

COVENANT
between **PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN** and
the GENERAL ASSEMBLY COUNCIL of the
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

I. Preface: This covenant expresses the partnership in mission among Presbyterian Women (PW, as represented by its Churchwide Coordinating Team, CCT) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Council (GAC, with National Ministries Division, NMD, as the primary source of contact). PW and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have had a long-standing partnership based upon shared beliefs, complementary visions and commitments, common history, and a relationship of mutual respect and cooperation. While this covenant is specifically for the relationship between PW Churchwide and the GAC, it is commended as a model for PW in relation to other corresponding governing bodies and 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, GAC, National Ministries Division (NMD) *, and Women's Ministries Area (WMA) will each assume responsibility for their actions, and the signing of the covenant does not hold any party liable for the actions of another party. As reflected in this covenant, the GAC does provide various services to PW. PW supports the mission of the GAC.

A. Background: Presbyterian Women (PW) is the national women's organization of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), hereinafter PC(USA). Its members are first and foremost members of the PC(USA). PW in its current form 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. It is a mission entity in the PC(USA) with leadership coordinating teams at all governing body levels from the congregation to the General Assembly.

From reunion in 1983 until the organizing Business Meeting of PW in 1988, a Working Team of the Women of the Church (WOC) and United Presbyterian Women (UPW) proposed designs to their constituencies which culminated in the approval of the present structure. The 198th General Assembly (1986) received the PW 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.

* **Note:** These entities may change during the course of a covenantal period. See item IIC1.

Membership in Presbyterian Women is open to all women who choose to participate in or be supportive of the PW organization in any way.

The PW 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 PW, willingly became a part of the 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 National Ministries Division. PW continues to be lodged in NMD in partnership with Women's Ministries with staff as part of the NMD program area. PW leaders in presbyteries and synods were polled in the spring of 1994 and eighty-three percent (83%) of the respondents were satisfied with PW's placement. Presbyterian Women supports the PC(USA) ministries that advance the role of women in the church and society. With each restructure or reorganization of the denominational staff, the Presbyterian Women organization made the decision to be lodged with women's constituency groups and emphases.

Funds owned and operated by PW but managed by the GAC and its entities belong to PW in perpetuity. Should the relationship between PW and GAC or its successor be dissolved, these funds and earnings from investment of the funds will be transferred to PW or its successor.

B. The Covenant Responsibilities of the Presbyterian Women organization

Presbyterian Women will as stated in their purpose:

1. commit to
 - a. nurture (their) faith through prayer and Bible study,
 - b. support the mission of the church,
 - c. work for justice and peace,
 - d. build a...community of women that strengthens the PC(USA);
2. work cooperatively with the Women's Ministries Area as a whole and with other offices within the GAC organization and other related entities;
3. be an active presence on the General Assembly Council through the PW Moderator's membership, voice and vote and vice moderators' attendance at GAC meetings as observers;
4. 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;
5. ensure editorial autonomy for *Horizons* magazine, the annual Bible study, and all other publications of Presbyterian Women;

6. respect the limits of staff time;
7. understand that staff operate under the rules of the GAC employee handbook and report via the regular process of supervisors within the GAC;
8. be guided by general policies of the GAC (for example: contract procedures, minority vendor policies, and travel and meeting policies).

C. Covenant Responsibilities of the General Assembly Council

The GAC will:

1. recognize and respect PW's autonomy and status as a national Women's organization of the PC(USA), self-determining in its leadership, budget, program and lodgment.
2. make support systems available to the PW personnel. Support systems include information technology, human resources, payroll, office space, legal counsel, and insurance coverage. This arrangement will be reviewed triennially on the anniversary date of this covenant by the parties to the covenant and revised by agreement if revision is needed.
3. provide support to PW by the GAC:
 - a. honoring the relationships as stated in the GAC Manual of Operations, recognizing the full membership with voice and vote on the GAC of the Moderator of PW Churchwide and advocating that the moderator of PW Churchwide serves as a full member of the GAC executive committee
 - b. servicing the funds and affirming the faithful stewardship of money and offerings given by Presbyterian Women;
 - c. acknowledging and ensuring editorial autonomy for all PW publications, including *Horizons* magazine and the annual Bible study;
4. through specifically assigned staff persons, seek ways to build tangible partnerships with PW for joint programming with various program areas of the PC(USA) in which the mission priorities of the church are served;
5. through the WMA staff assigned, maintain close connections with PW and be responsive to changes, new developments, and program options;

III. Accountability: In the following ways, PW, GAC, NMD and WMA stay in communication as each party attempts to be faithful to the covenant promise:

- A. PW will provide an annual report to the GAC through NMD of its programs, services, and policies, and PW's mission giving will appear in the General Mission Budget;
- B. A member of the GAC will be invited to report on the policies and activities of the GAC when the Churchwide Coordinating Team of PW meets in Louisville and at the triennial Churchwide Gathering Business Meeting of PW;
- C. A representative group from each body will meet on a three-year cycle to review the covenant and propose any changes, the terms of this covenant being three years, commencing July 1, 2006 and expiring June 30, 2009.
- D. Any party may propose changes in the covenantal relationship at any time upon prior written notice to the other parties.