

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

# 6

### *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.

## Money, Money, Money...

*by Jim Cahalan, Elder, First Presbyterian Church, Edmond, OK*

Who controls local congregation finances?

Many congregations express significant concern that money they contribute to the denomination is not being used in a manner and for purposes their congregation supports. Or worse, they fear that the money they contribute is being used to further objectives directly *contrary* to the wishes of the congregation. Although a congregation should be aware and concerned about where their contributions go, this need not be a deciding factor if that congregation is considering whether or not to stay in ministry within the PC(USA).

The subject of congregational contributions to the denomination can become confusing, because the words “*per capita*” get quickly inserted into the conversation. And *per capita* can mean different things in different locations. In some presbyteries, congregations are assigned *per capita* payments that include apportionments for presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly. In other presbyteries, only the General Assembly *per capita* is specifically assigned to congregations. And, in still other presbyteries, there is no assigned *per capita* apportionment at all.

Regardless of their presbytery, however, all sessions need to be aware of G-10.0102 (i) in the Book of Order, which reads that the session has the responsibility and power:

to establish the annual budget, determine the distribution of the church’s benevolences, and order offerings for Christian purposes, providing full information to the congregation of its decisions in such matters...;

That exact wording has been in the Book of Order at least since 1991-1992. This responsibility of sessions to determine what disposition should be made of church benevolences has been supported by several Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) cases over the years.

**Article Six in a series, “Why Stay in the PC(USA)?”**  
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On July 15, 2003, the General Assembly PJC issued a *unanimous* opinion that:

Presbyterian sessions have the right to withhold payment of per-capita apportionments to support presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly of the PC(USA).

That opinion reaffirmed a 1991 ruling that:

a church may neither be compelled to pay, nor punished for failure to pay, any amounts pursuant to such (per capita) plan.

There have also been several attempts in recent years to have the General Assembly amend the Book of Order via overtures and/or commissioners resolutions that proposed changes to the voluntary nature of payment of *per capita*. However, these proposed changes have all been defeated at General Assembly.

It would be naive not to recognize that different presbyteries treat receipt of benevolences from particular congregations differently. Most presbyteries recognize the responsibility granted by G-10.0102 (i). In some rare cases punitive actions have been taken, although such actions have been overturned when tested by a PJC.

Support of the General Assembly, synod and presbytery mission budgets are, of course, also voluntary, and for those benevolences a session has the additional option of designating its contributions to a specific function or program. Again, some higher governing bodies attempt to influence sessions to contribute even to the mission budget, but such actions are not supported by polity or by PJC decisions.

Every session has the responsibility to faithfully steward the funds entrusted to them by their congregations. They are expected to recognize the high moral obligation based on the grace and call of God to participate fully in the covenant community, and to further the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200). They may resolve to willingly and cheerfully contribute --- to the extent their conscience will allow --- the full *per capita* apportionment determined by their presbytery. If the session members' consciences do not allow such full support, however, sessions have the right -- and indeed the responsibility -- to redirect or designate their benevolences in a manner that they deem appropriate.

Because a session retains this degree of ethical responsibility and personal oversight over where the congregation's particular contributions are directed, concern about denominational use of benevolences need not be a factor as a congregation determines whether to stay in ministry within the PC(USA). Financial concerns ought to apply only in extraordinary situations in which Presbyterian polity is not being properly applied.