

Per Capita - The Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund

What is Per Capita?

Per capita funding is how Presbyterians mutually share the costs of coming together to discern the Spirit's leading for the future.

- It is how Presbyterians are trained to become better elders and ministers.
- It is how Presbyterians discern God's call in their lives.
- It is how Presbyterians participate in the life of the wider church by serving on GA committees and commissions.
- It is how Presbyterians participate in the life of the Church universal as we commit ourselves to work and live in fellowship with "all persons in every nation" (*Book of Order*, G-4.0101)

The Westminster Confession says, "All believers are, therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinances of the Christian religion where they are already established and to contribute by their prayers, gifts and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the whole earth" (6.058).

Per capita is a fundamental way in which all of the nearly 11,000 congregations and governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are connected and participate in the work of the wider church.

Because it is rooted in the connectional and covenantal nature of the Presbyterian Church, as affirmed by the ordination vows taken by elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, per capita could be called the Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund.

The official definition: "Per capita is an opportunity for all communicant members of the Presbyterian church through the governing bodies to participate equally, responsibly, and interdependently by sharing the cost of coordination and evaluation of mission; and of performing ecclesiastical, legislative, and judicial functions that identify a Reformed Church, while at the same time strengthening the sense of community among all Presbyterians" (*GA Minutes*, Part I, 1995).

In essence: Per capita is a set amount of money (apportionment) per member that congregations pay to the larger Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Said another way, it is a Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund — part of the glue that holds Presbyterians together. Because every Presbyterian shares in the benefit of the PC(USA)'s system of government, the expenses associated with coordinating and performing the functions of that system should be shared by everyone as well.

How old is per capita?

The first-known mention of per capita dates back to 1734 in a letter to ministers!

Who pays per capita, and how much?

Congregations (through their sessions) pay an annual amount of money per church member — per capita apportionment — to their respective presbyteries.

The per capita amount requested from a congregation is a combined total of requests from that congregation's presbytery, the synod in which the presbytery is located and the General Assembly — based on their respective budgets for the coming year(s).

Our total per capita amount is \$41.71 per member. That amount breaks down as follows:

Albany Presbytery's per capita rate is \$32.22 per member
Synod of the Northeast's per capita rate is \$3.70 per member
General Assembly's per capita rate is \$5.79 per member

Why is Per Capita important?

Per capita brings Presbyterians together — literally!

Presbyterians are connected in many ways, including our [church government](#). We believe we discern best what God is calling us to do when we gather as governing bodies, “seek[ing] together to find and represent the will of Christ” (*Book of Order* G-4.0301). Per capita dollars pay for the costs of holding a [General Assembly](#) — including paying for the travel, room and board of commissioners and advisory delegates, several of whom would not be able to afford these expenses on their own.

Per capita makes it possible for Presbyterians to govern ourselves the way we do.

Presbyterians have a form of government built upon shared power and mutual accountability as we seek together to find and represent the will of Christ. By providing the primary means through which commissioners and advisory delegates can gather to do their work, per capita dollars help to undergird our governance system.

Our Constitution provides a moral and theological compass that builds community and calls us to Christian faithfulness in gratitude to God.

Per capita makes possible our effort for visible unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

The PC(USA), as with other faith traditions and denominations, is but a small part of the one church of Jesus Christ. We affirm that God’s call is for the church to be one.

Per capita makes it possible for us to maintain our historical awareness.

Our historical heritage helps us make informed decisions for the future. The Presbyterian Historical Society is our national archives and historical research center. It collects, preserves and shares the history of the American Presbyterian and Reformed tradition.

What does the Presbytery’s \$32.22 fund?

Congregations of Albany Presbytery support the presbytery through two income sources: ecclesiastical (which is funded through per capita) and mission (which is funded through mission giving).

The ecclesiastical budget supports the administrative and personnel expenses related to the coordination and evaluation of the presbytery’s mission and the necessary ecclesiastical, legislative and judicial functions of the PCUSA. Ecclesiastical costs include the following: operation and governance, Presbytery Committees required by the Book of Order, Administrative, Office and, ecumenical partnerships expenses. Personnel positions include the General Presbyter, the GP Administrative Assistant, the Stated Clerk and the Stated Clerk Administrative Assistant, Financial Manager and other expenses related to this staff.

The mission budget supports God’s mission with our congregations and beyond. The mission budget will support local, national, and international mission work including ministries of compassion, advocacy, discipleship, education and evangelism. Mission costs include the following:

What does the Synod’s \$3.70 fund?

The Synod’s Administrative budget, which includes: the operating expenses of Synod committees, personnel costs and capital expenses related to the office space rent.

What does the General Assembly's \$5.79 fund?

Here is what Per Capita funds at the General Assembly level:

General Assembly meetings — planning for General Assemblies and other related gatherings through the [GA Meeting Service](#)

Permanent and special GA committees and commissions — staffing, training and meeting costs for the:

[Church Leadership Connection](#) — a Web-based matching and referral system for all Presbyterian church leaders

[Immigration issues](#) — communicates with presbyteries, synods, PC(USA) entities and ecumenical agencies on immigration issues and policies; offers advice and counsel to presbyteries and pastors whose members have immigration issues or questions

[Presbyterian Historical Society](#) — collects, preserves and shares information relevant to American Presbyterianism and encourages appreciation of the church's heritage

[Constitutional services](#) — maintains judicial and legislative services required by the PC(USA) Constitution; helps to interpret the Constitution

[Moderator of the General Assembly](#) — coordinates the schedule and ministry of the GA Moderator and Vice-Moderator

Communications — coordinates development and implementation of the electronic system used by GA commissioners and everyone else to access GA business; maintains the [OGA Web site](#); coordinates communication pieces from the Stated Clerk, GA Moderator, and other areas of OGA to the PC(USA) and beyond

PC(USA) statistics — preparation of annual statistics that include the number of congregations, number of church members, summary of finances and more

[Standard ordination exams](#) — preparation, administration and grading of ordination exams

GA publications — publication and distribution of the [Book of Order](#) and [The Book of Confessions](#), the *GA Minutes*, and other GA-related reports, studies, and publications

Leadership development — includes such items as the annual polity conference, [national elders conference](#), moderators' conference, conference for committees on ministry/committee on preparation for ministry/seminaries and much more

[Middle governing body relations](#) — connecting with presbyteries and synods to coordinate the church's work

PC(USA)'s participation in the ecumenical world — [coordinates the ecumenical responsibilities of the OGA and the Stated Clerk](#); extends the church's mission efforts and our work for peace and justice far beyond what we can do by ourselves and promotes Christian unity includes the [National Council of Churches of Christ](#), [World Council of Churches](#) and the [World Alliance of Reformed Churches](#)

[Office of the General Assembly](#) — one of six agencies of the PC(USA) and under the direction of the Stated Clerk, OGA provides for the overall coordination of work of the GA between meetings and assists the Stated Clerk in carrying out the duties assigned to the Clerk by the GA

A portion of the activities of the [General Assembly Council \(GAC\) executive director's office](#) — includes GAC meetings, advisory and advocacy committees, task forces, legal services and communication

What happens if a presbytery cannot or will not pay its per capita to the General Assembly?

The PC(USA)'s Constitution does not mandate the payment of per capita by congregations. At the same time, the Constitution provides no provision on the part of congregations (sessions) to withhold per capita as a form of protest.

If a presbytery has a congregation within its bounds that is withholding per capita because of insufficient funds or protest, the presbytery is still obligated to pay per capita, as funds are available.