



Presbyterian Women Groups in PC(USA) Churches Seeking Dismissal— The National Task Group Response

In response to three items of new business brought to the 2012

Business Meeting of Presbyterian Women in the PC(USA) regarding women who wish to remain in relationship with PW when their congregation leaves the PC(USA), a national task group appointed by Mary Jorgenson, PW national moderator, created a report for the PW Churchwide Coordinating Team. This information piece is condensed from that report. For more information, visit the Presbyterian Women web site, www.presbyterianwomen.org.

Introduction

PW's articles of incorporation, bylaws, covenant with the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and the *Presbyterian Women Manual* speak to the relationship between PW groups and women in congregations that are not part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Because some denominations do not have women's organizations, Bible study resources, and strong women's mission programs, many former PC(USA) members active in PW groups are seeking a way to remain active in Christian mission with other women. In many areas of the country, there is no viable alternative to Presbyterian Women. Women who are no longer PC(USA) members can remain in relationship with Presbyterian Women.

Presbyterian Women

Any woman or man who supports the PW Purpose, including the specific phrases representing the PC(USA), "will strengthen the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (the "Church"); supporting the mission of the Church worldwide," is welcome and encouraged to participate in all activities. The PW Manual states: "PW members are those who choose to participate in or be supportive of Presbyterian

Women in any way." In congregations where PW groups include women from other faiths and denominations, those women may be involved in all activities and in certain leadership positions. The ecumenical edition of the *PW/Horizons* Bible study is an excellent resource for any Bible study group. Anyone who supports Celebration Giving and Together in Service programs may participate. Should women in a congregation that has left the PC(USA) wish to remain in community and meet within their new congregation, they are welcome to use PW resources, but they are not to consider themselves members of PW. PW groups are to be formed only in the denomination's congregations.

Leadership Positions

Though PW participation is open to all who support the purpose, the covenant between the organization and the PC(USA) Mission Agency Board reads, "PW is a not-for-profit national women's organization related to the PC(USA). It's members are, first and foremost, members of the PC(USA)" (item IIA). The bylaws state, "Voting representatives must be members of the Church and actively involved in a Presbyterian Women group" (3-3a), and "All Directors [CCT or officers] must be members of the Church and must be actively involved in a Presbyterian Women's group" (5.2c).

Therefore, at the national level, voting representatives and board members must be members of the PC(USA). While it is not explicitly stated in the bylaws that search committee members must be PC(USA) members they too are to be denomination members. According to bylaws, all elected leaders at the PW in the synod (PWS) and PW in the presbytery (PWP) levels must be members of the denomination. At the congregational level,

PC(USA) members must hold the moderator, vice moderator and treasurer positions. Also, at least two-thirds of the congregation coordinating team must be members of the denomination.

At the PWC level, appointed leaders, including circle leader, special event coordinator, and mission interpretation representative, do not need to be members of the PC(USA). Each PWC group is able to expand the structure of its coordinating team and be flexible so that it is most effective in its work, but the leaders specifically mentioned above must be Denomination members. At the PWP and PWS levels, non-Denomination participants may be appointed to specific positions, with specific responsibilities.

Relationships with Non-PC(USA) Groups

Women whose congregations have left the PC(USA) are welcome in PW groups. Those women do need to affirm the PW Purpose and to support the denomination's work. PWC and PWP groups are encouraged to continue to invite women from those congregations to all PW events. However, if women whose congregations have joined other denominations wish to remain active in PW, their new denominational focus and concerns are not to be brought to PW events. They are not to undermine the PW Purpose or the activities of the groups with which they participate.

Financial Responsibilities

If any of those groups have funds that were collected with specific PW uses in the solicitation of the funds or in the receipt of them (donor restrictions), including funds for the General Mission Pledge, Birthday Offering, Thank Offering, leadership development funds, Least Coin, Together in Service projects), the PWCs must honor those donor-restricted purposes and remit the donor restricted funds to the PWP treasurer or any other appropriate recipient of donor-restricted funds. PWP treasurers receiving donor-restricted funds must use or remit the funds in a manner consistent with the donor restriction. Funds collected for congregational and PWC use through events such as rummage sales and bake sales may be used as determined in the negotiations between the departing congregation and the presbytery and their respective PWC and PWP groups.

Conclusion

The energy and encouragement of PW members needs to be foremost with those women who are part of PW. Members should strengthen and develop leaders within PW but be open and welcoming to women who seek Christian community and who support PW mission and programming. We stand by our Purpose and organizational documents, respecting organizational limitations and requirements.

PW Purpose

Forgiven and freed by God in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, 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 to build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and witnesses to the promise of God's kingdom.