

# Congregations with built-in ecumenism



## Better together

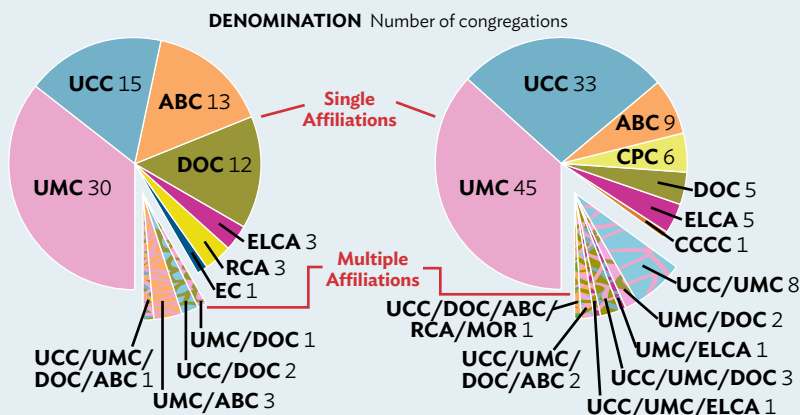
PC(USA) congregations affiliated with other denominations

### FEDERATED CONGREGATIONS

In 2012, there were **84** federated congregations, representing 0.8% of the PC(USA)'s 10,262 congregations.

### UNION CONGREGATIONS

In 2012, there were **122** union congregations, representing 1.2% of the PC(USA)'s 10,262 congregations.



New York has the most federated and union congregations: 19 federated (22%) and 18 union (15%).

KEY TO DENOMINATIONS	
ABC	American Baptist Churches—USA
CCCC	Conservative Congregational Christian Conference
CPC	Cumberland Presbyterian Church
DOC	Disciples of Christ
EC	Episcopal Church
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
MOR	Moravian Church
RCA	Reformed Church in America
UCC	United Church of Christ
UMC	United Methodist Church

### COMPARING CONGREGATIONS BY TYPE

	Federated	Union	PC(USA)
Number of congregations in 2012	84 (0.9%)	122 (1.2%)	10,262 (100%)
Median membership	50	55	89
Membership range	6 to 485	4 to 572	1 to 6,940
<b>Regional distribution</b>			
• Northeast	25%	24%	20%
• Midwest	48%	45%	26%
• South	9%	16%	40%
• West	18%	15%	13%

A small number of Presbyterian congregations are ecumenical by definition, some having federated with a congregation of another denomination and others being jointly affiliated with the PC(USA) and one or more other denominations.

The practice of federation has been around since the 1890s, when it was introduced as a solution for small or dying congregations—and for those that had lost their buildings due to fire or some other disaster. Other federations came about during World War I, when many ministers were away as chaplains.

Federated congregations may keep separate membership rolls for each denomination, and often separate mission budgets as well. Historically, as these complex structures became burdensome, some big partners swallowed up little partners. In other cases they hit on the idea of dual alignment with one membership roll: union congregations.

As the ecumenical movement grew after World War II, with its predictions of a decline in denominationalism, many multiply aligned union congregations were started. But promoting many denominational programs and attending various judicial meetings killed off some union congregations. Others went back to one or two denominations.

The relatively small number of federated and union congregations in the PC(USA) can also be attributed to our polity. In general, congregational churches find it easier to cooperate or merge, because they have fewer denominational structures.

*Jack Marcum is coordinator of Research Services of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. He would like to thank Richard Taylor for his insights on the history of federated and union congregations.*

» Other findings [pcusa.org/research](http://pcusa.org/research)