

# A Brief History of the Presbyterian Church in America

The Presbyterian Church in America has a strong commitment to evangelism, missionary work at home and abroad, and to Christian education. From its inception, the church has determined its purpose to be “faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.”

The PCA was organized as a constitutional assembly in December 1973. It separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) in opposition to the long-developing theological liberalism.

The PCA has made a firm commitment on the doctrinal standards which had been significant in presbyterianism since 1645, namely the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. These doctrinal standards express the distinctives of the Calvinistic or Reformed tradition.

Among the distinctive doctrines of the Westminster Standards and of Reformed tradition is the unique authority of the Bible. The reformers based all of their claims on “sola scriptura,” the Scriptures alone. This included the doctrine of their inspiration which is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of Scriptures (in their original autographs) so that their words should convey the thoughts He wished conveyed, bear a proper relation to the thoughts of other inspired books, and be kept free from error of fact, of doctrine, and of judgment — all of which were to be an infallible rule of faith and life. Historically, the concept of infallibility has included the idea of inerrancy.

The PCA maintains the historic polity of Presbyterian governance set forth in The Book of Church Order, namely rule by presbyters (or elders) and the graded assemblies or courts. These courts are the session, governing the local church; the presbytery, for regional matters; and the general assembly, at the national level. It has taken seriously the position of the parity of elders, making a distinction between the two classes of elders, teaching and ruling. It has self-consciously taken a more democratic position (rule from the grass roots up) on presbyterian governance in contrast to a more prelatical form (rule from the top assemblies down).

The PCA is one of the faster growing denominations in the United States, with over 1700 churches and missions throughout the USA and Canada. There were over 335,000 communicant and non-communicant members as of December 2000.

The influence of the PCA extends far beyond the walls of the local church. Mission to the World has 519 career missionaries in almost 60 nations of the world, 169 two-year missionaries, and over 6500 short term missionaries. PCA churches support an additional 690 career missionaries, covering over 130 nations. Further, with more than 100 chaplains in the military, Veterans Administration, prisons, and hospitals, and 45 college and university campus ministers, the Gospel is proclaimed to a rather large audience around the world not reached through usual outreach channels.

The PCA offices are located in Lawrenceville, GA, and is the location from which most of the ministries of the denomination are coordinated.

(abridged from the PCA website: [www.pcanet.org/history](http://www.pcanet.org/history))