

Special Offerings: Our Collective Witness to the Love of Jesus Christ



Lives changed, hope restored, hunger sated. Every day, Presbyterians all over the world work toward these goals, making the world a better place. We reach out a hand to flood victims in Tennessee; we help a farmer sow seeds in Africa; we bring hope to each one of God's children. This life-changing work is possible because of our mission programs, our staff, our volunteers, and people like you. Every year, Presbyterians give generously through Special Offerings, as much as \$16,000,000 in 2009, to support the mission and collective witness of the church. Special Offerings also play an important role in defining what it means to be a connectional church in the twenty-first century, bringing together the diversity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to focus and take faith-based action on shared concerns.

Why this review?

The General Assembly (GA) believes so strongly in the role of Special Offerings that it took an action at the 218th General Assembly (2008), ordering a review of the four churchwide Special Offerings. The review is to do two things: determine their effectiveness in funding the mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and explore ways that Special Offerings could further engage congregations and individuals in deeper relationship with the church's witness and ministry. In response to the GA action, the chair of the General Assembly Mission Council appointed a Special Offerings Advisory Task Force of pastors and elders from across the United States to carry out this work. Determined to be thorough and objective, the Task Force engaged The Alford Group, a consulting firm to the not-for-profit community, to meet with key leaders and members to share their Special Offerings experiences and suggestions. Your forthright insights are crucial in shaping the future health and



After the earthquake shook Haiti on January 12, 2010, within twenty-four hours **you** were working alongside international partners in Port-au-Prince to set up food and water distribution sites throughout the city. As a result of One Great Hour of Sharing, you made a difference in saving lives and bringing hope to those in fear and despair.

success of these Special Offerings, the denomination’ s well-spring of good works in our communities and the world. *For these reasons we look to you as leaders and members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to shed light on the perception and practices surrounding each of our four special offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, the Pentecost Offering, the Peacemaking Offering, and the Christmas Joy Offering.*

What makes Special Offerings special?

They are opportunities for *partnership*. Special Offerings invite us to participate in mission work that reaches beyond ourselves and our communities. By giving together as a church, we are able to have a larger, deeper impact on our world’ s pressing needs. The Offerings foster a sense of belonging to the larger church as brothers and sisters in Christ join millions of other PC(USA) members in supporting mission.

They are opportunities for *learning*. Special Offerings help us learn and teach one another about mission, stewardship, and discipleship. Churches welcome and use Special Offering promotional posters, bookmarks, bulletin inserts, and colorful fish banks (loved by children) that originate in denominational offices. Mission and Christian education committees work together to distribute and interpret the materials in diverse congregations. The Offerings also serve an integral role in discipleship development by nurturing church members in the act and attitude of joyful giving as important ways of opening themselves to the Holy Spirit.

They are opportunities for *witness*. Few activities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) profoundly affect the life of the church as do Special Offerings. Special Offerings inspire, equip, and connect Presbyterians in a collective witness of Jesus Christ’ s love for the whole church.



“Suddenly there were people telling me I had skills and talents and expecting me to use them...and they helped solidify the moral foundations on which to make decisions. I can’t put a price tag on those gifts... because of the generosity of Presbyterians to the Christmas Joy Offering...I’ve been able to have a positive impact on my family and community.”

~ A scholarship recipient

What are the four churchwide Special Offerings currently received by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?



One Great Hour of Sharing began in 1949 and usually is received on or around Easter. This Special Offering funds the work of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Self-Development of People, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

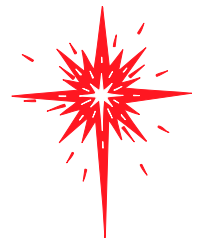
The **Pentecost Offering** started in 1998 and is received on the day of Pentecost. This collection supports the ministries of children, youth, and young adults. Forty percent of the Offering is retained by congregations for their own use in ministries, especially with children and youth at risk. Sixty percent of the Offering supports the mission of Child Advocacy, Youth Ministry, and Young Adult Volunteers through the General Assembly Mission Council.



The **Peacemaking Offering** started in 1980 and is received on the first Sunday of October, World Communion Sunday. This fund is directed to the ministry of Peacemaking. Twenty-five percent of the offering is retained by congregations, 25 percent is held by presbyteries and synods for peacemaking work, and 50 percent is designated to the mission carried out by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program of the General Assembly Mission Council.

The **Christmas Joy Offering** originated in the former PCUS (“southern” church) in the 1930s as an offering to support retired missionaries and their families. It was officially named the Joy Gift Offering in 1940. The UPCUSA (“northern” church) began a similar offering in 1960, and the two offerings combined in 1988 to become the Christmas Offering of Joy, renamed in 1990 the Christmas Joy Offering.

Received at Christmastime, this collection provides assistance through two ministries of support. Half of the Offering provides emergency, shared, and housing grants through the Board of Pensions to meet needs of clergy, mission workers, and church professionals in situations not ordinarily covered by the normal pension program. The other half of the Offering provides leadership development by supporting our historically racial ethnic schools and colleges.



What is my role?

We believe the Special Offerings play an essential role in the PC(USA) of the twenty-first century and that strengthening them will, in turn, intensify the impact that we can have in today's needy world. Our final report will be submitted to the 220th General Assembly (2012). With your participation in this review process, our joint effort will increase our understanding of how we can maximize Special Offerings to do God's work in this world.

Thank you.



“God’s Wish—No Child Soldiers!” “Stop Hurting Children!” Part of the Pentecost Offering’s work to protect children and the Peacemaking Offering’s effort to bring peace to our violent world is engaging Presbyterians in the “Red Hand Campaign.” Many groups have created red handprints on paper onto which they have added their names, hometowns, and a message.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15–16

