

Response from Constitutional Services in the Office of the General Assembly Regarding the Relationship between a Presbyterian Women's Group and the Corresponding [Council]

Over the years, Constitutional Services in the Office of the General Assembly, in response to questions posed about the relationship between Presbyterian Women and the related governing body states has repeatedly affirmed the unique Presbyterian Women groups unique relationships with the corresponding [council]. With each change in the structure of the national office, the unique relationship with Presbyterian Women has remained unchanged.

[T]here is no other organization nationally, or in the local church, that is quite like PW. The PW can trace its unique position back to the Design for Mission adopted shortly after reunion:

Does the Local Chapter of Presbyterian Women have the right to determine its own budget?

Answer: Yes it does, according to the Structural Design for Mission adopted in 1986 (page 406) [General Assembly Minutes] specifically reserves that right to Presbyterian Women. The mission design states:

"Presbyterian Women shall determine its own leadership, program and budget. Decisions shall be made by voting or consensus at gatherings that shall have representation from appropriate groups."

Does PW report to the Session?

Answer: All groups within a congregation must make annual reports to the session. With regard to Presbyterian Women, this too was made explicit by the Structural Design for Mission:

"Be accountable to the governing bodies through an annual written report which shall include a financial report."

Presbyterian Women (and its predecessors) have always had a unique relationship to the governing bodies of this denomination. That uniqueness is reflected in the Structural design for Mission. It is quite clear that the current design was not effective upon the close of the 1986 General Assembly. It was effective only upon the affirmative vote of "the constituency." (meaning the voting delegates of Presbyterian Women at their business meeting) (GA Minutes, p 407). Therefore it follows that local chapters of Presbyterian Women are bound by and enjoy the benefits of the terms of the Structural Design for Women.

While Presbyterian Women must submit a report to the session as required by the Presbyterian Women's Manual there is no basis for the session or presbytery council controlling how the money is actually spent.