



PER CAPITA. WHAT IS IT, WHY DO WE NEED TO PAY IT?

“Per capita” comes from Latin and means, “per person”.

Over the years, Presbyterians have asked the question: “**What is this, and why do we pay it?**”

This is a membership fee much like you pay for AAA . In the case of Triple A, you only need it when you are stuck on the side of the road broken down and you realize how truly blessed you are to have it.

In this case, Washington Presbytery is there when the church breaks down and needs a new pastor and supplies preachers, or needs conflict mediation, or has legal problems that need to be addressed, or is blown apart by a hurricane, burnt out by lightning, or flooded out by a storm and needs help repairing its building, and helping the congregation regroup itself. The Washington presbytery is there if the church is interested in doing mission to help needy people in other places in the world.

“Per Capita” is a fee as a Presbyterian to help with the administration expense of running the greater church, and it is \$45.00 per year per member. The fee is divided up into three parts: \$33.75 to the Presbytery, \$2.30 to the Synod of the Trinity, and \$8.95 to the General Assembly. It needs to be paid separately from your general tithe.

What is the greater church? Where do our gifts go, and why?

The Presbytery of Washington, that oversees all 40 congregations in our geographic Washington area comprising 5600 members and extends over several Southwestern Pennsylvania counties from south of Pittsburgh down to West Virginia, over to Ohio.

Since the Presbytery has only minister members and is charged with the oversight of all the churches, its budget is funded by two sources: **mission giving, and per capita**. Its budget is approximately \$260,000. App. \$151,000 of that budget provides for office costs, property expenses and administrative salaries. Another \$44,500 provides for Presbytery committees, our cost for owning and operating Pine Springs Camp. The rest is divided up in various mission activities and benevolences such as Resurrection Power, helping addicts recover in a safe environment, the Southwest Bethel Synod of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church-Mekane Jesus and many other projects.

The Synod of the Trinity that has been in effect since 1717 over seeing three presbyteries, now 16 that includes West Virginia and parts of eastern Ohio.

The General Assembly, that is housed in Louisville, Ky, and oversees the administration of the entire Presbyterian USA church worldwide, including all of its mission partners.

Because it is rooted in our theology and is part of the connectional nature of our Presbyterian denomination, affirmed in the ordination vows taken by elders and ministers of the Word and sacrament, our “per capita” system could be called a “Presbyterian Covenant Community Fund.”

What happens if we don't choose to pay it?

A 2012 General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission decision reaffirmed that per capita not paid by individuals or congregations is nonetheless expected from sessions and, in turn, expected from presbyteries.

If a member does not pay the per capita, then the church has to budget it from its operating resources. Our per capita last year was based on 195 members and cost the church \$8775.00. Since the session has actively trimmed the roles, the fee is still over \$6700.00. In a good year, we have only collected less than half of that, and that comes out of your general tithing which means less money to pay salaries and do mission.

What would happen if the church didn't pay it?

The Presbytery only collects 88% of its per capita in a good year. Our Executive Presbyter has taken a second job as Stated Clerk in Upper Ohio Valley Presbytery in order to balance the budget. What does that tell you?

On top of that, we would not be in good standing in the Presbytery. How could we in good faith ask for help from the Presbytery....if we are not willing to help the Presbytery?

We are in the process of calling a new pastor. All of the administrative work that it takes to find a pastor comes from the General Assembly committee, Church Leadership Connection that carefully matches dossiers to churches. On top of that, the General Assembly oversees the Board of Pensions that provides pensions and insurance and disability and death benefits to pastors and their families. The committee on ministry of Washington Presbytery provides a liaison to each church to handle issues and concerns and be a connection to the greater church when there is a need. There is a host of other committees that reach out to our congregations.

The Westminster Confession reads, “all believers are therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinances of the Christian religion where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the kingdom of Christ through the whole earth.” (Chapter 10, Book of Confessions 6.058.)

This about does it. If you have any further questions, please contact the Presbytery office at 724-222-1500 or email it at Craig@washingtonpresbytery.org.