

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (OVERVIEW)

The second largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States is the Presbyterian Church in America (the PCA). It is known for being the largest conservative Reformed denomination in the country, but not necessarily the most conservative Presbyterian denomination. Nevertheless...the PCA does typically take traditionally conservative positions on social issues.

The PCA is Reformed in theology, Presbyterian in government, and very active in missions. It is one of the fastest-growing denominations in the U.S. having experienced steady growth since its founding in 1973 and growing at least tenfold since 1983. As of 2014, the PCA had 1831 churches with a total membership of over 358,000, and close to five thousand ministers.

Prominent leaders in the PCA would include Tim Keller, R.C. Sproul, and the late Francis Schaeffer. In Houston, the most prominent PCA church would probably be Christ the King Presbyterian. In the Dallas area, Park Cities Presbyterian would be a PCA church of note.

As most of you know, the PC(USA), MDPC's current denomination, came into being in 1983, when there was a merger of the PCUS (a denomination of Southern Presbyterian churches) and the UPCUSA (a denomination of Northern Presbyterian churches). The Presbyterian Church in America church began ten years before that when the more conservative churches of the PCUS (the Southern churches) left that denomination, mainly over some issues concerning the deity of Jesus Christ, differences of opinion about the Great Commission, and over convictions related to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture.

The headquarters of the PCA, now 43 years old, is located in Lawrenceville, Georgia. The PCA believes that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Their motto is "Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed faith, Obedient to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ." The PCA professes adherence to the historic confessional standards of Presbyterianism, namely: The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the Westminster Larger Catechism. And all of those documents are considered secondary documents and subordinate to the Bible, which alone is viewed as the inspired Word of God.

The PCA form of government is Presbyterian in nature, based on the Book of Church Order, which itself was based on the old PCUS Book of Church Order. There are basically three levels of Church government: the Session, which governs the local church; the Presbytery, which is a regional governing body; and the General Assembly, the highest court of the denomination. There are no Synods in the PCA. The PCA denomination was intended from the beginning to be more of a "grassroots" denomination with more power invested in local presbyteries; in other words, less centralized power at their General Assembly. Church property belongs to the local congregation without any right of reversion whatsoever to any Presbytery or General Assembly.

Local church officers are teaching elders (pastors), ruling elders and sometimes deacons, all elected by the congregation. Teaching elders are called by the Congregation and examined,

received, ordained and installed by the Presbytery to serve as Pastors. Ruling elders are elected by the Congregation and are ordained by the ordained Elders of the church who are present at the service of ordination and installation.

The PCA is very big on missions, sending missionaries around the world, having close to 700 career foreign missionaries of their own, while supporting hundreds of others, including over 6500 short term missionaries serving in over 130 nations, claiming to put into the field the world's largest Presbyterian mission force.

But, and saving this point for last, the most obvious and quite problematic issue for us at MDPC with the PCA is the fact that they do not ordain women. That, of course, is a major concern for our church since we have exceptionally gifted and experienced, wise godly pastors on our staff who also happen to be women. There is an increasingly strong current movement in the PCA to allow ordination of women as deacons, but it would seem that they are currently quite a ways from ordaining women as pastors, if indeed they go that route at all. For this reason alone, it would seem that MDPC aligning with the PCA at this time would not be likely or practical.