

Institutional Relationship Agreement between Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc., and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

I. Preface

This agreement expresses the partnership in mission among Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc. (PW) and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PC(USA)). PW and the PC(USA) have had a longstanding partnership based upon shared beliefs, and complementary visions and commitments, common history, and a relationship of mutual respect and cooperation. While this covenant is specifically for the relationship between PW and the General Assembly, it is commended as a model for Presbyterian Women in relation to other corresponding councils.

II. The Covenant-Based Relationship

A covenant is essentially an agreement between two or more parties committing themselves to certain responsibilities. The idea of covenant is at the heart of the biblical story and is generally understood as different from a contract. A contract is about legal and economic transactions while a covenant depends on trust and fidelity and focuses more on the quality of the relationship. It is agreed that PW and the PC(USA) will each assume responsibility for their actions, and the signing of the Institutional Relationship Agreement does not hold any party liable for the actions of another party. As reflected in this covenant, the PC(USA), via its principal corporation, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation, does provide various services to PW pursuant to a Service Agreement. PW supports the mission of the PC(USA), especially its priorities for thriving mid councils, disciple formation & leader development, the life of the denomination, restorative justice & witness, and unifying.

A. Background

PW is a tax-exempt, national women's organization related to the PC(USA). Its members are, first and foremost, members of the PC(USA).

Presbyterian Women came into being in 1988, five years after the reunion of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Presbyterian Women incorporated at the national or churchwide level in 2009 as a mission entity related to the PC(USA) as an integrated auxiliary. PW's bylaws link PW closely to the Constitution of the PC(USA). Presbyterian Women's members participate in leadership coordinating teams at all council levels from the congregation to the General Assembly.

From reunion in 1983 until the organizing business meeting of Presbyterian Women in 1988, a working team of Women of the Church (WOC) and United Presbyterian Women (UPW) proposed designs to their constituencies that culminated in the approval of the present structure. The 198th General Assembly (1986) received the Presbyterian Women Purpose and Principles of Organization as information only, pending approval by the uniting constituencies. The General Assembly action affirmed the independence and responsibility of Presbyterian Women to make its own decisions concerning leadership, program, and budget. Membership in Presbyterian Women is open to all women who choose to participate in or be supportive of the Presbyterian Women organization in any way. The Presbyterian Women Purpose states: “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, 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.” In 1986, UPW and WOC, as they looked ahead to becoming Presbyterian Women (PW), willingly became a part of the General Assembly Council’s (GAC) Women’s Ministry Unit, where they were in partnership with Justice for Women, Women Employed by the Church, and the Committee of Women of Color. In 1993, the Women’s Ministry Unit was reorganized into the Women’s Ministries Program Area of the GAC’s National Ministries Division.

In 2007, the Women’s Ministries Program Area was reorganized into Racial Ethnic and Women’s Ministries (RE&WM). The ministry area was subsequently renamed Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries (RE&WIM) in 2018. In 2025, the unification of the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency, resulted in a new structure that focuses on denominational life & witness, partnerships within the PC(USA), and partnerships beyond the PC(USA), in addition to an organizational planning and operations area, and eliminated the Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries program area. PW supports the PC(USA) ministries that advance the role of women in the church and society.

B. The Covenant Responsibilities of Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc.

PW will:

1. Conduct all mission and ministry according to the PW Purpose:
 - a. Nurture [their] faith through prayer and Bible study,
 - b. Support the mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [which includes the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Life and Witness Agency,

- c. Work for justice and peace,
- d. Build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the PC(USA);
- e. Work cooperatively with Presbyterian Life and Witness as a whole and with other individual offices and areas and other related entities;
- f. Be an active presence on the [New Gov] Board through the PW Moderator's membership;
- g. Be faithful stewards of the money given by Presbyterian women from throughout the church, whether that money is given for the general mission of the Church, for ongoing work of PW, or for projects of Creative Ministries offerings;
- h. Ensure editorial autonomy for *Horizons* magazine, the annual Bible study, and all other publications of PW;
- i. Be guided by the general policies of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Life and Witness (for example: contract procedures, minority vendor policies, and travel and meeting policies).

C. The Covenant Responsibilities of the General Assembly as performed by Presbyterian Life and Witness.

PL&W will:

- 1. Support the Purpose of Presbyterian Women;
- 2. Recognize and respect PW's autonomy and status as a separate corporation, self-determining in its leadership, budget, and program;
- 3. Provide support to PW;
 - a. Honor the relationships as stated in the Organization for Mission, recognizing the membership, on the Presbyterian Life and Witness Agency Board, of the moderator of PW or her designee;
 - b. Appoint a member of the Presbyterian Life and Witness Board to serve on the PW Board of Directors;**
 - c. Acknowledge and ensure, to the extent Presbyterian Life and Witness is able, editorial autonomy for all PW publications, including *Horizons* magazine and the annual Bible study;
 - d. Seek ways to build tangible partnerships and share resources with PW for joint programming with various mission areas of the Presbyterian Life and Witness in which the mission priorities of the Church are served;

- e. Maintain close connections with PW and the PW staff and be responsive to changes, new developments, and program options;
- f. Ensure that collaborative women's ministries work remains a focus of [Unified Agency] and ongoing work is supported.

D. The Covenant Responsibilities of the General Assembly

The General Assembly will

- 1. Support the Purpose of Presbyterian Women;
- 2. Recognize and respect PW's autonomy and status as a separate corporation, self-determining in its leadership, budget, and program;
- 3. Invite PW to support and participate in GA programs that align with the Purpose of Presbyterian Women;
- 4. Provide support to PW;
 - a. Recognize the membership, with voice and vote, of a PW representative to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation Board of Directors;
 - b. Recognize PW as a corresponding member to the General Assembly, as stated in the Standing Rules of the General Assembly as amended by the 226th General Assembly (2024).

III. Accountability

In the following ways, PW and the PC(USA) will stay in communication, as each party attempts to be faithful to the covenant promise:

- 1. PW may provide a report to the Presbyterian Life and Witness Board through Presbyterian Life and Witness of its programs, services, and policies.
- 2. The PW Board member representing the Presbyterian Life and Witness Board will report on the policies and activities of the Presbyterian Life and Witness at the triennial Business Meeting of PW.
- 3. The term of this agreement will be four years, commencing July 16, 2026, and expiring July 15, 2030.
- 4. Any party may propose changes in the Institutional Relationship at any time upon prior written notice to PW or Presbyterian Life and Witness (on behalf of the General Assembly).

Rationale

Over the years it became apparent that a clear understanding about the relationship between Presbyterian Women and the national church structure needed to be articulated. The Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women (CCT) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Council, later known as the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board, approved the original covenant in August 2001. The current recommendation is the first renewal since the unification of the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Notes

*This version of the Institutional Relationship Agreement has been updated from the recommendation on PCBiz to reflect the names of the new agency (Presbyterian Life and Witness) and the new agency board (Presbyterian Life and Witness Board). This version also reflects the language of the 2027–2029 Organization for Mission regarding PW membership on the PL&W Board.

**The 2027–2029 Organization for Mission does not currently list PW, Inc., as an agency/entity that receives an appointed member from the Presbyterian Life and Witness Board.