

**CONSTITUTIONAL MUSING: #25**  
**“JOINT CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS”**  
**(G-5.05)**

**What is a Joint Congregational Witness?**

A joint congregational witness is a **mission** strategy of a presbytery. **When its strategy for mission requires it**, a presbytery may approve a joint congregational witness between PC(USA) congregations and congregations of other Christian churches.<sup>i</sup> Accordingly, a joint congregational witness **can only be formed by the joining of two or more separate congregations**, one of which is a PC(USA) congregation.

**Can a PC(USA) congregation form a joint congregational witness without Presbytery involvement?**

No. A congregation can express to the presbytery its interest in forming a joint congregational witness. However, a congregation, of its own volition, cannot form a joint congregational witness. **Creation of a joint congregational witness requires the approval of the presbytery.**

**What entities may presbyteries approve for a joint witness?**

A PC(USA) congregation and one or more congregations of other eligible Christian churches

**How does a presbytery determine whether another congregation of a Christian church is eligible for joint congregational witness?**

The presbytery must determine whether the other Christian church complies with the following three requirements:

1. Recognizes Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
2. Accepts the authority of Scripture; **and**
3. Observes the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

**How does the presbytery form a joint congregational witness?**

- **First, a presbytery must determine whether the presbytery’s strategy for mission requires the creation of a joint congregational witness.**
- **Second, a presbytery must determine whether the congregation of another Christian church is eligible for a joint congregational witness.**
  - As noted in the previous question, to be eligible the other Christian Church must recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, accept the authority of Scripture, and observe the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
- **Third, a written plan for how the particular joint congregational witness will be formed must be developed.**
  - No provision of the plan for joint congregational witness shall be construed as modifying or amending the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
  - For further information about this plan see the next question
- **Fourth, the creation of the joint congregational witness, as outlined in the plan, must be:**
  - Approved by 2/3 majority of members of each of the congregations at duly called meetings of each congregation;
  - Approved by the presbytery; **and**
  - Approved by a council or governing body comparable to a presbytery in the other Christian church.

**What should be included in the plan for joint congregational witness?**

The plan should outline how the joint congregational witness will be formed. While specific details of what the plan should include are not listed in the PC(USA) Constitution, historically, plans have included provisions for how the joint congregational witness will be organized including issues of incorporation, membership, officers, councils, benevolences and pastoral leadership.

**What happens when the constitutions of the denominations in a joint congregational witness differ?**

Where the constitutions of the denominations in a joint congregational witness differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. However, where there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the congregational council shall petition the next higher councils of each denomination to resolve the conflict.

**How does “Joint Congregational Witness” relate to “Union” or “Federated” churches?**

The current form of government uses the term “joint congregational witness” to include congregations formerly identified as “union” or “federated.” Historically in our polity, the term “federated” and “union” have described two types of relationships between congregations of different denominational membership that desire to make a united witness in their community.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> See G-5.05 “Joint Congregational Witness”

<sup>ii</sup> For more detailed information on the interpretation and difference between union and federated churches see General Assembly action taken in 2006: Item 07-02, *Minutes*, 2006, Part I, p.566