

Horizons

July/August 2004

THE PRICE OF VOICE AND VOTE

**An in-depth look at the influence and status of
Presbyterian Women at the presbytery level**

SUPPLEMENT TO *HORIZONS*, THE MAGAZINE FOR PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

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The purpose of *Horizons* magazine is the same as the purpose of our publisher, Presbyterian Women:

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
- to support the mission of the church worldwide
- to work for justice and peace
- 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

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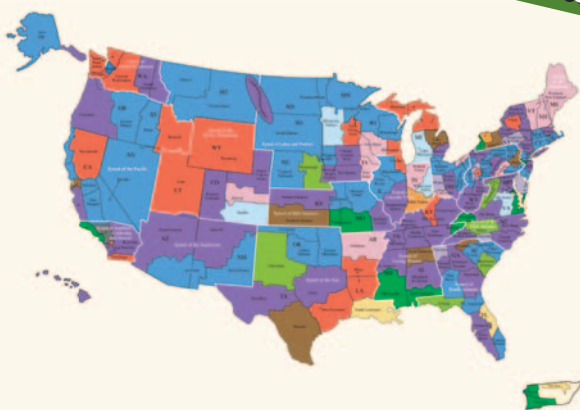


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About the Map

Pull-out Map Poster



The pull-out poster in the center of this supplement is a map that details voice and vote at the presbytery level. Information came from the stated clerk of each presbytery, except where indicated. Submit new or corrected information to Leah Bradley, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396; Lbradley@ctr.pcusa.org. To purchase additional copies of this resource, contact Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS), 800/524-2612 and ask for HZN-04-230; \$4 each, plus shipping and handling.

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Women of the Church
(Presbyterian Church, U.S.)



United Presbyterian Women
(United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.)



**PRESBYTERIAN
WOMEN**

The Price of Voice and Vote

BY LEAH ELLISON BRADLEY

As any Presbyterian will tell you, the best conversations happen in hallways—and parking lots and bathrooms and hotel lounges—any space that’s adjacent to a place where Presbyterians conduct business.

One of those hallway conversations prompted this article. Beth Snyder serves as moderator for Presbyterian Women (PW) in the Synod of Lincoln Trails. She is also a member of PW’s national staff and my coworker. One afternoon, I passed Beth in the stretch of hallway that connects our offices and heard her grumble, which prompted me to ask what was wrong. She shared with me the disappointing news that PW in her home presbytery (Ohio Valley) just lost voice and vote at presbytery council meetings.

After additional conversations with Beth and interviews with other members of Ohio Valley Presbytery, I learned that PW’s position on the presbytery council, which granted PW voice and vote at council meetings and presbytery meetings, was eliminated as part of a reorganization of the presbytery. “This action erases decades of recognition of the significant role Presbyterian Women has played and continues to play in support and interpretation of the mission of the church,” Jane Parker Huber wrote in a newsletter article for PW in Ohio Valley Presbytery.

Apparently, the loss of voice and vote for Presbyterian Women at the presbytery level is an increasingly common occurrence these days. Many times councils and/or presbyteries eliminate voice and vote due to restructuring, reorganization or the simple streamlining of presbytery business. Add to that the number of

“Frankly, I am amazed that there would be any question of Presbyterian Women not having full participation!”

—Carla White, stated clerk,
Cimarron Presbytery

Sarah E. Dickson



Sarah E. Dickson became the first woman ordained in the PCUSA as an elder in 1930.

presbyteries who never have granted PW the privilege of voice and vote at presbytery and/or council meetings, and the landscape of PW involvement at the presbytery level looks more like the church our mothers grew up in than the PC(USA) of the 21st century.

In an effort to determine who has voice and vote, who doesn't, who lost it and who never had it, I interviewed PW synod moderators, PW presbytery moderators, executive presbyters and stated clerks in each presbytery in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Surprisingly, responses sometimes varied within a presbytery—a PW presbytery moderator reported one thing, while the presbytery's stated clerk or executive presbyter reported something else. So I chose to use responses received from presbytery stated clerks—the

"The Presbytery of Charlotte gives the PW moderator voice in council and at presbytery meetings. However, the moderator does not have a vote in either place. I can report that the moderator of PW is clearly offended by not being granted vote."

—Sam Roberson, general presbyter and stated clerk, Charlotte Presbytery

secretary/parliamentarian and official "final word" at the presbytery level—to create the charts and reports of voice and vote status for Presbyterian Women that accompany this article.

On the eve of the 75th anniversary of the PC(USA)'s first ordination of a woman elder (1930) and the 50th anniversary of the PC(USA)'s first ordination of a woman minister (1956), what does the loss of voice and vote say about the influence and status of Presbyterian Women today and in the future?

What Does It Mean to Have Voice and Vote?

The question of who has voice and vote in any given presbytery is more complicated than it might sound. First a distinction must be made between voice and vote at a presbytery meeting (a gathering of elders and ministers from congregations in a designated area of the United States) and a presbytery council (a smaller group of representatives in a presbytery). The two privileges in question provide the rights and responsibilities described in their titles—voice means the privilege of speaking at a meeting; vote means the privilege to vote on an issue or decision that is up for debate.

Having voice and vote at presbytery council does not necessarily mean one has voice and vote at a presbytery meeting, and vice versa. In addition, the significance of voice and vote varies from presbytery to presbytery. In some presbyteries, the majority of decisions are made at the presbytery meeting. Other presbyteries relegate certain decisions to the presbytery council meetings, which have smaller quorums and are easier to navigate than the potentially unwieldy meetings of the presbytery.

And then there's the question of ordination. Interview questions sent to stated clerks in all 173 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) netted a wide array of opinions on the subject of voice and vote. John C. Huff, stated clerk of Blackhawk Presbytery said, "The PW moderator has voice and vote at presbytery meetings and presbytery council, with no requirements except being the PW moderator."

Margaret Towner



In the PCUSA, Margaret Towner was the first woman ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in 1956.

Although the PW moderator has voice and vote in Detroit Presbytery, their stated clerk, Edward Koster, pointed out that "No one can have a vote at a presbytery meeting unless [he or she is] ordained, according to the *Book of Order*. If the moderator of Presbyterian Women is not an ordained elder, she may have voice but not vote." Several of the stated clerks I interviewed echoed Ed's opinion, often citing G-9.0101 in the *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, "The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by representative bodies composed of presbyters, both elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. These governing bodies shall be called session, presbytery,

Katharine McAfee Parker



One Formidable Foremother

By Jane Parker Huber

My mother, Katharine McAfee Parker, was active in Presbyterian Women at the national level, mostly between the late 1930s and 1958 (when two denominations united to form the United Presbyterian Church, USA). [At her father's urging] she attended the 1929 General Assembly in St. Paul, Minnesota, when the General Assembly voted to send to presbyteries the proposal to allow the ordination of women as elders.

My mother served on the Board of Foreign Missions as the representative of Presbyterian Women. Margaret Shannon was the staff person on that board assigned to work with women. Together they supported the idea of having PW groups at every judicatory level (congregation, presbytery and synod) and it was during those years that a national organization was proposed and approved in the PCUSA (also known as the "northern stream").

I remember how pleased they were to have enough women elders to serve Communion at the 1946 Grand Rapids National Meeting of United Presbyterian Women (UPW), even though a male minister had to administer the sacrament because they couldn't get permission for the Reverend Tamaki Uemura to do so, even though she was fully authorized in her home country of Japan. As it turned out Tamaki didn't arrive in time for the Communion service, but her appearance on stage at the National Meeting was the most memorable moment of that event.

As the women's movement gained recognition and momentum following World War II, my mother joined many women of her generation in whole-hearted support of new roles for women in the church and in society at large. She understood and supported my concern for inclusive language and recognized the price many women paid for asserting their right to equal pay for equal work and reproductive freedom. She was delighted when women could be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, even if it was a quarter century after women's ordination as elders.

My mother was a college student during the suffragette movement in the United States and always grateful that she came from a family that valued education for women as well as for men. Her upbringing gave her a worldview that stretched beyond her community and nation. In fact, she and my father left for a term as missionaries to China on their wedding night!

In her middle years, my mother welcomed students from around the world and helped them appreciate the value of their home countries and the opportunities available to them. In later years she mentored younger women who were facing motherhood, careers and all the challenges of an exploding, ever-expanding society.

It occurs to me that my mother would have been very much in favor of PW having voice and vote at presbytery meetings and on presbytery councils, although it would not have occurred to most women in the 1930s that such a privilege was possible.

synod, General Assembly." There is no such constitutional requirement for voice and on presbytery councils, except in rare circumstances.

When asked for his official response to such disparate responses regarding who may or may not vote, Mark Tammen, director of the Department of Constitutional Services in the Office of the General Assembly, commented that he per-

sonally believes the answer is clear, but added "there is no authoritative interpretation." After reviewing some of the replies from stated clerks across the denomination, Mark observed that Michael Lukens, stated clerk of Winnebago Presbytery, offered the most helpful statement on this issue. When asked, "Must a PW moderator be an elder in order to vote in your presbytery?" Michael replied,

"Actually, I would say no. Since [our presbytery has] no formal provision

"PW in Boise Presbytery has voice and vote both in presbytery and council [meetings]. We recognize Presbyterian Women as the vital force in Presbyterianism that they are and consider PW as full partners in all things."

—Joey Mills, stated clerk,
Boise Presbytery

“I cannot say enough about the contribution the PW makes to Salem Presbytery. They provide effective and careful training and leadership development for PW and the presbytery benefits, since many of those women are tapped for leadership in the presbytery structure. Often a former leader in Presbyterian Women will be elected to the Presbytery Nominating Committee. Her extensive contacts and understanding of the gifts required for leadership enrich the whole presbytery.”

—Ike Kennerly, general presbyter,
Salem Presbytery

that the moderator of PW must be an elder, we would presently seat any PW moderator. It is hypothetical until such a challenge would be made.”

Alaska Presbytery has a creative and generous approach to this sticky situation. According to Guy Warren, stated clerk, “We have dealt with this situation by giving vote to the PW moderator or a person designated by the PW moderator. That

designated person must be an ordained minister or elder.”

Among PW at the presbytery level, another approach and growing trend is to amend PW bylaws and the requirements for a PW moderator in the presbytery. Jeanne Simpson, moderator of PW in Greater Atlanta Presbytery, said, “We changed our bylaws to make sure that the moderator and vice-moderator of our PW in the Presbytery Coordinating Team (PWPCT) are ordained elders or ministers. Actually, most of the PWPCT’s in our synod have the same rule now, since the moderator is a voting member of coordinating council.”

Although this removes any barriers to voice and vote at presbytery and council meetings, not all women of Greater Atlanta Presbytery view this as a positive change. Bettie J. Durrah, a former PW moderator in the congregation, presbytery and synod, and deployed staff member of the Women’s Ministries Program Area for nine years, offers an impassioned argument against

this change to PW bylaws. “In my estimation, requiring the moderator of Presbyterian Women to be an elder is a step backward for the women’s movement. There are many good women leaders who, for one reason or another, have not been chosen as elders in their congregation. If we are so busy trying to measure up to the male model, we lose women’s gifts. The ongoing work of PW takes place in contexts other than the presbytery. Are we willing to disenfranchise women with their special gifts, skills and leadership just to get a seat of perceived power? Can we use the power of voice to persuade, impact, change direction and inform? Would not our voice be tantamount to a position?”

PW program coordinator, Ann Ferguson, commented that the question of ordination is a modern day phenomenon, since “women who first crossed over into voting roles in the church (national boards, committees and other positions of leadership) didn’t have to be

A Successful Argument

Mary Jorgenson, PW moderator in the Synod of Mid-America, sought and earned voice and vote for PW in Heartland Presbytery. These are the arguments she made in her overture:

1. It should never have been taken away. PW had voice and vote in council meetings in Heartland Presbytery until soon after reunion, when the presbytery also reorganized. Taking away representation for no other reason than to downsize a meeting was unconscionable.
2. The presbytery should follow the model of General Assembly Council, which restored representation to the PW moderator of the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women.
3. PW represents more than half of the members of the presbytery, not just in numbers, but in true mission work and second-mile giving.

When asked what advice she has for Presbyterian Women seeking voice and vote at the presbytery or synod level, Hazel Fuhrmeister, former moderator of PW, said, “The key is to be positive. Emphasize the strength of PW, how much we can do for each congregation, presbytery and synod. Make sure everyone knows that we are a solid part of the church, members in good standing who contribute in many different ways. Plus, we have access to a unique network, with excellent communication channels at every level. Be patient, remembering that change is slow and takes a great deal of quiet persistence.”

ordained elders or clergy in order to vote because at that time ordination wasn't even an option for them."

Why All the Fuss?

The privilege of voice and vote for Presbyterian Women at its highest office—the moderator of the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women (CCT/PW)—is still fairly new. Prior to reunion and the formation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1983, the organizations of women in both predecessor denominations (United Presbyterian Women [UPW] and Women of the Church [WOC]) had voting membership on their councils. The proposed design for Presbyterian Women, developed in 1986, included voice and vote for its moderator on the General Assembly Council. Four years later, still lacking voice and vote, the 202nd General Assembly (1990) designated the Moderator of Presbyterian Women as an advisory member of the General Assembly Council, granting her voice, but no vote.

Following a restructure of General Assembly Council entities in 1993, the 206th General Assembly (1994) adopted the revised Organization for Mission designating one advisory member for Presbyterian Women on General Assembly Council (GAC) who "shall have voice without vote in council, but voice with vote in an assigned committee of the General Assembly Council," and adopted the Revised General Assembly Council Manual of Operations seating the moderator of Presbyterian Women on the National Ministries Division Committee of the GAC.

Noting that many presbyteries and synods follow GAC's example regarding membership and structure, Presbyterian Women renewed its pursuit of voice and vote on the



The first ordained women elders to serve as commissioners to the General Assembly, 1931, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—from left to right: Mina L. Silliman, Lena Jennings, Belle Roberts, Helen Logsdon and Mary Yeilding

General Assembly Council and the following referral came to the 207th General Assembly (1995).

"This referral from the General Assembly Council recommends that the council's membership be increased to include the moderator of Presbyterian Women. To do so requires the amendment of G-13.0202a by adding the following paragraph: '(6) The moderator of Presbyterian Women.'

"At the present a member of Presbyterian Women sits on the General Assembly Council as an advisory member and shall have voice without vote in the General Assembly Council, but voice with vote in an assigned committee of the General Assembly Council.

"The General Assembly Council believes that, at this time, there is a critical need for advocacy for and empowerment of women. Voice and vote on the General Assembly Council for the Presbyterian Women's moderator will enable Presbyterian Women to

be full partners in the life and work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" (Minutes, 1995, Part I, p. 360).

During the year that followed, advocates of Presbyterian Women worked to promote and interpret the issues related to voice and vote for the moderator of PW before presbyteries voted on this amendment. Their arguments were simple.

"Prior to restructuring, we had a representative council and PW had a seat on the council with voice and vote, but that was not the most effective way for PW to be seen and heard, or to exert their influence in any significant way. The current PW moderator has helped to make PW much more visible in the presbytery. She was offered space in the presbytery resource center for materials and displays; using the presbytery Web site to announce events, and using other means of communication to increase awareness. Having voice or vote is not a particularly important factor, but communicating the story of PW and being seen and known has increased PW's effectiveness in this presbytery."

—Janet Schlenker, stated clerk,
Denver Presbytery

“PW is integrated into everything [in this presbytery] and has a specific seat on council. They generate some of our best programs.”

— James H. Bennett,
interim executive presbyter,
Southern New England Presbytery

“Presbyterian Women is an organization with a unique identity and partnership in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), providing leadership, experience, commitment, educational channels, uncounted hours of volunteer time and six million dollars in combined undesignated and designated giving.

PW then, at every level—congregation, presbytery, synod and General Assembly—provides support and interpretation for the mission of the church. Restoring voice and vote on the General Assembly Council for the Moderator of Presbyterian Women will ensure the continuing communication between PW, the GAC and the three ministry divisions” (Memo from the CCT/PW to PW synod moderators, August 25, 1995).

As anticipated, there was some resistance to this amendment. Hazel Fuhrmeister, moderator of PW (1994–1997), recalls “Some GAC members spoke about the current workload of the moderator of PW,

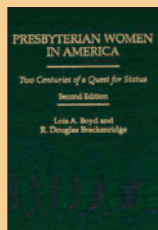


expressing concern that she would not be able to handle the responsibility of voting in addition to her other duties. There was also concern

Know Your History!

The following resources can help you learn more about the history of women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

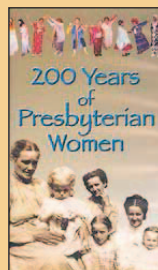
A Guide to Women's Archival Resources in the Presbyterian Historical Society, by Kristin L. Gleeson & Frederick J. Heuser. \$20.00



Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status, Second Edition, by Lois A. Boyd & R. Douglas Brackenridge. \$55.00

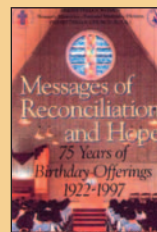
To order, contact The Presbyterian Historical Society, 425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia PA 19147; 215/627-1852; www.history.pcusa.org.

200 Years of Presbyterian Women; 25 minute video and 12-page leader's guide



PWR-00-210,
\$24.95*

Bound Together in Love: The Creation of Presbyterian Women, 1978–1988 by Barbara McDonald
PWR-99-203, \$3*



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PWR-00-507, \$16*

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that granting the vote to PW would make other organizations feel entitled to vote, too.” Presbyterian Women reminded the GAC that PW was (and still is) unique within the PC(USA) and PW was part of the original organization of the denomination, approved by the General Assembly and lodged in what was the Women’s Ministry Unit.

“It was certainly unexpected when the 207th GA (1995, Cincinnati) Committee on Church Polity voted against recommending [voice and vote for PW],” Hazel continued. “This was a direct result of voting by YADS (Youth Advisory Delegates voting in committee but not on the floor of the assembly). They [appeared to be] carefully instructed and fed their lines, such as ‘Why should a special interest organization like PW have a vote?’ This was an easy one to answer—

you bet we have a special interest; it’s the mission of the PC(USA)!

“During the debate, it was wonderful to hear several speakers endorse the work of PW in the face of some opposition. There was excitement when several commissioners (including some illustrious Presbyterians) spoke on our behalf, including the General Assembly Moderator, Marj Carpenter.”

Susan Andrews, pastor of Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland, and Moderator of the 215th General Assembly (2003) made the official motion to add “the moderator of PW” to the list of GAC members. When asked about her experience of PW, Susan said, “I continue to believe—as I did when I made the motion—that PW representation on boards and presbytery entities is important. To call PW ‘a special interest group’ is to neither honor the history or the

“Several years ago, presbytery policy was for the PW moderator to have an automatic seat on council. This was changed because no other group received an automatic seat on council and presbytery felt that women were well represented on council and within presbytery. It is because of her own merits and contribution to presbytery that the current PW moderator is a member of council, not based on an automatic seat for the PW moderator.”

—Fred Feth, stated clerk,
Wyoming Presbytery

present reality of these faithful servants. Not only is representation the right thing for entities that have a strong PW presence, it’s also the smart thing to do. Presbyterian Women brings a breadth of experience, wisdom, passion for mission and love for the church that can only enrich the overall leadership of our governing bodies.”

Susan Andrews



In Her Own Words

By Susan Andrews, Moderator, 215th General Assembly

As I’ve traveled across the church this year, I’ve met many members of Presbyterian Women—most of them intimately involved in the leadership of their congregations and presbyteries, as well as PW. There is honest concern in many places about how to keep PW strong, and a real willingness among the women I met to be creative and flexible in reshaping PW for the 21st century. The challenge of reaching younger women and working women continues to be central to the future of this valuable organization within our denomination. But even in churches where there is not an official PW organization, there are women’s groups and Bible Study groups that connect, inspire and equip the female members of our denominational family.

During my year as Moderator, I’ve also seen and experienced the vital ministry that PW continues to offer through mission, education and leadership training. I saw mission projects, both locally and globally, funded by the Thank Offering (Including Health Ministries) and other PW funds, and was able to celebrate the abundant life that continues to spring from the second mile giving of Presbyterian Women.

One of my earliest memories of church is crawling around under the pews of some Presbyterian Church in Wisconsin or Pennsylvania, while my mother stood up front leading a presbyterial meeting. The strength, joy and worshipful energy of those women helped start me on my own journey of faith. I thank God for all the Presbyterian women who have nurtured me, encouraged me and modeled faithfulness for me over the years.

Sylvia Washer



In Her Own Words

By Sylvia Washer, executive presbyter, Mission Presbytery

One thing that amazes me is how few women clergy realize and appreciate the advocacy role PW and its predecessors had in opening doors for them. In fact, many clergywomen seem to discount PW and want to be at arm's length from the organization.

When I served in New Covenant Presbytery, our Committee on Women's Concerns realized how many women were entering seminary and how few churches ever even had seen a woman in the pulpit. So we asked the presbytery to designate a Sunday in October when each church would be encouraged to invite a woman to preach. Our committee also offered to provide women preachers and pay all related expenses. We recruited a group of laywomen who came for a training day on preaching a sermon—the training was so successful, this continued for a number of years. I think it opened the door for some churches to consider a woman as pastor. When I realize this happened just 25 years ago, I am amazed at how [recent these changes for women still are].

PW's influence in the church has certainly changed as more and more women have become ministers, officers and leaders in all arenas of the church's life. There is no question that PW and its predecessors paved the way for this change. When doors began to open a crack, women who PW had trained as leaders stepped into new roles. Although these open doors, to some extent, have diminished the leadership role for PW, I give thanks for our history and for what it has meant for women and for the church. I also value the role PW continues to play in developing leaders and giving women a place to learn and grow.

Last spring, women from a church of about 200 that had no PW groups led the PW gathering in Mission Presbytery. After working with the PW leaders in our presbytery to prepare for the gathering, and with the support of their marvelous female pastor, they now have five circles! While they don't conform to any old models of PW, I think they really represent what PW is about in "building an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the ministry of PC(USA)."

Where Do We Go from Here?

Almost three months after my conversation with Beth Snyder about PW's loss of voice and vote in Ohio Valley Presbytery, it looks as if the

"I assure you I would do everything I could to give the PW moderator a chance to make announcements to presbytery, either in five minutes on the floor (maybe once a year) or by including fliers in the materials prepared for presbytery commissioners. But my hands are pretty much tied for anything beyond that."

—Elizabeth Groelle, stated clerk,
Sacramento Presbytery

presbytery will see more changes. At its May presbytery meeting, Ohio Valley Presbytery unanimously approved a motion to "address an unforeseen problem that arose with the change in presbytery council structure, when Presbyterian Women lost the voice and vote of their moderator at meetings of the presbytery. The council considered that presbytery make the moderator of Presbyterian Women, if an ordained elder, a continuing member of presbytery for her term in office" (Presbytery of Ohio Valley Council Report, May 21–22, 2004).

Lorna Kuyk, executive presbyter of Ohio Valley Presbytery, points out

that "Representatives or moderators of all committees and other organizations, including PW, receive an invitation to all council meetings. They have voice at these meetings, thus they have not lost their ability to influence the decisions of the council. Council is moving toward a consensus style of decision making, in part to erase distinction between those who have voice and vote and those who have voice only."

Apparently, this information did not assuage the concerns of Presbyterian Women in Ohio Valley Presbytery, so a second motion was made by Beth Snyder, asking that the presbytery "amend the by-laws to

include the moderator of Presbyterian Women in the presbytery, or her designee, [and give her] voice and vote at meetings of the council.” Since this was a motion to amend the by-laws, a second reading of the motion is required before a vote is taken. This will occur at the September meeting of presbytery.

Beth Snyder spoke informally with a few ministers and learned that women across the presbytery spoke up in response to the presbytery’s previous decision to remove PW’s voice and vote. PW in the presbytery experienced record attendance at its spring gathering, due in part to a note published in Ohio Valley Announcements, the PWP newsletter, concerning the loss of voice and vote for PW. Gathering participants decided to circulate a petition requesting reinstatement of

the PWP moderator’s status as a voting representative of presbytery and council. The petition was then presented to the stated clerk at the May presbytery meeting. “It proved to be an excellent opportunity for education, conversation and a little PW history lesson,” Beth said. “The women in the congregations are to be congratulated for speaking their minds and I hope they will continue to make their voices heard.”

Did Ohio Valley Presbytery revisit its decision because of some well-timed questions and interviews? Their “correction of an unforeseen consequence” led me to wonder how many other presbyteries might be willing to take another look at how they work with Presbyterian Women if concerned women and men asked questions and started conversations. Although the research

“The PW moderator has voice and vote at our presbytery meetings and on presbytery council . . . but at presbytery meetings, PW is virtually invisible—10 minutes of docket time once a year to make the required annual report and that’s it.”

—Dick McFail, stated clerk,
National Capital Presbytery

provided in this article is by no means complete, it’s hoped that the information shared here will prompt questions, inspire new conversations and remind women at all levels of the church not to assume that women will always enjoy the privileges we possess today. 🍓

Leah Ellison Bradley is an associate editor for Presbyterian Women and a minister member of Southeastern Illinois Presbytery.

Questions for Discussion

1. Does your presbytery offer voice and vote to Presbyterian Women at council and presbytery meetings? Why or why not? If you don’t know, whom can you ask to find out? If PW is not represented, how can you bring this matter to the attention of your presbytery’s governing body?
2. What does the loss of voice and vote mean to PW and the church as a whole?
3. Neal Lloyd makes the point that the issue of voice and vote for PW is no longer about granting women representation equal to that of men. So why is it still important? Decide for yourself, then check your response against Reason #10 in Hazel Fuhrmeister’s list.
4. Jeanne Simpson and Bettie Durrah express opposing viewpoints on the question of whether or not PW moderators in the presbytery should be ordained as elders. What advantages do you see in adopting one or the other as policy?
5. According to executive presbyter Lorna Kuyk, the presbytery of Ohio Valley is moving toward a consensus style of decision making. This trend toward participatory democracy appears to be spreading throughout the denomination. How do you think Presbyterian Women might be affected?
6. Hazel Fuhrmeister highlights the influence of Youth Advisory Delegates at General Assembly. Why is it important that youth in your congregation understand and appreciate the history and outreach of Presbyterian Women? What can you do to foster this?
7. Jane Parker Huber tells her mother’s story. Who were the pioneers in women’s participation in your presbytery? Consider some ways you might tell their stories to the next generation. For example, ask some young people to interview matriarchal women. Use the information gathered to create a brief lesson plan for youth that could be included in the next packet your presbytery mails out to every congregation.

Presbyterianism 101

BY NEAL E. LLOYD

Our reforming ancestors took over a church structure that was entirely controlled by the clergy. One principle they agreed on in their Reformed Church was that there would be no hierarchy of clergy. A foundational understanding comes to us from that determination—all ministers of Word and Sacrament are equal to each other in authority and responsibility. This is the historical meaning of parity as used by Presbyterians.

From the dawn of the Presbyterian denomination, ministers maintained membership in a separate body, the presbytery, where care was taken that false doctrine and shoddy preaching did not infiltrate congregations. Ruling elders were invited to sit with the ministers as the governing body for a particular church (what we call a session). As presbyteries evolved, ruling elders served as representatives from the congregations, seated alongside the minister members. Ministers and ruling elders each had a vote, but they voted as two different types of “members” in the presbytery. Until the 1950s, a presbytery was simply a geographical district and there was no constitutional concern for a balance of ministers and elders. If there was concern, it was that the ruling elders not become a majority.

Two things changed after World War II. First, a greatly increased number of (what we now call) specialized ministries altered the traditional pattern in which ministers served almost exclusively as parish pastors. Suddenly it seemed that there were more ministers than there used to be. Anxiety at this apparent inequity was intensified by a growing sentiment for “participatory democracy,” leading to amendment that made minister and ruling elder participation in presbyteries more equal in numbers. At this point, the use of the term parity defined the equality of numbers between offices in governance. Parity still spoke of who had access to the vote and the power that accompanied it.

In the late 1960s another wave of change swept across the church. Reorganization in both the UPCUSA and the PCUS altered traditional patterns of relationships. Prior to 1972, presbyteries in the “northern stream” were (with a few exceptions) small and dealt almost exclusively



with ecclesiastical business. National structures organized to address any programmatic, missionary, developmental or educational activity for that purpose. Presbyterian Women took their place among other national boards. These national entities were accountable to the General Assembly but were semi-independent with their own elected governing bodies. Representatives (staff and volunteers) of the national bodies went to presbyteries and synods to train, encourage, support and implement the work and witness of the church. A presbytery or synod authorized these endeavors, but accountability and responsibility were national in scope.

In the early 1970s reorganization brought all work under the direct responsibility of the General Assembly and agencies replaced the formerly independent boards. However, Presbyterian Women maintained an accountable but separate identity in relation to the national church. Women’s groups in a congregation related to the session, as they had in the past. At the General Assembly level, relationships of accountability and responsibility did not change and a representative of PW sat on the General Assembly Mission Council. But there was no mandated pattern for middle governing bodies (presbyteries and synods) and no assigned place was given for Presbyterian Women. Presbyterial and synodical women’s work remained sub-units of the national Presbyterian Women’s structure and each middle governing body made its own choices about its relationship to women’s ministry. A presbyterial or synodical governing body could choose whether or not to offer a place at the leadership table to Presbyterian Women.

Since reunion, a distinctive feature of our Presbyterian community is a strong recognition of and commitment to honoring diversity. Any current discussion of the role of Presbyterian Women in governing bodies takes place in the context of the various organizations within but not a part of the governing authority of the church.

Neal E. Lloyd is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Rochester, Minnesota and serves on the General Assembly Advisory Committee on the Constitution.

Top Ten Reasons PW Should Have Voice and Vote at All Levels of the PC(USA)

BY HAZEL FUHRMEISTER

- 1 PW is the official women's organization in the PC(USA), with our design and bylaws approved by the General Assembly in 1987; the bylaws include the qualifications for service as moderator, which means anyone PW elects as moderator is qualified under denominational requirements.
- 2 PW provides an award-winning annual Bible study and bimonthly magazine, leadership training materials, mission interpretation and support, all at no cost to the denomination.
- 3 Almost all of the PW Budget is contributed to the church with no strings attached. Plus, we have special offerings that support projects meeting PC(USA) criteria. We save the denomination money every day, in addition to what we give. And what we give through PW is "second-mile" giving (pledges beyond what we make to our own congregations, presbyteries and synods).
- 4 The PW network provides a direct link between the denomination's churchwide level and congregational level, helping keep national leaders in touch with local church members.
- 5 The triennial Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women draws up to 6,000 women from the United States and other countries, inspiring them to become active in the global mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- 6 PW initiates educational and support programs for global issues of justice and peace.
- 7 This is not a question of gender balance—that is a separate matter and we all know that women are represented at all levels of the denomination. This is about the General Assembly Council, synods and presbyteries availing themselves of the valuable service of PW, an organization that has proved its worth over and over. Participants in PW are among the hardest workers to be found in the church, bringing their training and willingness to work to governing bodies at every level.
- 8 The "independence" of our organization that seems to threaten some people was not something PW decided on—this relationship was studied, debated, discussed and approved by the General Assembly.
- 9 The triennial Global Exchange of Presbyterian Women promotes understanding, increases mission support and makes a significant impact on women in the United States and other countries.
- 10 PW remains the strongest, most faithful, productive, industrious, unselfish, dependable, necessary group within the PC(USA), supporting the denomination's policies, interpreting mission, preaching the gospel and giving our time and talents for no reason other than a desire to serve God and humankind. What's not to like about us?

Presbyterian Women in History

1946 On the recommendation of the General Council, PCUSA, General Assembly sends an overture stating “the office of minister may be either men or women.” In 1947 presbyteries defeat this overture.

1889 Louisa Woosley is ordained to ministry in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The Kentucky Synod rules Woosley’s ordination invalid in 1890, although Nolin Presbytery continues to send her to General Assembly as a commissioner.

1929 The PCUSA again submits alternative overtures for women as ministers and elders, as elders only or as licensed evangelists.

1915 PCUS amends form of government to allow election of women as deaconesses, but not as ordained clergy.

1917 Lillian Herrick Chapman is licensed to preach within the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). In 1919, the Synod of New York overrules her licensing as irregular.



1893 Edith Livingston Peake is appointed lay evangelist by the United Presbyterian Church in North American (UPNA), which sets a precedent of allowing women to serve as lay preachers.

1920 Responding to overtures, the General Assembly of the PCUSA asks presbyteries to vote on ordination of women as elders and as deacons. In August, the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution passes, giving women the right to vote.



1916 Katherine Bennet, president of the Women’s Home Board, is the first woman allowed to speak to a General Assembly.

1921 The PCUSA overture to ordain women fails narrowly in presbyteries. The General Assembly sends a new overture to presbyteries for the ordination of women as deacons. This overture is approved in 1922.



1930 In the PCUSA, the ordination of women as both ministers and elders is defeated by presbyteries. The ordination of women as elders is approved. The licensing of women as evangelists fails by three votes. Sarah E. Dickson of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, is the first woman ordained as an elder in the PCUSA.



1971 Lois Harkrider Stair is elected first woman moderator of the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (UPCUSA). The same year, the General Assembly approves inclusive language, stating that generic usage of masculine nouns, pronouns and adjectives is no longer acceptable in church documents.



1986 Holly Haile Smith is the first Native American woman ordained to ministry in the PC(USA).

1958 The PCUSA position on women in ministry becomes the policy of the merged UPCUSA.

1956 PCUSA presbyteries vote to add to form of government, "the office of minister may be either men or women." Margaret Towner is the first woman ordained to ministry in the PCUSA.

1983 The UPCUSA position on women in ministry becomes the policy of the reunited PC(USA).



1978 Sara Bernice Moseley is the first woman elected as moderator of the PCUS.

1955 The PCUSA, acting on an overture from the Presbytery of Rochester, again asks presbyteries to vote on ordaining women as ministers of Word and Sacrament.

1974 Katie Geneva Cannon is the first African American woman ordained to ministry in the UPCUSA.

1996 Presbyterian Women is granted voice and vote on the General Assembly Council.

1964 PCUS presbyteries approve the ordination of women as deacons, elders and ministers.



1965 Rachel Henderlite is the first woman ordained to ministry in the PCUS.



1979 Rebecca Reyes is the first Hispanic woman ordained to ministry in the UPCUSA. The same year Elizabeth Kwon, ordained in Japan in 1944, transfers her ordination—making her the first Korean American clergywoman—to the UPCUSA.

Essential Resources for Presbyterian Women

Keep your library up-to-date with these important PW resources; you'll have everything you need to communicate effectively, build community and work in the spirit of Christ.

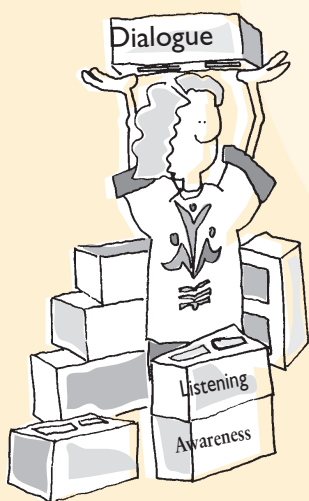


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A Guide to Speaking Up offers practical advice for both first-time and long-time presenters interested in honing their skills. The resource includes audio instructions on compact disc, plus a printed booklet to guide the listener through suggested exercises. Available in English (PWR-02-140), Arabic (PWR-02-141), Korean (PWR-02-142) and Spanish (PWR-02-143); \$8.00*

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Presbyterian women worship God in the business decisions we make, the prayers we offer and the programs we plan. This resource will guide you from the beginning of your meeting to the end, with suggestions for making any meeting more worship-filled. PWR-01-115; \$3.50 each for 1-9 copies, \$2.50 each for 10 or more copies*



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This 16-page resource guides Presbyterian women through creation of and participation in dialogue groups seeking to dismantle racism. PWR-03-121; \$3.50 each for 1-9 copies, \$2.50 each for 10 or more copies*

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This resource assists both leaders and participants in Presbyterian Women in developing communication skills. Learn about active listening, effective meetings, ways to brainstorm, creating newsletters and press releases, using email and the Internet, and much more! PWR-01-120; \$3.50 each for 1-9 copies, \$2.50 each for 10 or more copies*



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