

Clerks' Tip of the Month Per Capita



Last month in my Clerk's Tip I noted that every church's per capita amount, i.e., the amount each church is asked to pay on behalf of its members to support the governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (USA), is based on the membership numbers reported by the church in its statistical report.

Per capita is a somewhat vague concept to many of us and I thought it would be good to talk about what it is and what it is used for. First the basics. From the Minutes of the 1995 General Assembly: "Per capita is an opportunity for all communicant members of the Presbyterian church through the [councils] to participate equally, responsibly, and interdependently by sharing the cost of coordination and evaluation of mission; and of performing ecclesiastical, legislative, and judicial functions that identify a Reformed Church, while at the same time strengthening the sense of community among all Presbyterians." That is, it is a feature of our connectional church system that allows the PC(USA) and its councils to exist.

There are lots of things going on other than what happens in our individual congregations. Candidates are prepared for ministry, teaching elders are examined for membership, assistance is given to churches seeking new pastoral leadership, background checks are performed, new pastor support groups are supported, council staff salaries are paid, and on and on. And your church and its members support all of that through per capita.

There have been occasions when churches could not or did not pay their per capita. In those situations, the National Capital Presbytery must absorb the loss to its own operating budget plus must remit the required funds to the synod and the General Assembly. So it is sort of a double whammy to us when that happens.

I recently learned of a brochure that is available on our website that you might want to make available to your congregants. It answers numerous questions about per capita. You can find it here:

https://www.thepresbytery.org/application/files/1214/8415/9641/Per_Capita_Brochure17.pdf.

I hope your 2017 is starting well.

Peace and blessings,

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