

MID-TENN

Presbytery of Middle Tennessee E-Newsletter
December 2017



TAX TALK AT CHRISTMAS

Warner R. Dumell, Executive Presbyter

And it chanced in those days: that there went out a commandment from August the Emperor, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was the first executed when Cyrenius was lieutenant in Syria. And every (one) went to his own city to be taxed. And Joseph also ascended from Galilee...unto the city of David which is called Bethlehem...to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife which was with child. [Luke 2:1-5; Tyndale's New Testament]

According to William Tyndale's 1534 translation of the New Testament, the birth



narrative of Jesus starts out in The Gospel of Luke with talk of taxes. Caesar August decreed in the first century that all throughout the imperialistic reach of Rome a tax would be levied. All residents in each region would need to return to their city of birth in order to be assessed what they owed to the Empire.

Of course we know from modern biblical scholarship, as codified in more recent translations of the Bible, that what Caesar Augustus really decreed was a census, the registering of residents throughout the Roman Empire. This taking of a census was for the dual purpose of military conscription and tax assessment. The Jews of first century Palestine were exempt from military service, so the census in Judea was predominately for taxation purposes.¹ Joseph, the husband of Mary mother of Jesus, had need to travel some 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for this census and to be taxed. While there in Bethlehem, Mary's pregnancy was completed and she delivered her first-born.

There was talk of taxes in ancient Palestine that first Christmas, and there is talk of taxes in contemporary America this Christmas 2017, only the talk of taxation in our time and place is not that of tax assessment, but of tax cuts. President Trump calls the Congressional tax bill before the U.S. Congress "a Christmas present for the (American) middle class." By all accounts, the wealthiest Americans and U.S. corporations will doubtless find the passage of this legislation to be a brand new Lexus SUV tied in a bow. Middle class Americans may come to find this bill overtime a Schwinn Solara bike should the promised job growth and uptick in annual worker wages comes to pass; for which I earnestly pray. But for poor and working-class Americans, with the failure to fund CHIP, the weakening of the Affordable Care Act, and the likely gutting of entitlement programs like Medicare Expansion to offset tax cuts, this overhaul to the American tax code will end up being a lump of coal in many a Christmas stocking. Time will tell!

One thing is certain, the noise of tax talk that first Christmas was eventually drowned out by the proclamation of the angel of the Lord saying, "Be not afraid. For behold...unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord," and by a multitude of the heavenly host singing, "Glory to God on high, and peace on the earth; and unto (all) rejoicing!"² I am confident that the noise of tax talk this Christmas will soon grow faint in comparison to the sound of our confessing, "[We] believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary..." And by the sound of our singing, "This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing; haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!"

¹Barclay, William, The Gospel of Luke, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975, pg. 20.

²Tyndale, William, Tyndale's New Testament, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989, pg. 91.

Alternative Giving this Christmas

by Barbara Howell, HAA



Most of us don't need more "stuff" - instead we need more meaning, and to know that our lives improve the lives of others. As an "alternative" gift for the holidays, give yourself or another person a gift that keeps giving this holiday season through a donation to the Presbyterian Hunger Program. PHP funds go to provide long-term, sustainable, development assistance to communities in need, at home,

and around the world.

The link below will provide step by step instructions for making your gift to the Presbyterian Hunger Fund: <https://pma.pcusa.org/donate/make-a-gift/gift-info/H999999/#>

It is SOC SEASON!

Therese Howell, Stated Clerk

It's that special time of year - statistical reporting season! Clerks of sessions are dreaming of membership rolls, gains and losses, baptisms, worship and Sunday school attendance, as well as membership distribution by age.

Statistical reports (known as SOC - statistics of the church) are a way of keeping track of church

membership. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) uses the membership totals of each presbytery's churches and teaching elders to calculate per capita. The synods use these totals, too. Per capita is a tool to fund our governance; it is a system so the connectional church can do its work.



The Book of Order, G-1.0304, reminds us that membership in the church is "a joy and a privilege." This section goes on to list 12 ways a faithful member is actively involved in the ministry of Christ's Church. Sessions are advised to keep a membership roll (G-3.0204a) which includes rolls of active and affiliate members, as well as baptized members, as well as registers (G-3.0204b) of baptisms authorized by the session, ruling elders, deacons, installed pastors with dates of service, and "such other registers as the session may deem necessary."

Statistical reports are also a way of discerning the health of a presbytery. More gains than losses, a majority of church membership attending weekly worship, a

varied and diverse membership, budgets that show strong support of missions - these are all signs of healthy congregations. This is important information for the presbytery, as well as for the local church.

Please encourage your clerk of session to complete the statistical report so that the session and the presbytery can have this important information.

As in the past few years, statistical reporting can be done online. You can download the 2017 statistical workbook ([click here](#)). If you are not comfortable filing your report online, I will be happy to do that for you - you'll need to complete the statistical report form ([click here](#)).

The deadline for clerks of sessions to enter their data is Thursday, February 15, 2018, 11pm CST. If you would like for me to file your report, you must get the data to me by Friday, March 2, 2018, 5pm CST. I know that life happens; if you are getting close to the deadline, give me a call (615-305-6795) or send me an email (thehowell@aol.com) and we can talk about reporting options.

Following are deadlines and links related to statistical reporting.

Deadline for churches to enter data: Thursday, February 15, 2018, 11pm CST

Deadline for the stated clerk to enter data: Friday, March 2, 2018, 5pm CST

Statistical Report 2017 Workbook: [click here](#)

Statistical Report 2017 (to send data to stated clerk): [click here](#)

Information and frequently asked questions (FAQs) regarding statistical reports: [click here](#)

Your log in ID and password is the same as 2016. If you need your login ID and password, please contact Linda Griffis, 615-332-3330, or pbymidtnoffice@gmail.com, and she will be glad to forward that information to you.

If you have any questions, please contact me! Don't get frustrated, don't wait until the last minute, just give me a call or text (615-305-6795) or email me (thehowell@aol.com).

ARTICLES RELATED TO PER CAPITA

Per Capita: <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/departments/per-capita>



Importance of per capita funding:

<http://oga.pcusa.org/section/ecclesial-and-ecumenical-ministries/per-capita/importance-capita-funding/>

Regarding Ruling Elders: Ruling Elders and Per Capita (an article by former stated clerk, Gradye Parsons) - <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/7/1/regarding-ruling-elders-ruling-elders-and-capita/>

2018 Guatemala Mission Trip scheduled for March 2-9

submitted by Kira Hilley, GPCC member



The Guatemala-Peten partnership between PMT and the Presbiterio Q'eqchi Peten (PQP) is in its 17th year, and 2018 will see the sixteenth annual Mission Trip to the Peten, scheduled for March 2 - 9, 2018. **An informational meeting is scheduled for January 22 from 6 - 8:00 pm at Second Presbyterian, Nashville, to include a review of the draft agenda for the trip.**

My husband, John Hilley (Pastor of East Brentwood Presbyterian Church) and I, participated in the 2017 trip. Beforehand, those involved gave us a pretty good idea of what to expect, as we all wondered what we would be able to contribute. They reiterated our purpose would become even more clear during the trip - and that was true. The power in the ministry of presence was perhaps the least anticipated and most meaningful aspect of our journey. We were reminded Dios es amor... God is love.

A simple way to describe what takes place on a trip is that we are helping churches to become better churches, through theological education (including leadership development and training so that churches reflect the Kingdom of God), support Basico education through gifts of scholarships to strengthen communities (our equivalent of primary and middle school), and empowering women to sustain church engagement and support Christian education for children. Mission values we came to identify include accountability, reciprocity, flexibility, and serving with compassion, dignity and integrity...[read more](#).

SAVE THE DATES!



Association of Presbyterian Church Educators
APCE Annual Event 2018
January 31 - February 3
For more information, [click here](#)



223rd General Assembly (2018)
June 16-23, 2018
St. Louis, Missouri
For more information, [click here](#)

Upcoming PMT Committee Meetings

Committee on Mutual Support (CMS)

Monday, January 8, 2018
10:00 am @ Presbytery office

Pastor-to-Pastors

Tuesday, January 9, 2018
12:00 noon @ Presbytery office

Committee on Ministry (COM)

Tuesday, January 16, 2018
4:00 pm @ Presbytery office

Administrative Committee

Thursday, January 18, 2018
1:00 pm @ Presbytery Office

Finance Committee

Thursday, January 18, 2018
2:30 pm @ Presbytery Office

Guatemala Peten Covenant Committee (GPCC)

Mission Trip Informational Meeting
Monday, January 22, 2018
6:00 pm @ Second, Nashville

Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM)

Tuesday, January 23, 2018
4:00 pm @ First, Nashville

132nd Stated Presbytery Meeting

February 3, 2018
First Presbyterian Church, Columbia



Presbytery Holiday Hours:

Friday, December 22, 2017 - CLOSED
Monday, December 25, 2017 - CLOSED
Tuesday, December 26, 2017 - CLOSED
Wednesday, December 27, 2017 - CLOSED
Monday, January 1, 2018 - CLOSED
Tuesday, January 2, 2018 - CLOSED

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

You are receiving this e-newsletter because you are a member or friend of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee or one of its congregations.

Disclaimer:

Articles and events that appear in the e-newsletter are believed to be of interest to some segments of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee. However, these articles and events are not necessarily endorsed by the Presbytery.

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