



Denomination Comparison Chart

The purpose of this chart is to educate the membership through a comparison of the PCUSA and two other prominent Presbyterian denominations. **In no way is the chart intended to either advocate for a particular denomination, or to indicate a position on affiliation.** We hope you find this chart to be helpful and informative.

Additional information may be found at denom-issues.mdpc.org.

ISSUE	PCUSA	ECO	EPC
Denomination Founded	1983	2012	1980
Denomination History	PCUSA claims continuity back to the founding of the Synod of Philadelphia in 1706. In 1983, the PCUSA formed a “Reunion” of the “southern” PCUS and the “northern” UPCUSA following their split during the Civil War over slavery.	Plans to create what would become ECO began in January 2012 by the Fellowship of Presbyterians, an organization of theologically orthodox and missional-minded Presbyterians. ECO was conceived of as an alternative to the Presbyterian Church (USA). “ECO” is not an acronym. The denomination’s name represents its three-fold commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Evangelical), connect leaders through accountable relationships and encourage collaboration (Covenant), and commit to a shared way of life together (Order).	The EPC began in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981 when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St. Louis, MO for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations like the United Presbyterian (northern churches) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (southern churches). They wanted to form a church that took the Bible seriously, the theology of the historic Confessions of the faith seriously, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders seriously. They envisioned a denomination that was truly evangelical and truly Presbyterian; hence the name.
Website	pcusa.org Unless otherwise noted, all information in quotation marks is a direct quote from the pcusa.org website.	eco-pres.org Unless otherwise noted, all information in quotation marks is a direct quote from the eco-pres.org website.	epc.org Unless otherwise noted, all information in quotation marks is a direct quote from the epc.org website.
God	“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”	“God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth, and all beauty, and all love and all life, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.”	“We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!”

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Jesus	<p>“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”</p>	<p>“The one who, for us and our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.”</p>	<p>Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.</p>
Jesus Christ - Lord of all and the only way to salvation?	<p>Yes and No - the way and truth for Christians, yet in deference to other religions there are those that believe other ways to God could be considered.¹</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p>
Incarnation (the belief that Jesus became fully human)	<p>Yes - Nicene Creed understanding of fully God/fully human.</p>	<p>Yes - included in Essential Tenets and maintains traditional Nicene Creed language and standards</p>	<p>Yes - included in Essential Tenets and maintains traditional Nicene Creed language and standards</p>
Substitutionary Atonement by Jesus Upheld	<p>Yes and No - this view is upheld by PCUSA, however different beliefs are allowed.</p>	<p>Yes - included in Essential Tenets: "Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give."</p>	<p>Yes - included in Essential Tenets</p>

¹ According to the Presbyterian Panel Survey Fall 2011: Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians, 45 percent of PCUSA pastors responding to the survey disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: “Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved.”

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Holy Spirit	"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets."	"We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit. He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission."	"The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption."
Trinity	Trinitarian by its Confessions, but allows other views.	Strongly embraces traditional Nicene Creed standards: "The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who is both one essence and three persons." "The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, not are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead."	Strongly embraces traditional Nicene Creed standards: "We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."
Salvation	PCUSA Confessions express the classic Reformed view that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. ¹	"Although we are each deserving of God's eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin."	"Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life."
"Sola Scriptura" upheld? (Reformed teaching that the Bible is the only inspired, perfect, sufficient, and authoritative word of God, and the only source for Christian doctrine)	Yes and No - this view is upheld by most ordained leaders.	Yes - this view is held by all ordained leaders: "The clearest declaration of God's glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written." "We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures."	Yes - this view is held by all ordained leaders: All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."

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<p>Theological Essentials Affirmed and Expressed</p>	<p>Affirmed in principle, described and defined. No consensus on the theological tenets essential to PCUSA.</p>	<p>Yes - Essential Tenets and Confessional Standards (found on ECO website) nine values of ECO:</p> <p>Jesus-shaped Identity – “the key is making disciples rather than orthodox believers.”</p> <p>Biblical Integrity – “A faith that is not just taught but shapes the life of your community”</p> <p>Thoughtful Theology – “not papers for intellectuals but rearing followers who are able to reflect and apply their faith to their lives.”</p> <p>Accountable Community – “caring environments that allows integral faith to emerge.”</p> <p>Egalitarian Ministry – women and minorities in leadership.</p> <p>Missional Centrality – “the whole of the gospel to the whole of the world; what would you lose if your church went away?”</p> <p>Center-focused Spirituality – “calling people to the core of Christianity, not fixating on the boundaries – we are NOT truth cops.”</p> <p>Leadership Velocity – “growing and developing leaders who are culture-changing, risk-taking innovators.”</p> <p>Kingdom Vitality – “congregational life is not about size, but trajectory.”</p>	<p>Yes - Essentials of the Faith found on website including: “Explanatory Statement to “Essentials of Our Faith” The Westminster Confession of Faith is a confessional statement of orthodox Presbyterianism. The Westminster Confession of Faith is our standard of doctrine as found in Scripture.”</p>

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Ordination Vows about Scripture	"Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, and by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ universal, and God's Word to you?" However, The Confession of 1967 (C67) stated a new set of ordination vows in which the person ordained acknowledges that the Bible may contain the Word of God but is "nevertheless the words of men" and promises only to be "guided" by the confession of the church.	"Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?"	"Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"
Confessions/Creeds	8 Confessions plus 3 Catechisms, no Essential Tenets listed.	8 Confessions plus 3 Catechisms (same as PCUSA), Essential Tenets found on website.	Westminster Confession of Faith, two Westminster catechisms. Essential Tenets found on website.
Authority of Creeds/Confessions Affirmed	No - viewed as historical documents that serve to guide but are effectively under polity (governance directives).	Yes - under Scripture but over polity (governance directives).	Yes - under Scripture but over polity (governance directives).
Ordination Vows about Jesus Christ as Savior?	"Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?"	"Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?"	To affirm without exception the Essential Tenets, including the statement on Jesus Christ.
Ordination of Women (pastors, elders, deacons)	Yes	Yes	Yes and No - while most congregations ordain women into leadership, it is not seen as an essential belief and thus it is not a required belief all must affirm
Same-Sex Marriage	Allowed. The Book of Order was revised in 2014 to redefine marriage as "Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives." Ministers are allowed to perform same gender marriages in states where it is legal. Ministers and churches may elect not to do so.	Not Allowed	Not Allowed

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<p>Are ordained leaders expected to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness?</p>	<p>The PCUSA has decided to practice mutual forbearance toward each other and other councils of the church regarding ordination. "We suggest that "mutual forbearance" means endeavoring to hear and take seriously the convictions of others even while we hold our own (sometimes differing) convictions at full strength." A Statement of the Faculty of Austin Seminary, 05/09/2014, austinseminary.edu</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Membership</p>	<p>Church membership is open to all people of all conditions and orientations and is based solely on a person's profession of faith in Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Not ascertainable at time of printing, but subject to future clarification.</p>	<p>Church membership is open to all persons in every place who profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, who submit to His law and Lordship.</p>
<p>Abortion</p>	<p>"Abortion ought to be a last resort, because life is sacred to God." In a resource for women facing problem pregnancies, PCUSA writes that the church "would like to support you as you make decisions about your pregnancy" and offers three options: 1. keep the baby; 2. give the baby up for adoption; 3. have an abortion.</p>	<p>No formal stand. On FAQs the statement: "ECO clearly states that all human life is sacred, from conception until natural death," but no formal statement is available on ECO website, nor does this broad statement suggest how ECO would deal with rape, incest, and the mother's life.</p>	<p>Should be legal only to protect the physical life of the mother.</p>
<p>Church Property</p>	<p>Held in trust for the benefit of the PCUSA</p>	<p>Owned by congregation</p>	<p>Owned by congregation</p>

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Outreach	Historically strong but past decades have seen a decline in mission work and funding of missionaries. In 1978 the GA redefined “Missions” as “Mission.” “Up until this time, ‘missions’ was the word commonly used by the church to describe its response to the Great Commission, sending evangelistic missionaries throughout the world to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and make disciples. The replacement ‘mission’ was defined as ‘everything the institutional church does.’ This included political and social activism.	No missionaries at present but founding principles highly missional. Likely to partner with existing programs/work. Stated core value: "Missional Centrality: We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission – including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice – in our communities and around the world."	Highly missional with strong, vital, and healthy work being done. "The Evangelical Presbyterian Church spells out specifically the first duty of the Church. Our Book of Government reads, "The first duty of the Church is to evangelize by extending the Gospel both at home and abroad, leading others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior." It makes clear that "good works" are not the Gospel, but the fruit of the gospel. The statement concludes, "... The Church must never confuse its primary task of evangelism (the Gospel) with the fruit of faith (good works)." This affirmation settles for us a dispute that has caused much division in our day when churches have become preoccupied with social change to the neglect of true spiritual change."
Governance and Discipline	Book of Order and Book of Confessions can be downloaded on PCUSA website.	"ECO polity consists of a flatter structure than many denominations, with an emphasis on nurturing God’s work within the local congregation. There are three layers to the ECO polity structure; session, presbytery, and synod, with the synod being the widest council in ECO." ECO Polity and Discipline can be downloaded on the ECO website.	EPC governing documents, including its Book of Order and New Book of Government can be downloaded on the EPC website.
Number of Churches (approximate)	9829 (As of end of 2014)	263 (As of March 2016)	575 (As of March 2016)