

Covenant between Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Sessions and Presbyterian Women in the Congregation

Background Information

In September 2017, the Board of Directors (Churchwide Coordinating Team or CCT) for Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc., approved a covenant for use by Presbyterian Women in the Congregation (PWC) and PC(USA) sessions. Participants in Presbyterian Women in the Congregation (PWC) have requested help from PW national leaders and the national office with navigating the relationship between PWCs and congregational sessions. These requests have been ongoing over many years, but have become more frequent in recent years. Questions and concerns center around local PW financial and program management. The attached PWC/Session covenant is an **optional tool** for sessions and PWCs that clarifies the relationship and provides accountability guidelines.

The PWC/Session covenant is modeled after the Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc.'s, Institutional Relationship Agreement (covenant) with the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The institutional agreement is affirmed every four years by the PC(USA) General Assembly.

This approved covenant includes input received from the Office of the General Assembly/Stated Clerk's office and the Presbyterian Mission Agency legal office.

For additional information, please contact the Presbyterian Women, Inc., offices in Louisville, Kentucky (844/797-2872, extension 5368).

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A. History

Presbyterian Women (sometimes “PW”) is the national women’s organization related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Its structure parallels that of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (“PC(USA)”) with coordinating teams at each judicatory or council level of the denomination (churchwide/General Assembly, synod, presbytery and congregation (session)). Any woman who is a member of a PC(USA) congregation or a clergy member of a PC(USA) presbytery is considered a Presbyterian Woman. Its members are, first and foremost, members of the PC(USA).

Presbyterian Women, through its many predecessor organizations, was created (over 200 years ago) to allow women to be actively involved in the mission and ministry of the denomination. This included serving in non-ordained leadership positions as missionaries and for women in the pews to commit themselves to “second mile” financial support of programs organized by the denomination and complimentary nongovernmental organizations, especially those programs that aided women and children in need.

Following the 1983 reunion of the former northern and southern streams which created the PC(USA), Presbyterian Women was organized, in 1988, around a single purpose:

Forgiven and freed, by God through Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit¹, we commit ourselves to

- nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study,
- support the mission of the church worldwide,
- work for justice and peace, and
- build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and witnesses to the promise of God’s kingdom.

¹ *empowered by the Holy Spirit* was added in 1991.

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Presbyterian Women and the PC(USA) have a long-standing partnership based on shared beliefs, complementary visions and commitments, common history, and a relationship of mutual respect and cooperation. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved an Institutional Relationship Agreement that was developed by Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc.,² and the Presbyterian Mission Agency. This agreement reflects the organizational changes that Presbyterian Women has undergone since 2009 which include incorporation.³

Presbyterian Women is incorporated at the churchwide/national level only. Presbyterian Women groups in the synod, presbytery and congregation generally exist as unincorporated mission programs of their corresponding councils. Presbyterian Women in the Congregation (“PWC”) relates to the session of the congregation where the group is organized as PW. PWC exists as a mission program of the session, which has the responsibility for directing the ministry of deacons, trustees and all organization of the congregation (*Book of Order*, G-3.02c). Because of this relationship with the council, PWCs use the council’s federal Employer Identification Number (“EIN”). Tax-exempt status stems from the PWC’s council’s inclusion in the PC(USA)’s federal group ruling.

B. Responsibilities of Presbyterian Women in the Congregation (PWC)

1. Operate under the direction of the Session and be guided by their policies and mission directives, including congregational mission and vision statements and rules for standard financial practices (*Book of Order*, G-3.02c);
2. Conduct all mission and ministry according to the PW Purpose;
3. Be faithful stewards of the money given to PW from throughout the denomination, whether that money is given for the general mission of the PC(USA), for ongoing work of PW, or for projects related to

² Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc. is the national or churchwide expression of PW. It is a federally tax-exempt (501(c)(3), Delaware membership corporation which is structured as an integrated auxiliary of the PC(USA).

³ A copy of the agreement can be found at <http://pma.pcusa.org/ministries/pw/about/#7>

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PW's Celebration Giving program, including Creative Ministries offerings;

4. Provide a detailed financial report to the session annually and more often if requested (*Book of Order*, G.3.0205);
5. Ensure a mutually beneficial partnership with the session for joint programming and mission opportunities in which the priorities of the church are served.
6. Honor the leadership (including programming decisions) of the session in the congregation where PW is organized.

C. Responsibilities of the Session

1. Support the Purpose of PW;
2. Seek ways to build tangible and mutually beneficial partnerships in which the mission priorities of the church are served;
3. Recognize that funds received by PW through its Celebration Giving programs (Mission Pledge, Creative Ministries offerings, Fellowship of the Least Coin, Together in Service projects, etc.) are donor restricted for that PW group or for PW national programs, either because of the nature of the solicitation made by the group or because of the intent of the donor which was expressed at the time the gift was made.
4. Ensure that PW funds, if managed transparently by the church, are readily accessible when requested;
5. Honor the leadership (including programming decisions) of the PWC coordinating team (or the leadership model of the PW group);
6. Support the mutually beneficial programming opportunities provided by PW that seek to encourage priorities in the church.

D. Accountability

PWC and the session will remain faithful to this covenant promise:

1. PWC and the session will strive to maintain open and transparent communication.
2. PWC will provide a report (both financial and programmatic) to the session annually, and more often as requested (*Book of Order*, G.3.0205).

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3. The session (or the congregation’s financial secretary, bookkeeper or treasurer) will, when applicable, provide regular and transparent accounting to PWC and ensure Presbyterian Women’s funds are accessible to the PWC treasurer or Presbyterian woman acting in this capacity.
4. Both the session and PWC will continue working together to find ways to strengthen the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) as they witness to the promise of God’s Kingdom.

Signatures

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Church Name

Session Representative and Date

PWC Moderator (or designated leader) and Date

Note: PWC and the session may want to insert terms here (for instance, when the covenant will be renewed).

Approved by the Presbyterian Women, Inc., Board of Directors (Churchwide Coordinating Team), September 3, 2017.