian Disciples, 1891-2010 (From the Margins to the Mainstream), in *Discipliana* 71/1 (Spring): 6-28.
- D. Machado, “Kingdom Building in the Borderlands,” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*. Fortress Press, 1996: pp63-72.
- “Marks of the Faithful Regional Church”. disciples.org. Revised March 2007. URL = <https://disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/MarksofaFaithfulRegionalChurch2007.pdf>

³ The student is responsible for procuring/purchasing these books.

⁴ These articles and chapters of books either will be provided via email upon registration or are available for free online (simply click on link).