

**Comparison of basic beliefs and viewpoints
of three Presbyterian denominations:
Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA),
Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO),
and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)**

| Issue | PC(USA) | ECO | EPC |
|---|---|----------------------------|---|
| When did the denomination come into existence in its current structure / form? | 1983 | 2012 | 1980 |
| Number of members | 1,667,767 The membership declined by 92,433 in 2014, the largest percentage decline ever. From 2012 to 2014 the PC(USA) lost 15% of its members. | 80,000 & Growing | 150,000 & Growing. Doubled in the last 5 years. |
| Number of churches | 9,829 | 235 | 550 |
| Statistics as of: | December, 2014 | October, 2015 (website) | October, 2015 (website) |
| Does the denomination list what it considers to be essential tenets of the faith? | No ¹ | Yes | Yes |

| Issue | PC(USA) | ECO | EPC |
|---|--|--|--|
| What are deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders asked in their ordination vows about Scripture? | “Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ universal, and God’s Word to you?” | “Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?” | “Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?” |
| Is the view of ‘Sola Scriptura’ – the idea that Scripture is the church’s only authority – upheld by church officers? | Yes and no ^{2&3} | Yes – part of the essential tenets | Yes – part of the essential tenets |
| What are deacons, elders, and pastors asked concerning Jesus Christ as Savior? | “Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” | “Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?” | To affirm without exception the essential tenets, including the statement on Jesus Christ |
| Do officers and congregations affirm the centrality of Jesus as Lord and Savior? | Yes and no ⁴ | Yes | Yes |

| Issue | PC(USA) | ECO | EPC |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Confessions / Creeds | 8 confessions plus 3 catechisms | 8 confessions plus 3 catechisms (same as PC[USA]) | Westminster Confession of Faith (For clarity of message, the EPC lifts up only one confession.) |
| Allows same-sex couples to marry | Yes ⁵ | No | No |
| View on abortion | Pro-choice ⁶ | Pro-life ⁶ | Pro-life ⁶ |
| Ordains women | Yes | Yes | Congregation determines Ruling Elders; Presbytery decides Teaching Elders |
| Political lobbying office in DC? | Yes ⁷ | No | No |
| Ownership of congregation's property | Congregations hold property in trust for the benefit of the PC(USA) | Congregation owns property. | Congregation owns property. |

Notes to Denominational Comparisons

1. In the PC(USA) there is an ordination vow for pastors and officers which asks, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable exposition of what Scripture leads us to believe and do?” Themes of the confessions are listed in F-2 of the “Form of Government”. But there is no statement of essential tenets, and since the 1920s, the denomination has historically resisted efforts to frame one.
2. When determining what a denomination’s beliefs are, one needs to consider more than what is stated in the confessions. The confessions of the PC(USA) stand as a reliable guide to understanding what Scripture teaches, but the question arises about the extent to which leaders and members in the denomination fully embrace these confessions. In this context, notes which follow will reference official decisions, results of surveys, and associations which show a wide variety of understanding about core principles of the faith.

3. The booklet “Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture” underscores that there are at least five different perspectives in the PC(USA) on the nature of divine inspiration of scripture, ranging from “inerrancy” to “the Bible is merely a record of moral and religious experiences of Hebrews and Christians.” No preference is expressed for any of the five positions.

The Book of Order (G-2.0104-b) suggests that ordination councils, in performing their examinations of candidates, should be ‘guided’ by Scripture. An overture in the most recent GA to change the language to say councils should be ‘obedient to’ Scripture was defeated 53-6 in committee and by simple hand vote in the plenary.

In the 2012 Permanent Judicial Commission Parnell case (in the PC(USA) this is similar to a ruling by the Supreme Court), those who sought to reference the authority of Scripture to decide a controversy were told that, since there are so many interpretations of the Bible, it cannot be used to prove any one position.

4. Our confessions and the document *Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ* both affirm Jesus as “The only Savior and Lord.” But other indicators point to a greater diversity of opinion when PC(USA) members and leaders answer Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?”

At the 2001 GA, a resolution was introduced to declare “Jesus is the singular saving Lord”, but the language failed to pass and instead, GA could only affirm “Jesus is unique.” Again at the 2006 GA, before modifying a proposed resolution to say Jesus was “uniquely Savior”, a group of ordained commissioners stated their belief that Christ is only one among many paths to eternal life.

In a 2011 denominational survey, nearly 60% of PC(USA) members and 23% of pastors agreed or were neutral on the statement, “All the world’s different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.” In the time since this survey was published, 359 churches were dismissed to other denominations, and over 400,000 members have left. (Source: PC(USA) Comparative Summaries).

Over 50 Presbyterian churches in the US are members of an association called Progressive Christianity (<http://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>), which lists “8 Points” of their shared beliefs. The first two points are:

- [We] believe that following the path and teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life
 - [We] affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey
5. With the passage of Amendment 14-F in the 221st General Assembly (2014), ministers were given the option of marrying couples of the same sex in jurisdictions where that was legal. With the June 2015 Supreme Court decision, this means PC(USA) ministers are free to perform same-sex marriages anywhere in the US. Amendment 14-F changes the Book of

Order to allow these weddings even though the Book of Confessions continues to define marriage as between one man and one woman. This puts one part of our church's constitution in conflict with another (and with Scripture).

6. PC(USA)'s resource for women facing problem pregnancies writes that the church "would like to support you as you make decisions about your pregnancy" and explores three options: 1) keeping the baby; 2) making an adoption plan; and 3) having an abortion.

The PC(USA) has two agencies who are members of an abortion rights lobbying group in Washington, DC but it does not belong to a lobby group supporting a pro-life viewpoint. In 1970, the General Assembly made a statement that, "the artificial or induced termination of a pregnancy is a matter of careful ethical decision of the patient ... and therefore should not be restricted by law ...", and that view has been reiterated in subsequent statements.

ECO does not hold an official position on abortion, but in their Essential Tenets, members are to hold one another accountable to "honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death."

The EPC has an official statement on abortion that draws references from Scripture and which says that "Christians should individually and corporately oppose abortion (except under the most extreme of circumstances that endanger the physical life of the mother), and do everything in their power to provide support groups, para-church ministries and sponsoring agencies that offer viable alternatives to abortion."

7. The PC(USA) maintains a lobbying office on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. called the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness. The PC(USA) has urged positions on a number of topics including gun control, divestiture of fossil fuels, support of the Affordable Care Act, and opposition to deficit reduction. In addition, the PC(USA) participates in law suits around the country through the Advisory Committee on Litigation, filing "friends of the court" briefs. The denomination has engaged in topics including property disputes in the Episcopal Church, immigration, and support for the removal of a monument of the Ten Commandments from the capitol grounds in Indiana.