



# SPECIAL OFFERINGS TASK FORCE

2023 Report

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**RESEARCH  
SERVICES**



# SPECIAL OFFERINGS

**One Great Hour of Sharing**

**Pentecost**

**Peace & Global Witness**

**Christmas Joy**

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A review of the Four Special Offerings of the Church 2023

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Purpose

The Special Offerings Task Force has as its charge to:

*...conduct a review and evaluation of Special Offerings and the recipient ministries and bring a recommendation to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board for the pattern and distribution of Special Offerings for the next four-year cycle (2026-2029). The Presbyterian Mission Agency Board will then make a recommendation to the 226th General Assembly (2024).*

At the request of the Task Force, Research Services designed and implemented a survey that was sent to congregations to assist the Task Force in fulfillment of its charge.



SPECIAL OFFERINGS

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Overview 1 of 3

### Findings

The Four Special Offerings of the Church (Special Offerings) are known by the respondents. There is agreement that the offerings generally aligns with the liturgical season in which it is received.

### Promotion

Bulletin inserts and offering envelopes are the two primary materials used to promote the offerings. The children's coin boxes are congregational favorites! There are requests to do something equally clever for adults. Some congregations supplement their promotions with materials produced in-house by the pastor. More videos of two minutes or less would be welcomed!

### Social Media

Very few follow Special Offerings on any social media platform. Facebook commands the most followers at 10%. The majority do not follow it on any social media platform.

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Overview 2 of 3

### Participation

Only 40% of responding congregations are 4x4 congregations, that is, that they receive and submit each of the four special offerings.

Surprisingly, 51 (4.5%) congregations received the offerings, but did not send the funds to the national offices. Rather, they choose to reabsorb the funds into their existing budgets and then use those funds for other ministries of their choosing.

### Opting out

Not every congregation that receives the promotional material presents the offerings to the congregation. Those congregations that do not participate in the special offerings shared what led to those decisions.

- Members prefer to focus on local needs and missions..
- A feeling that there are too many “asks” from the national offices and a sense of offering fatigue.
- Incomes are limited; therefore, the number of offerings is limited.
- Disagreement with decisions made by the national leadership.

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Overview 3 of 3

### Special Offerings and Matthew 25

At the direction of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency focuses its work to accomplish the challenge that is set forth in Matthew 25. The charge is to engage the world to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Of these respondents, 65% are familiar with the Matthew 25 movement but were not aware of any connection between the Matthew 25 movement and the Special Offerings.

For those who were familiar with Matthew 25 prior to this survey, 58% think the One Great Hour of Sharing offering fits closest to the purpose of the Matthew 25 movement.

There are many stories to share about the Special Offerings; 20 are willing to share theirs.

### Presbyterian Giving Catalog

The Presbyterian Giving Catalog is another opportunity for Presbyterians to support siblings in need and to make life-changing differences for them. About 80% of the respondents had some familiarity with the Presbyterian Giving Catalog. This report confirms that as leaders become more familiar with the Catalog, they increasingly use it to interpret mission.

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Research Process

Surveys were sent to 6,383 congregations as that is the number of congregations that provided an email address on their 2022 Session Annual Statistical Report (SASR); 1,118 responses were received. Of those 719 (65%) were complete responses having answered all questions. The remaining 399 responses varied with the number of questions that they completed. This equates to a 17.5% response rate with a 11.2% completion rate of the known or reachable congregations.

A shortcoming of the survey process is the lack of reliable, accurate email addresses for the congregations. Not every congregation maintains its email addresses. With the election of a new Clerk of Session comes a new email address that might go unknown until the next filing of the SASR. If the Clerk of Session or other church contact uses their personal email address, then opts out of receiving future mailings from Research Services, connection with that congregation is lost until a new email is provided, usually on the next filing of the SASR. To promote the survey response, generic links that are not linked to a specific congregation point of contact were shared with mid councils for their distribution to their congregations.

Given the access limitation, the survey participation appears to be similar to that of the denomination's congregations but not completely representative by church size and location of the denomination.

# The Offerings

**Offerings & Their Programs**

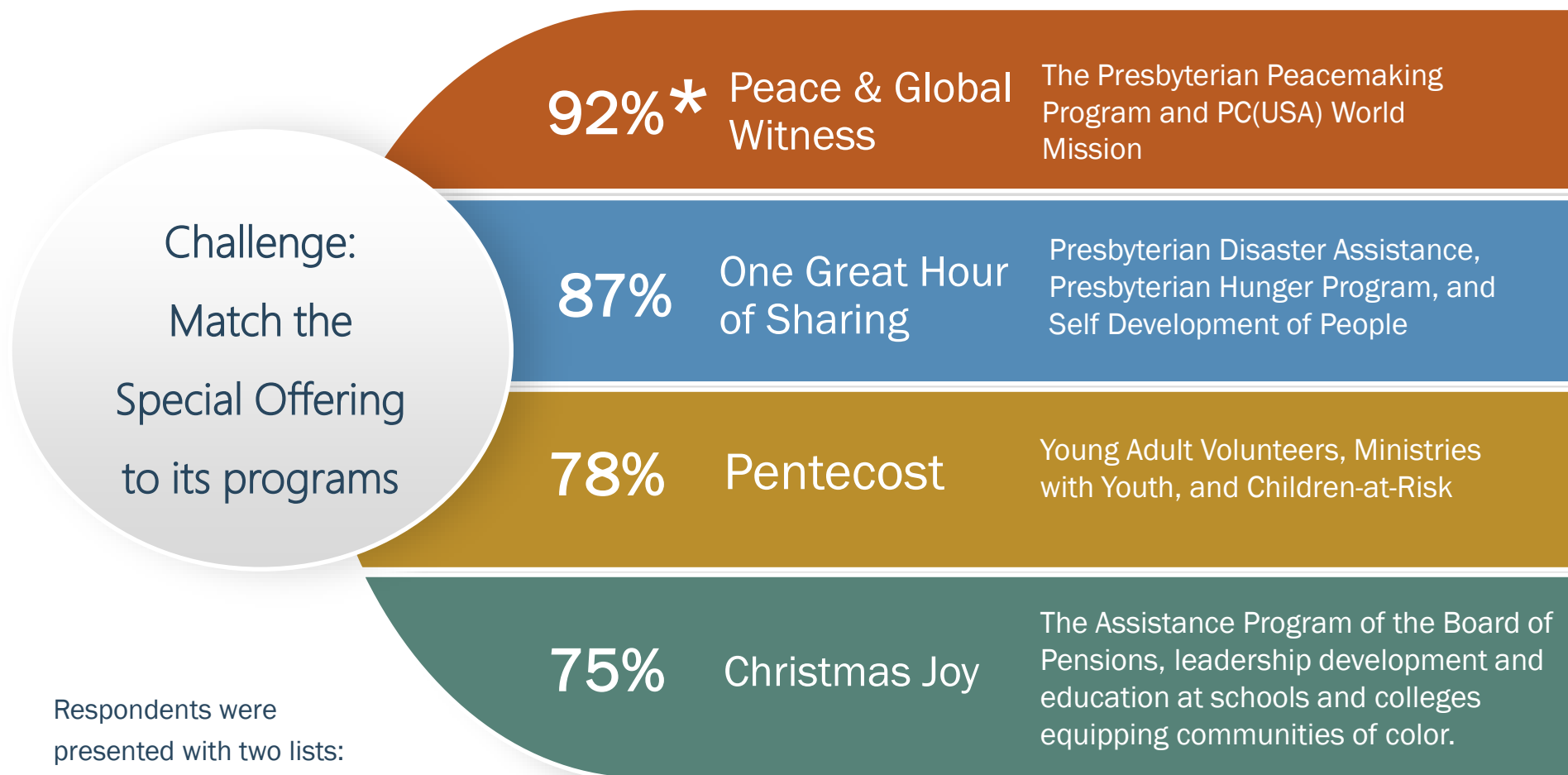
**Offerings Received**

**Liturgical Season**



## Special Offerings Task Force

# Do Presbyterians know what each offering supports?



Respondents were presented with two lists: offerings and programs with the challenge to match the offering to its programs. The offering is shown with its associated program in the graphic. Administrative staff appear most knowledgeable about the offerings followed by pastors, ruling elders, and stewardship chairs.

\* The percentages reflect the percentage of correct responses.

## Special Offerings Task Force

# What offerings do congregations receive?

**PC(USA) congregations receive several designated offerings each year. Of these eight, four constitute the Four Special Offerings of the Church. Within this response, the four special offerings seem to be received by congregations significantly more than the other four.**

**Congregations are encouraged to receive each of these four offerings. Those congregations that receive all four special offerings are known as 4x4 congregations. When asked if their congregation is a 4x4 congregation, here is their response.**

**40% Yes**  
**50% No**  
**10% Do not know**

Offerings received by congregations



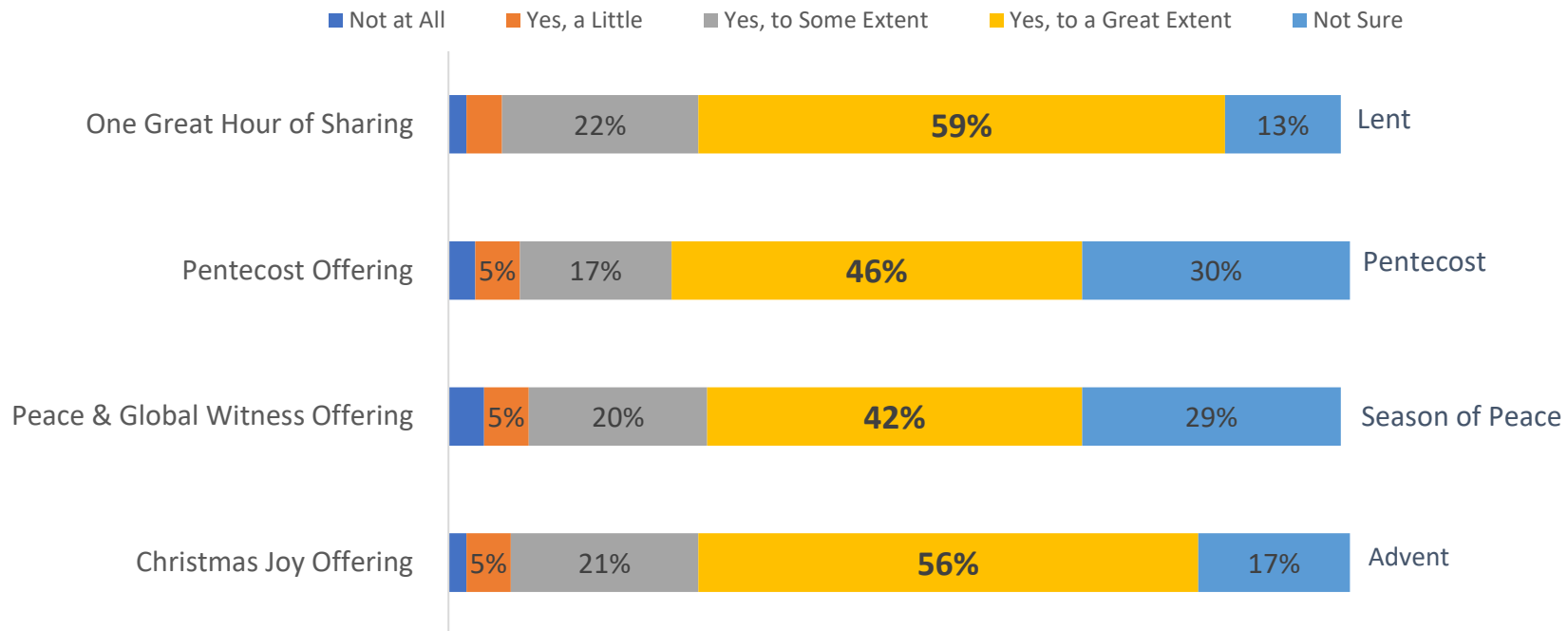
n=847

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Offerings & their Liturgical Season

Respondents were asked if the special offering is well-aligned with the liturgical season in which it is received. The One Great Hour of Sharing seems to be well aligned with the season of Lent. Still, not everyone agrees or is certain that the materials developed for each offering aligns with the offerings liturgical season. There is an underlying assumption that the respondent knows in which liturgical season that the offerings are received.

How well does the offering align with its liturgical season?



n=740

\* Values of less than 5% are not noted.

# The Offerings

**One Great Hour of Sharing**

**Peace & Global Witness**

**Pentecost**

**Christmas Joy**

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Similarities

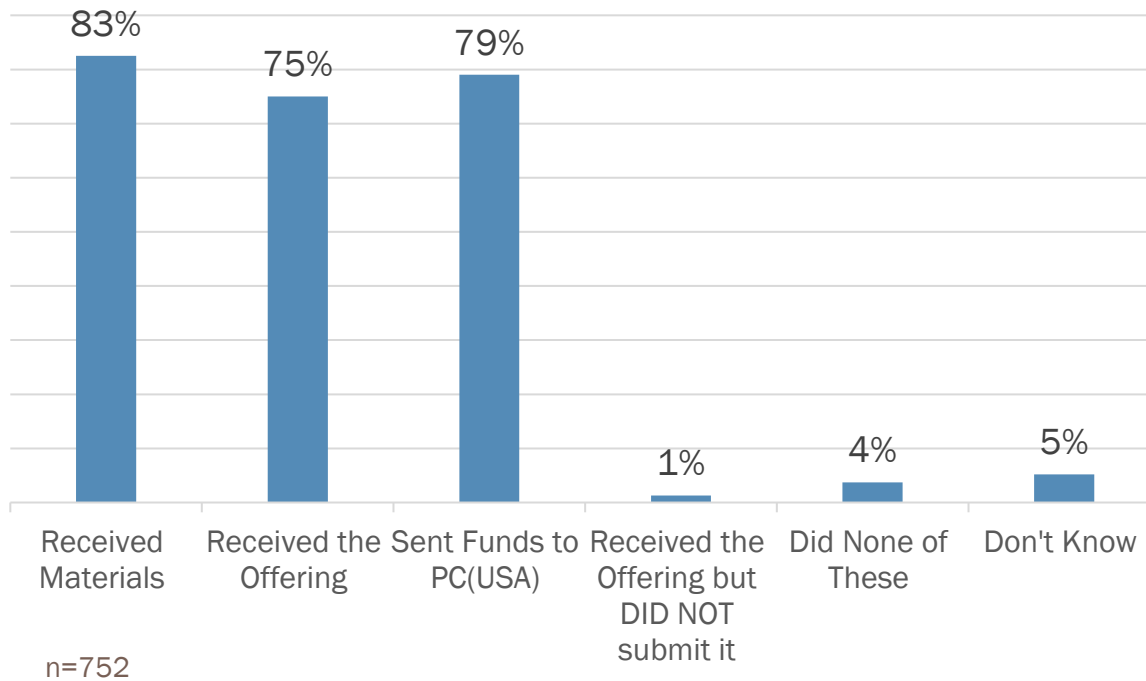
### THE OFFERINGS SHARE SOME SIMILAR FINDINGS:

- In general, if the offering is received, the funds are remitted to the Office of Special Offerings. Less than 2% of those who receive the offering do not to submit it.
- Not all congregations receive materials for all the offerings, Only 58% reported receiving materials for Peace and Global Witness, while 83% reported receiving materials for One Great Hour of Sharing.
- Receiving the materials does not mean the offering is received. Between 8% - 14% receive the promotional materials but do not receive the offering.
- Each offering has those who do not participate. Some common reasons for non-participation include a decision by the Session to not participate, prefer to support local needs, income limitations of members, lack of trust with national programs, and too many offering requests. Here are the non-participation rates:
  - 24% Pentecost
  - 21% Peace & Global Witness
  - 8% Christmas Joy
  - 4% One Great Hour of Sharing

## Special Offerings Task Force

# One Great Hour of Sharing

As one of the oldest and best-established offerings of PC(USA), this offering has the highest participation rate of the four special offerings. The offering is received during the Lenten season, usually in the late winter months of February and March.



**Only a few congregations that receive the One Great Hour of Sharing offering do not submit the funds.**

**The reasons for not submitting the offering include...**

**Having lost faith in PDA &/or national offices**

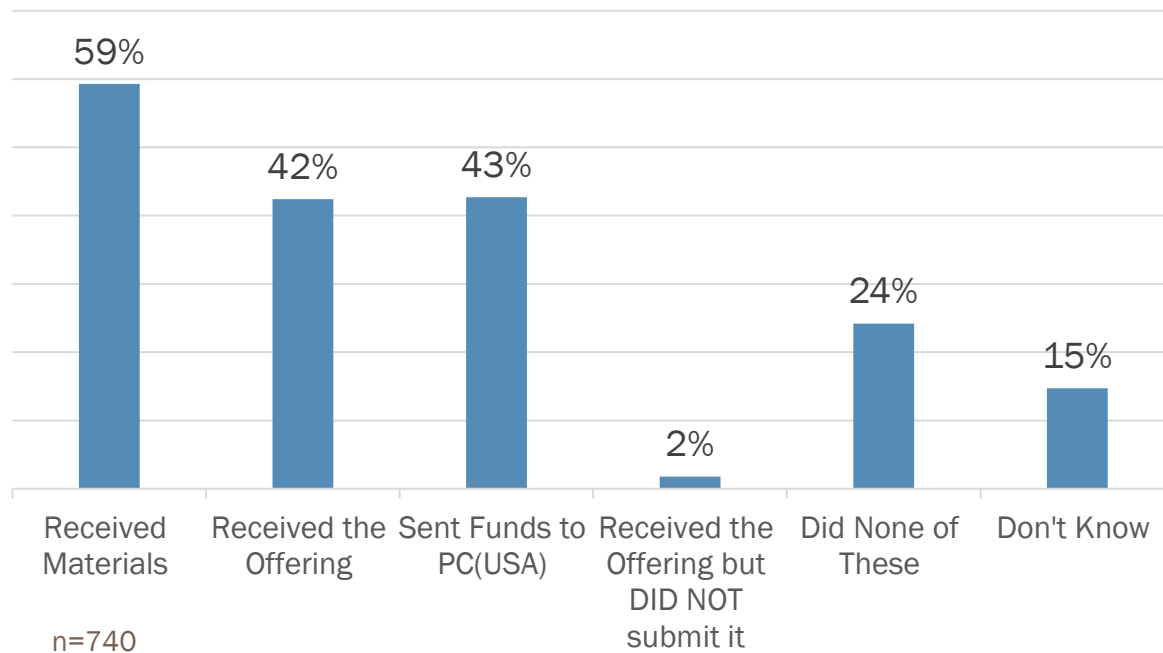
**Decision to use the funds for local needs**

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Pentecost

In 2023, the Pentecost offering celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> year. This offering has the lowest participation rate of the four special offerings. The offering is received at the time of Pentecost, usually in the late spring months of May or June.

The 16% of those who receive the materials and do not take the offering are small congregations and say their members are “financially stretched”.



**Those who do not participate in the Pentecost Offering mention that they....**

**Prefer to support local needs**

**The offering conflicts with local requests**

**No interest in the offering**

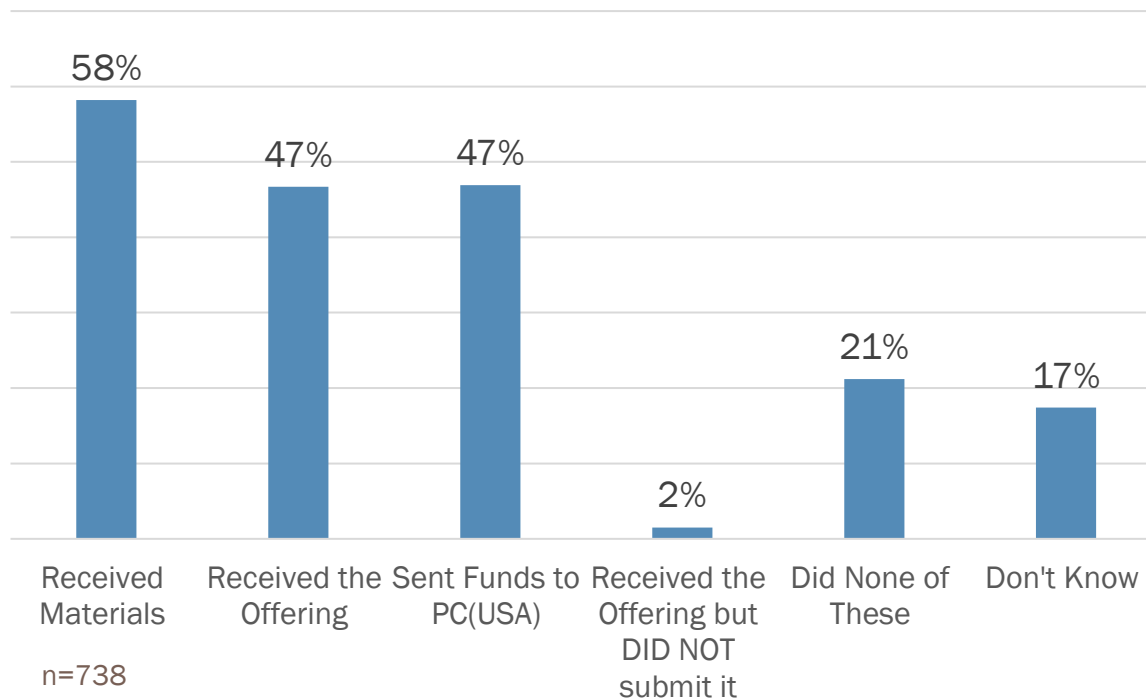
**Too many offerings**

.....  
**Surprisingly, a Clerk of Session for 20 years had never heard of the offering until a new synod leader mentioned in an email.**

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Peace & Global Witness

Many have known this offering as Peacemaking. In recent years, the name was changed to better reflect its connection with the activities that it supports. As of 2023, Presbyterians have been receiving this offering under either of its two names for 40 years. It is received during A Season of Peace which ends on World Communion Sunday, usually in the early fall months of September or October.



**Of the 21% that do not participate, their comments include...**

**Session did not approve it**

**Pastoral transitions**

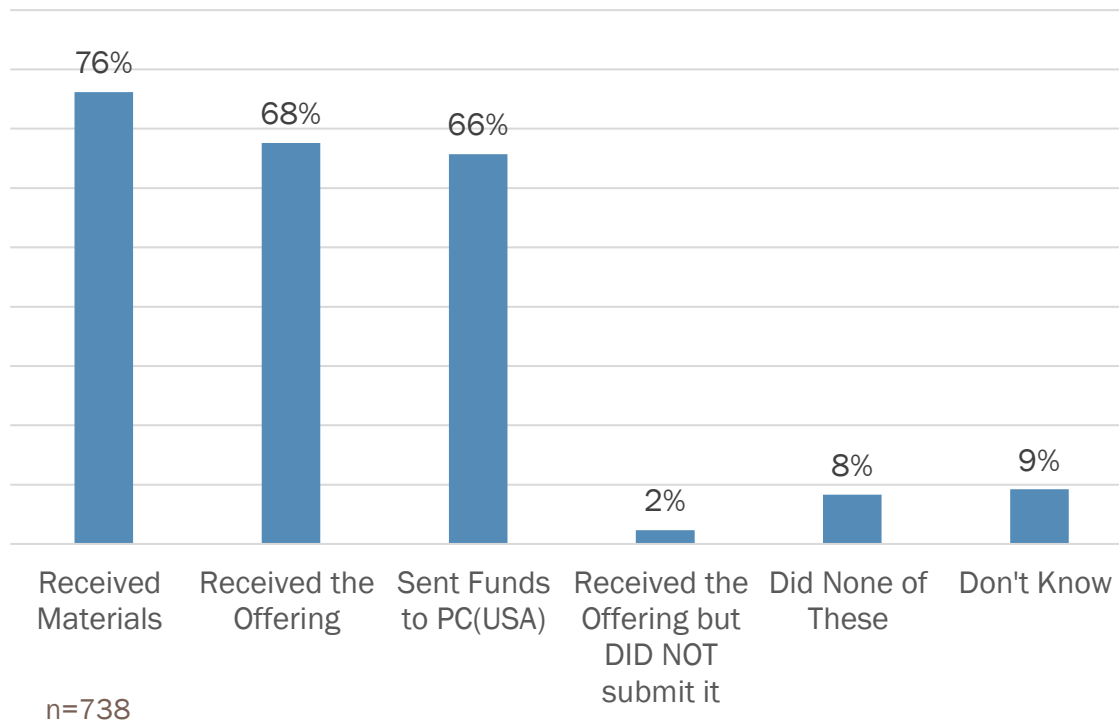
**Session voted to discontinue being 4x4 then selected a reduced number of offerings for participation**



## Special Offerings Task Force

# Christmas Joy

As the oldest of the four special offerings of the PC(USA), the Christmas Joy offering has second highest participation rate of these offerings. The offering is received during the Advent season, usually in the months of November and December.



**Similar to the One Great Hour of Sharing, Christmas Joy appears well supported and engaged by congregations.**

**A few do not participate, here are some their reasons...**

**Members face increasing financial difficulty at Christmas**

**Prefer to help those in need in our community during Advent**

**Too many offerings**

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Why collect the offering & not send it?

A small number of congregations collected the offering but for some reason did not send it to the Office of Special Offerings. Here are the reasons/explanations for not sending the offering.

- The congregation collected money for the Special Offering(s) and used the money for ministries of needs of our choice.
- The congregation has not given much thought to participating in the Special Offering(s) in recent years.
- The congregation collected money for the Special Offering(s), but just did not send it.
- Other higher-priority items took precedence over collecting the Special Offering(s).
- The congregation collected money for the Special Offering(s), and the money was reabsorbed into our treasury.
- Pastoral transitions

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Promotional Materials\*

Different materials are available to promote the offerings. The resources are listed in order of their use. Less than 1% report using either Spanish or Korean materials.

76%	Bulletin inserts
72%	Offering envelopes
52%	Posters
39%	Children's coin boxes
38%	Brochures
22%	Online Minutes for Mission
13%	Online Leader's Guides
11%	Online worship resources
7%	Online videos
7%	Bulletin covers

n=625

Congregations have options as to how they order and receive the materials. For the majority of these congregations, a standing order is preferred.

57%	Maintain our current standing order
20%	Create a standing order for each offering
15%	Place an order when the congregation is ready to receive the offering
9%	Send only electronic resources

n=605

\*9% report using other materials than what were listed, such as pastor created materials.

# The Offerings & Matthew 25

**Familiarity**

**Awareness**

**Alignment**

## Special Offerings Task Force

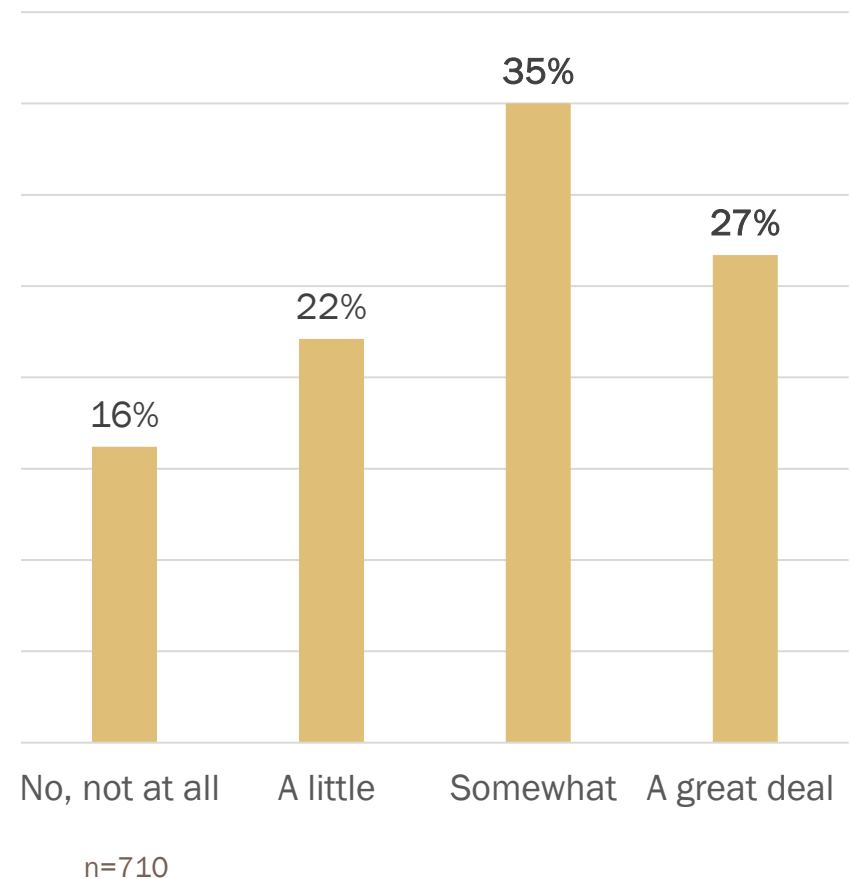
# Familiarity

The Four Special Offerings of the Church have a long history in Presbyterian life. The General Assembly directed the Presbyterian Mission Agency to become a Matthew 25 agency.

What is the connection to or relationship between the offerings and Matthew 25? First, we must ask if the respondent is aware of the Matthew 25 mandate prior to this survey.

More than half can say that they are fairly familiar with Matthew 25.

Familiarity with Matthew 25

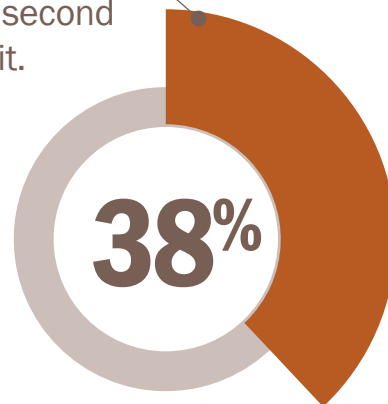


## Special Offerings

# Awareness & Fit

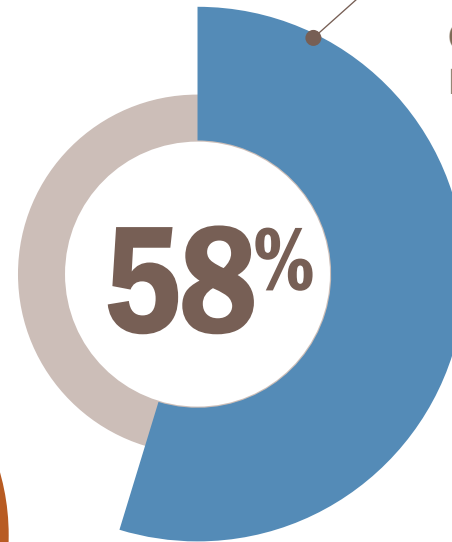
### Peace & Global Witness

Offering seems to be second with its Matthew 25 fit.



### One Great Hour of Sharing

Offering fits best with the Matthew 25 Invitation.



### Informed & Aware

Only 10% knew a great deal about Matthew 25 **AND** its connection with the special offerings prior to the survey.



Do the offerings fit with the Matthew 25 mandate? That is, do the offerings provide ways for the local congregation to actively engage the world around them, to become more relevant to their communities and to the larger global community? If so, how well do they fit?

n=710

Source: Placeholder example

# Presbyterian Giving Catalog

**Familiarity**

**Mission**

**Interpretation**

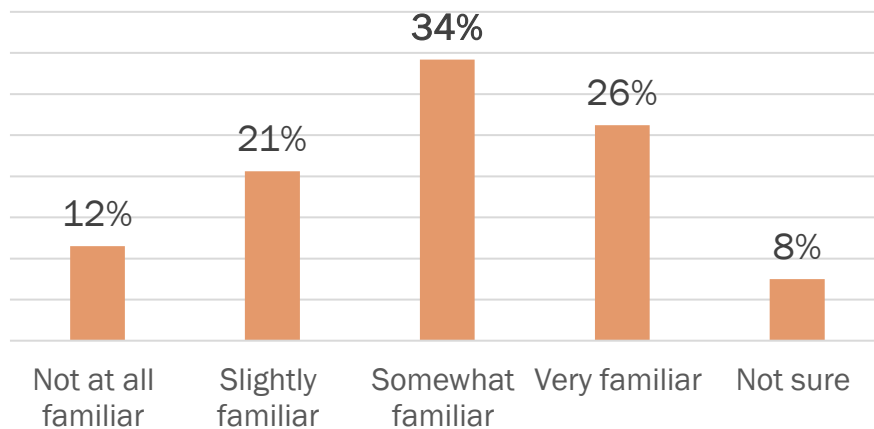
**Materials**

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Presbyterian Giving Catalog

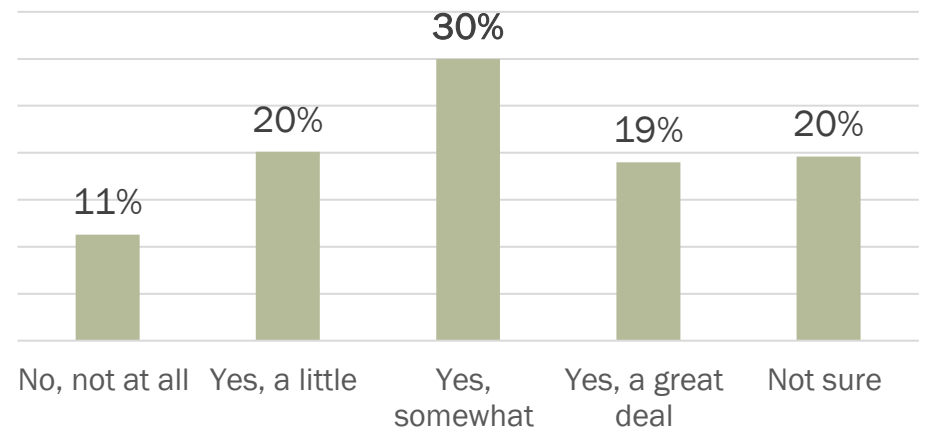
The Presbyterian Giving Catalog is a resource that connects people as neighbors by offering a variety of tangible ways to support our siblings in need and make a life-changing difference. How familiar are congregations with the Presbyterian Giving Catalog? Is the Catalog used to interpret mission?

Familiarity with the Catalog



n=708

Use it to Interpret Mission



n=568



## Special Offerings Task Force

# Presbyterian Giving Catalog

It is useful to understand the general familiarity with the Catalog and the frequency by which congregational leaders use it to interpret mission; however, what is more valuable is know the intersection of familiarity and use for mission interpretation. This table is a crosstabulation of these two questions. One can see as familiarity increases use of the catalog to interpret mission also increases.

While the observation appears significant, it is not statistically significant. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to note that as congregational leaders become increasingly familiar with the catalog, they are more than likely use it to interpret mission.

	Not at all familiar	Slightly familiar	Somewhat familiar	Very familiar
Mission interpretation				
A Great deal	0	10	30	68
Somewhat	0	28	89	53
A little	0	33	58	23
None	0	19	24	21

n=456, another 112 are familiar with the catalog but could not respond as to how the it is used.

## Special Offerings Task Force

# Promotional Materials & Use

When considering which of the Presbyterian Giving Catalog promotional materials a congregation decides to use it, the majority prefer to use the catalog itself. A few promote the catalog during their Minute for Mission.

- 
- 78% The actual Presbyterian Giving Catalog
  - 30% Bulletin inserts
  - 27% Display boxes
  - 26% Posters
  - 14% Stories of Impact brochures
  - 8% Children's curriculum
  - 4% Downloadable ads
  - 2% Social media ads
- 

n=511

The catalog and other materials are used as teaching materials to encourage giving to others, special projects, and the giving of gifts to honor an individual or group.

- 
- 43% To share with members about new ways to give to those in need
  - 36% As part of the congregation's alternative giving market
  - 27% To purchase a gift in honor of someone (for their birthday, Christmas, etc.)
  - 26% As a special project for a Sunday School class, Presbyterian Women group, or small group
  - 12% Other ways (congregational projects, VBS)
  - 9% Other - day care, mission projects, as part of congregation's giving tree
- 

n=262

# Comments about the Presbyterian Giving Catalog

Many enjoy the opportunities to support mission at a price point that is open to everyone for participation. The Presbyterian Giving Catalog provides the giver with the opportunity to give a small amount that has a big impact. Although there is the request to have more options for under \$25.

Before there was a Presbyterian Giving Catalog, there was Heifer International. Some commented that the Catalog competes with a congregation's established support of Heifer International and that the Catalog is more expensive.

The Catalog seems to be a good way to introduce and/or teach mission to children.

For some congregations, it has become a tangible way to honor or remember a member by giving a gift in their name.

It is visually engaging. Tech savvy congregations would like more visuals that could be downloaded into their social media or other electronic communication platforms.

# Demographics

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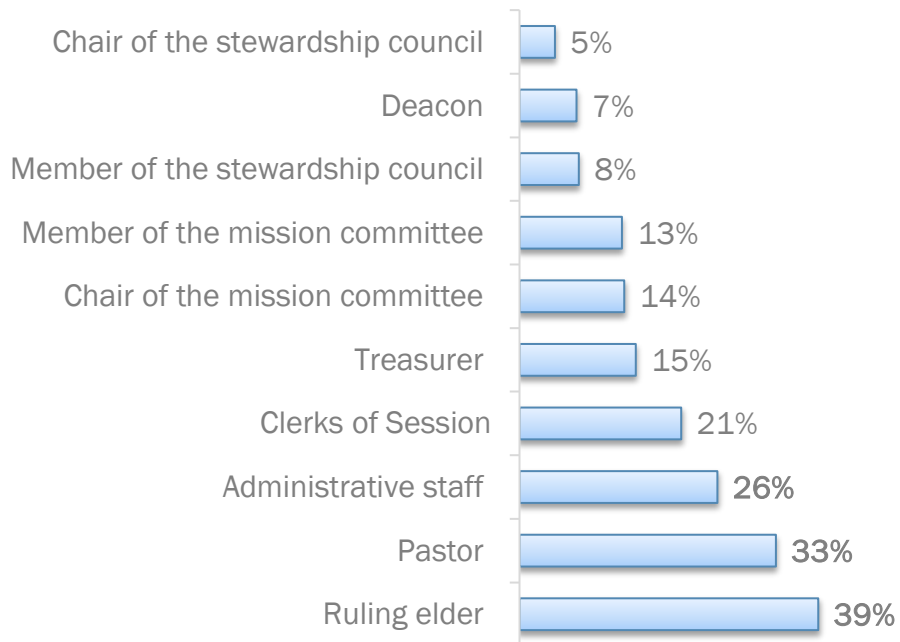
## Special Offerings Task Force

# Demographics\*

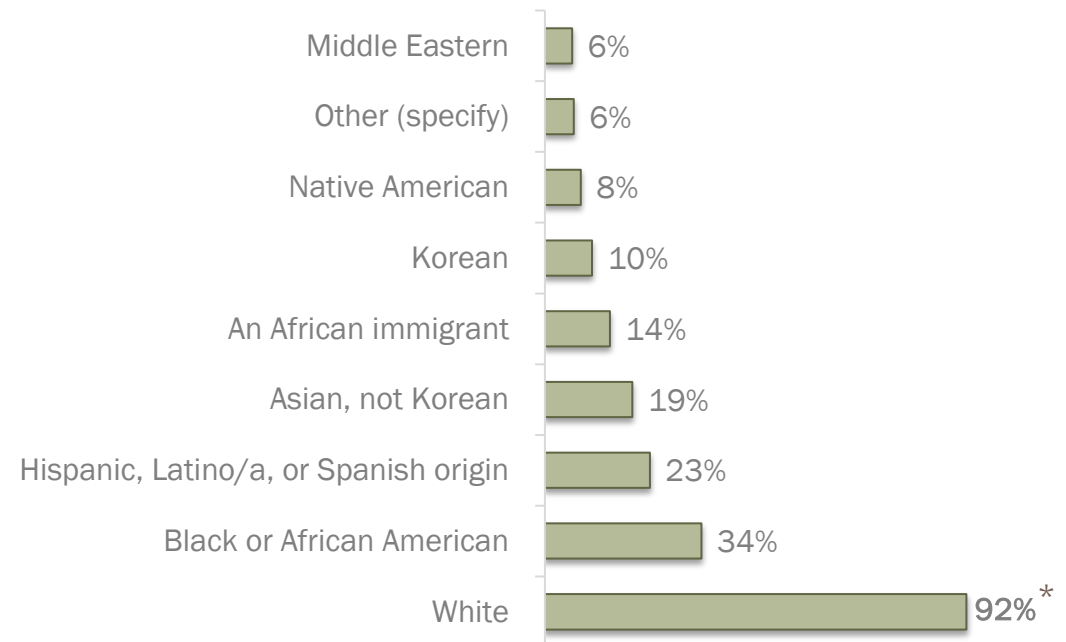
It is always useful to understand who provided the survey response. Ruling elders, pastors, and staff seem to be the primary respondents. For this survey, the person could select multiple congregational roles.

Each respondent was asked to describe the diversity of their congregation, NWC, or new church development. The responses may be more diverse than most congregations.

### Respondent's Role(s)



### Diversity within the Fellowship



\* 50% of these congregations are diverse.

\*For both sets of data, the totals exceed 100% because the respondent could select multiple options.

# Next Steps

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## Special Offerings Task Force

# What's next?

Part of the research role is to review the data for what is says and does not say. A common response throughout the survey is that there are too many offerings. Local needs and national offerings compete for the same, and often, limited funds, with frequent overlap. It is offering fatigue. Some congregations chose to reduce participation in one or more national offerings to ease the situation. Some choose non-participation because of the lack of trust in national programs. Can the offering fatigue with its competition for funds be reduced and trust in national programs increased? If yes, might it result in an increase in support and funding for national programs?

A quick survey of PC(U.S.A)'s Research Services' Faith Community Today partners including United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Episcopal, and American Baptist Churches USA asked for the number of denomination-wide offerings the denomination promotes annually. These denominations sponsor:

- 1- 12 annual offerings where the local, regional, or mid-governing body has the autonomy over the allocation of the funds.
- 1-15 annual offerings that focus on the denomination's domestic agenda/programs/concerns.
- 1-10 annual offerings that focus on the denomination's international agenda/programs/concerns.

Most denominations promote one (1) annual offering for each of these three categories. The United Methodist Church promotes the most with 10 or more offerings in each of these categories.

Is it appropriate to reconsider the Four Special Offerings of the Church and to consolidate all the national offerings into a fewer number? Would making fewer requests work to promote more trust between the national offices and the local congregation?

Before such a decision is made, additional information is needed from the congregations.

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions using surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, presbyteries and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a ministry of the Administrative Services Group.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or [research@pcusa.org](mailto:research@pcusa.org).



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