

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

# 2

### *presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## Is There a Witness in the Church?

*by Paul Detterman, Interim Executive Director, Presbyterians for Renewal*

“Evangelical” has lost its punch. Ask a dozen different people what the word means, and you will get thirteen different answers—many of which have far more to do with politics or a particular conservative worldview. Even among church people, “Evangelicals” are sometimes thought to be the nutty Christians who womp up emotions and call it worship, are easily swayed socio-political tangents, and form the core of the dreaded Conservative Right in contemporary American life.

Wrong on every count!

From before the time of the New Testament, evangelists were the people who carried good news. Christians evangelists brought the Greatest News of Jesus Christ. Throughout Christian history, it has been the evangelists (or evangelicals) who have called the Church back to its message and the joy of proclaiming, without a blush or flinch, that Jesus Christ is Lord and through him God wants an eternally abundant and amazing relationship with us. Only in the past few decades when the radical conservatives shanghaied the term “evangelical” for their own ends, and the liberal press believed them and wrote about it, have we lost the punch of our calling to evangelize the world with God’s Word and in God’s love.

This is important for us to realize at this moment in our history, because among members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) there has never been a better time to be a true evangelical—a bearer of the Great News of the gospel. This may sound strange to people who are feeling mocked, marginalized, maligned, or defeated in our current climate of confusion and hyperbolae, but it is true.

Jesus Christ has commissioned us to share the Good News, first to those closest to us, and then, in increasingly widening circles, throughout the world. For reasons too numerous to mention here, we

have come to assume that the people closest to us already know the gospel and, in their better moments, are living it out.

In the current PC(USA) ethos, we've been taught to be spooked and skittish at the thought of sharing our faith, afraid we might offend someone or, worse yet, might be asked questions we don't think we can answer. If we focus on "mission" at all it is through funded encouragement of extroverts in foreign service. Then, we are surprised when some of the people closest to us speak and act in un-Orthodox and even non-Christian ways. We have assumed the Good News has reached the people we were called to reach, by Providence or osmosis, and we have assumed far too much. Our mission field is at our door. An elder once said to me, "The great thing about being a Presbyterian is that you don't have to go looking for lost people—they can be sitting right next to you at Presbytery!"

Now there are stirrings among some of our Presbyterian siblings concerned with Orthodoxy and biblical faithfulness to abandon ship and seek the company of other like-minded people. That would be a comfortable and enticing option if it were not for two things; Christ's commission to share the Good News starting with people closest to us, and the reality that almost every other Western Protestant denomination is facing the same challenges we are—no matter how "faithful" they may appear.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not a lost cause. It is not a fraternity of faithless people or a hotbed of heresy. It is merely a reflection of our own spiritual neediness and our own Great Commission complacency. Bottom line, there's nothing wrong with the PC(USA), or right with any denominational alternative, that can't be traced to the condition of our own hearts.

The PC(USA) has been portrayed by some as a "liberal" denomination. But if this were true, why has one liberalizing amendment after another been voted down by super majorities of the presbyteries when the actual presbyters, the elders and pastors of the presbyteries of the church, had the chance to vote?

The PC(USA) has been portrayed by some as faithless. But the truth is that the Good News of Jesus Christ is being shared in thousands of congregations, large and small, in preaching and in teaching, and even more importantly, in the witness of lives transformed by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ—all of this unhindered by the family name. To paraphrase a wise old saying, the gospel works if we will only be serious about trying it!

We are currently working in a denominational structure that has allowed agendas other than the Good News of Jesus Christ to claim the eyes and ears of our people. We have let this happen. But the Acts of the Apostles, and the dynamic witness of the contemporary Church throughout the developing world should remind us that the power of the Holy Spirit, unleashed in lives obedient to Christ, can redeem cities, and nations, and even denominations without breaking a sweat.

**Article Two in a series, "Why Stay in the PC(USA)?"**  
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No alternative denominational identity will change our heart for God and refocus our witness on his Son. No name change alone will propel our people out of their complacent pews and into Kingdom work among the truly needy in God's world.

It is our personal responsibility to refocus our eyes, and the eyes of the people closest to us from scrutinizing the sheep to adoring the Shepherd. It is our personal calling to boldly and joyfully proclaim Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, victorious, returning, and reigning eternally. That is the message of our gospel hope—our evangelical witness—the Good News!

There has never been a better time to do this among Presbyterian people than right now. A serious dearth of leadership in all levels of our denomination can be cause for dismay if we look to the denomination to define and defend us. But the same dearth of leadership can be a God-given opportunity for believers to step forward and articulate faith with joy!

The recommendations resulting from the PUP report and the 2006 General Assembly have opened the door for close examination of every candidate for ordination at every local level of the PC(USA)! Hooray! We've just been invited to ask the essential questions and help earnest people discover the life-changing answers.

The only thing that can hold back the spiritual renewal and reassembling of the PC(USA) is a whining or apathetic spirit on the part of people who are commissioned to go and make disciples: baptizing, instructing, and reminding each other of every promise God ever made and of the hope we have in his Son alone. Bitterness, resignation, apathy, and retreat are fruit of the Enemy. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, is there a witness in the Church??