

**PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY BOARD**  
**February 9-11, 2022**  
**Mission Engagement & Support/Special Offerings**

**ITEM P.102**  
**FOR ACTION**

FOR PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S OFFICE USE ONLY			
	A. Resource Allocation & Stewardship	D. Coordinating Committee	G. Outreach to the World
	B. Personnel & Nominating	E. Mid-Councils	H. Ministerial Teams
	C. Property/Legal	F. Nurture the Body	X P. Plenary
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS – TO BE COMPLETED BY SUBMITTING OFFICE			
COST ( <i>explain in the Rationale section</i> ): None			
Within Per Capita Budget _____	Within Mission Budget _____	New Funds _____	

**Subject: Report from Special Offerings Review Task Force (SORTF)**

**Recommendations:**

- I. **The Special Offerings Review Task Force recommends that, for the foreseeable future, the ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING, interpreted and received during Lent and on Easter Sunday in response to Christ’s call to ministries of compassion and justice continue to support its causes at the following percentages: Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, 32 percent; Presbyterian Hunger Program, 36 percent; Self-Development of People, 32 percent.**
  
- II. **The Special Offerings Review Task Force recommends that the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board consider a comprehensive reshaping of the Pentecost Offering, the Peace & Global Witness Offering, and the Christmas Joy Offering in order to develop a unified vision within each offering that more closely aligns with the Matthew 25 call to action.**

**Rationale:**

MANDATE

On a four-year cycle, the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) is required to provide a task force for the review and evaluation of the four Special Offerings and the recipient ministries and for consideration of new Special Offerings purposes, in light of established criteria, for recommendation to the General Assembly (Organization for Mission, Appendix A).

The 2019 SORTF had been given several specific tasks by the Organization for Mission and the 223rd General Assembly:

1. Review progress toward attaining the \$20 million by 2025 goal
2. Align offering recipients with the strategic objectives of the Presbyterian Mission Agency
3. Examine the timing and programmatic emphases within each offering based on theological soundness, the liturgical calendar, and the mission engagement strategy
4. Evaluate progress on the aforementioned recommendations

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In 2020, at the recommendation of SORTF, the Presbyterian Mission Agency empowered the current SORTF to continue its work of evaluation with a focus on examining and developing a strategic approach to the funding of Special Offerings; directed that the Task Force make regular reports and recommendations concerning strategic opportunities and administrative impediments to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and present a final report to the 225th General Assembly in 2022.

MEMBERSHIP

Ruling Elder Linda Badger Becker, chair, Presbytery of Genesee Valley

The Rev. Steve Marsh, Presbytery of Los Ranchos

Ruling Elder Vince Patton, Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky

The Rev. Raul Santiago-Rivera, Presbytery of San Juan

Ruling Elder Tamara Williams, Presbytery of Charlotte

PROCESS

SORTF prepared a report that included recommendations for action by the 224th General Assembly (2020), which was presented to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board in February of 2020. When the Assembly was compelled to condense its agenda, the recommendations were referred to, approved by, and implemented by the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

The SORTF took seriously the mandate to “align offering recipients with the strategic objectives of the Presbyterian Mission Agency” and to “examine the timing and programmatic emphases within each offering based on theological soundness, the liturgical calendar, and the mission engagement strategy.”

In our first round of reviewing the offerings, it became abundantly clear that the mandate would be a complex and challenging task that would certainly take more time than the Task Force had allocated. The SORTF needed more time and more information. Therefore, it was recommended that SORTF continue its work of evaluation with a focus on examining and developing a strategic approach to the funding of Special Offerings.

Central to our efforts was aligning offering recipients with the strategic objectives of the Presbyterian Mission Agency identified as the Matthew 25 initiative. As friends of the Matthew 25 call to action and service, SORTF has been committed to ensuring that every congregation has an opportunity to participate in this important work.

In the fall of 2020, we reviewed the data we had gathered for the report to the 224th Assembly (2020) and discussed our approach to developing a strategy. At the recommendation of Co-Moderators Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart and the Rev. Gregory Bentley, we read the book *Decolonizing Wealth*. We were fortunate to have the co-moderators join us for a conversation to discover how the book intersects with the Matthew 25 foci of *building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty*.

We were profoundly challenged by the questions that were raised by this book and are grateful to the co-moderators for sharing their insights with us. Decolonizing funding processes involves asking uncomfortable questions that usually remain unexamined in reports such as ours. Where did the wealth come from? How is it invested? Who gets to manage, allocate, and spend it? How is colonization manifesting itself in our Church, in the programs we fund, and in the work of our Task Force? How might we adapt our approaches to be more equitable? There were no easy answers to these questions, but they remained with us as we continued our work of gathering information.

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In conversations with staff leaders of various recipient programs, we sought to understand how the use of offering funds aligns with the mission priorities of the Matthew 25 initiative: *building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty*. We are glad to report that all of the staff leaders were well-prepared to answer our questions and offered us full cooperation.

Having gathered information for nearly three years, the SORTF set about to discuss and develop a strategic approach that would indeed fulfill the mandate.

REPORT AND RATIONALE:

*“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Matthew 25:35-36 (NIV).*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a church that strives to live the Matthew 25 teaching daily. We Presbyterians live our lives understanding that the Lord overflows us with grace, love and mercy. Even when we may not understand the individual reasons for such mercy and love, we do know, that all we have—our talents, abilities and resources—are gifts from the Lord. We are a blessed church and a grateful church.

One of the significant strengths of the four Special Offerings is their ability to form a collective witness throughout the denomination, uniting congregations and individuals to respond to causes about which Presbyterians care deeply. The Offerings affirm the compelling connection between stewardship and mission.

The four Special Offerings—*One Great Hour of Sharing; the Pentecost Offering; the Peace & Global Witness Offering; and the Christmas Joy Offering*—provide an opportunity for disciples of Christ to participate in the call of Matthew 25 in meaningful and tangible ways. Many of the programs supported by these offerings provide a living testimony to the words of Matthew 25, addressing systemic issues of racism and poverty and enhancing congregational vitality.

The SORTF observed that aligning programs with the Matthew 25 initiative may be approached in various ways. One way is to say, “Here are our existing programs. How do they connect with the Matthew 25 foci?” Nearly all of the programs were able to do this. However, another approach is to say “Here are the Matthew 25 foci. What programs can we develop that will be most effective in achieving these goals?” Admittedly, the second approach sounded more exciting to us, but it is easier said than done.

In taking a closer look at each of the Offerings, it became apparent that One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is the most successful at being clearly aligned with Matthew 25 initiatives. It is also the most popular, best understood, and well-supported of the Offerings.

For over 70 years, One Great Hour of Sharing has provided Presbyterians an opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of neighbors worldwide. Typically received during the season of Lent, each gift to One Great Hour of Sharing supports efforts to relieve hunger through the Presbyterian Hunger Program, promote development through the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People, and provide support through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. It is the largest and most widely known of the Special Offerings, benefitting from the season, church traditions, and causes that appeal to givers.

The SORTF is confident that the timing and the programmatic emphases of this offering is indeed based on theological soundness, the liturgical calendar, and the mission engagement strategy.

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In meetings with OGHS recipient staff program leaders, the SORTF was pleased to learn of the intentional efforts of collaboration among these leaders and their recognition that such collaboration provides a more unified vision and enhances opportunities for mission interpretation of OGHS. The SORTF commends the leaders of these programs and encourages them to continue their collaborative work.

The SORTF also observed that the other three Offerings (*Pentecost, Peace & Global Witness, Christmas Joy*) do not as clearly reflect the call to action of the Matthew 25 foci. While the programs supported by these Offerings all have merit, there would be greater benefit in developing a unified vision within each one in order to enhance the opportunities for donors to participate in the transformative work of the call of Matthew 25.

The SORTF explored the possibilities of how the other offerings might provide such a compelling and unified vision. We also looked at the timing and programmatic emphases of these offerings. We offer our considerations although we are not prepared to articulate any of these as recommendations at this time. We recognize the impact that such recommendations would have on existing programs and structures and anticipate the challenge of making these changes. SORTF also recognizes that change does not come easy in the church.

Considerations:

The Pentecost Offering

Congregations retain 40% of raised funds to initiate or support programs for young people in their communities. The remaining 60% is remitted to the Presbyterian Mission Agency to support programs such as the Presbyterian Youth Triennium, the Young Adult Volunteers Program, new Christian formation initiatives for children, and Youth-at-Risk.

Although seasonal appropriate, the name “Pentecost Offering” does not truly indicate the focus of youth and young adult ministry in a way that connects with the local congregations. Coming on the heels of OGHS, the timing of the offering coincides with the ending of the school year when opportunities for focusing on youth ministries may be limited.

SORTF wondered if an offering that focuses on youth, particularly youth-at-risk and young people of color, would be better placed with the Christmas Joy Offering in partnership with the Presbyterian Schools and Colleges Equipping Communities of Color (SCECC), and leadership development of people of color. SORTF considered the possibility of eliminating an offering at Pentecost so there would actually be three Special Offerings. This may provide an opportunity for a floating special offering that might be different every year and might highlight one of the Matthew 25 foci.

The Peace & Global Witness Offering

Formerly known as the Peacemaking Offering, the offering was renamed the Peace & Global Witness Offering beginning in 2014. It was hoped that this would provide a more focused collaboration between peacemaking and global witness ministries, especially in the area in promoting reconciliation and cross-cultural understanding. It was also hoped that this would increase participation in the offering.

Many of the ongoing PC(USA) peacemaking ministries, such as the International Peacemaker program and the Mosaic of Peace, demonstrate partnership and collaboration with World Mission. There are also domestic peacemaking ministries such as educational efforts to address gun violence.

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The offering seeks to equip the Church to accompany those who have experienced violence by building awareness and solidarity through educational resources and through relationships with active peacemakers. Offering receipts are shared with 25% retained by local congregations, 25% sent to mid councils, and 50% sent to the Mission Agency. The intent of this split was to promote partnership and increase participation.

The transition from the Peacemaking Offering to the Peace & Global Witness Offering has not been as successful as was envisioned. There is no clear evidence that changing the name of this offering has resulted in the anticipated outcomes. While this may appear to be a natural partnership, there have been no new initiatives that reflect that partnership. While there is indeed some collaboration around existing programs, there does not seem to be a unified vision and direction for the future. There is an opportunity for new programs that would more directly align with the Matthew 25 foci particularly in regards to dismantling systemic racism such as prison and legal justice ministries. The Peacemaking and Global Mission Offering is one in which we see the decolonization of funding to be critical.

The SORTF encourages ongoing and intentional collaborative work between peacemaking and global witness staff to develop initiatives which advance the churchwide Matthew 25 vision of peacemaking and reconciliation.

\*Both the Pentecost Offering and the Peace & Global Witness Offering have a shared component for offering receipts, each having a different formula. The original intent was to encourage partnership and participation. However, there is little evidence to support this as a successful strategy. There is however, compelling evidence that people find these formulas confusing. The SORTF sees no merit in continuing this practice for these offerings.

#### The Christmas Joy Offering

The Christmas Joy Offering began at reunion in 1983, combining offerings from two predecessor denominations. One-half of the offering proceeds are used to support retired and existing church workers through the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions. The remaining 50% is used to support education for communities of color through the Presbyterian-related Racial Ethnic Schools and Colleges (RESC), now referred to as Presbyterian-related Schools and Colleges Equipping Communities of Color (SCECC), and leadership development for people of color programs through Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries.

There has been a very real disconnect within this offering from the beginning due to the different interests of the two denominations. This is not serving the church well at this time. SORTF considered that the Board of Pensions (BOP) should be removed as a recipient. There is no doubt that the BOP is an effective ministry of the church. However, the BOP is already well funded, and technically it is not a program of the Mission Agency. Meanwhile, the Christmas Joy Offering provides an opportunity to focus on future leaders particularly among people of color. SORTF considers that this might be the more appropriate place for youth ministries.

The SORTF acknowledges that our denominational entities are attempting to address many issues of vision, mission, and structure at this time. In light of potential changes within the denomination, the SORTF does not feel sufficiently equipped to offer recommendations regarding a strategic overhaul of the three other Offerings. While our work has revealed issues that, if addressed, might enhance the effectiveness of and the participation in these Offerings, the timing of any kind of radical shift may be ill-advised.

There is certainly the temptation to simply say "Everything is fine. Keep doing what you are doing. Here endeth our report." However, that would not be faithful to the Church or to the Lord that we serve.

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Everything is not fine. The SORTF knows this but we are not empowered or equipped to make substantive recommendations at this time. While we acknowledge that each of the program areas are doing valuable ministry, opportunities for making a significant impact are being missed. We strongly urge that the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board undertake a comprehensive reshaping of the Pentecost Offering, the Peace & Global Witness Offering, and the Christmas Joy Offering in order to increase effectiveness and participation in the Matthew 25 vision.

Demographics, church attendance patterns, and even the nature of how worshiping communities come together continue to change. Because of this, the ways congregations are invited and engaged in the causes related to the Offerings must also evolve. New opportunities must be created in order to deepen the impact of our mutual ministry and create stronger affinity and connection to Presbyterian Mission among our members.

The current SORTF believes it has done as much work as it can within the current context and respectfully requests to be dismissed.

Respectfully,

Ruling Elder Linda Badger Becker  
Chair, Special Offerings Review Task Force  
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