

History of the PCA

The birth date of the Presbyterian Church in America is December 4, 1973. (But our spiritual roots are in the Protestant Reformation).

The PCA was formed to be an evangelical presbyterian denomination that is "Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission."

By evangelical we mean that we emphasize the gospel (good news of salvation) through faith in Jesus Christ, as well as affirming other orthodox Christian doctrines and holding to the inerrancy of Scripture.

By reformed we mean we are connected to the teachings of the historic church and the doctrinal beliefs recovered by the Reformation. These doctrinal beliefs are expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*. All officers in the PCA must personally subscribe to and uphold the teachings of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

By presbyterian we describe our representative form of church government. Local churches are governed by a "Session" of "presbyters" (elders) elected by the members of the congregation. Representatives of local churches within a geographical area compose a "presbytery." Representatives of presbyteries meet annually at "General Assembly." Thus, through the combined efforts and resources of all of the churches, we are enabled to advance God's Kingdom much more effectively. The Committees and Agencies of the PCA help lead this Kingdom work.

Today the PCA has over 1300 churches and more than 338,000 members in the USA and Canada with at least 76 Presbyteries. The PCA has over 590 long term missionaries and 7350 short term missionaries serving worldwide. Over 100 PCA military chaplains serve in all branches of the armed services; and 40 civilian chaplains serve in hospitals, prisons, and other agencies. The PCA has placed campus ministers on more than 110 college and university campuses all across America. Visit the PCA's website at www.pcanet.org

The presbyterian system of church government is representative and connectional.

Representative means the congregation elects the elders to the session of the church to govern and shepherd them; and the deacons to serve the needs of the church and the community in the area of mercy ministry. The local church is governed by the session of the church. The congregation also votes on calling a pastor. And the presbytery approves or disapproves of the establishment of a pastoral relationship between a minister and a particular church.

Connectional means local churches see themselves as part of the larger church, that local churches are not independent but are accountable to the larger church, and local churches do not minister alone but in cooperation with the larger church.

Presbyterian church government is analogous to a representative republic. Churches are not independent but interdependent, and there is no presiding bishop or other hierarchal clergy or ministers in a presbyterian system with overall authority of all the churches. Instead there are courts.

The chief advantage of presbyterian polity is its being the system most closely in general conformity to the principles of biblical polity. In the Old Testament, respect and deference were shown to older men. An inherent authority was with the elder of a household, a village, or a tribe. After the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he instructed him to gather the elders of Israel together to inform them he was about to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage and lead them into the Promised Land (Ex 3:16; 4:29). When the people were in the dessert, Moses became overwhelmed with the burden of leadership, and the Lord instituted a system of shared spiritual leadership through the suggestion of Moses' father in law Jethro (Ex 18) to appoint a plurality of elders and this practice of shared leadership continued (Deut 27:1; Joshua 8:10).

A hierarchal episcopacy or monoepiscopacy offers greater opportunity for the abuse of power by individual leaders. A purely congregational system offers an opportunity for the tyranny of the majority. The presbyterian system of representative connectional government by a plurality of elders in a gradation of church courts (Sessions, Presbyteries, and General Assembly) poses an effective check on the abuse of power by an individual leader. Moreover, the presbyterian system features not only majority rule, but also preserves the rights of a minority within the local church and the larger church.

COMMITTEES & AGENCIES

AC	Administrative Committee
CC	Covenant College
CEP	Christian Education & Publications
CTS	Covenant Theological Seminary
MNA	Mission to North America
MTW	Mission to the World
PCAF	Presbyterian Church in America Foundation
RBI	Retirement and Benefits, Inc.
RH	Ridge Haven Conference Center
RUM	Reformed University Ministries