

Presbytery of the James Proposed Budget for 2025 Overview

Greetings all!

This overview is to help guide you through the budget, highlighting what is hidden behind the numbers, and offering some insight into rationales for each line item or grouping.

The world that we are charged to be good stewards of, for better or worse, will use “money” to quantify things for us, to enable us to understand better the use of, or the non-use of, things that are not easily counted. For example, in manufacturing, as complex as it is, one is able, at the end of the day, be able to track costs of materials, labor, logistics, advertising and such and apply those figures to the number of items produced, and then assign a “money” figure to each of them to build a sale price point which leads them to determine if this is/was a good thing to do.

For an institution such as ours, one that can but does not need to follow “the ways of the world,” we must define, remember and repeat what is contained in each monetary item, as we will value and compare it with how we see its effect on the institution and the world in which it lives in, breathes, and is called to be good stewards of.

To that end, we are all Presbyterians of the PCUSA family. We may have varied faith memories and affiliations, but at this moment, we are Presbyterian. Which means we do things “the Presbyterian Way.”

So, let us Presbyterians enter into the budget.

Beginning at Line 4, we are using a term from the world, “Fixed Expenses.” These are items that constitute the reality of the promises we have made to ourselves and our denomination. Line 5 highlights our “denomination connections,” in short, how we have learned over time to function with one foot in the world and one in the Kingdom. We have learned to set ourselves up as congregation, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly, with each level participating in the fullness of our witness, and each level working and supporting each level in either direction.

Lines 6 to 8 represent our connection to the larger church, funding both missional and administrative functions, and allowing for sharing in ministries we may not be able to accomplish on our own.

Line 10 to 14 are committees and functions that all presbyteries should maintain resources for-that means funding and people to serve. At present, we have not funded them as they are working well within the presbytery with volunteers, or, thankfully, we have not encountered any deep disagreements within our institution. Do know that should any of these line items need funding, we will find it.

Lines 15 -35 are expenses tied to the reality of living in our world: we need power, water, materials, and other items to sustain the buildings we own. We must adhere to properly protecting these physical assets against unseen catastrophe, and we have promised the communities in which we dwell we honor our commitments made.

From this point forward, we begin to investigate the “particulars” of our financial needs.

Lines 36 -44 refer to the funding expectations of the Commission on Ministry, COM, which is the entity that best supports congregations and pastors alike, providing guidance and resources for both, to work towards healthy relationships and to create a true collegial working environment.

Lines 45 -51 represent the needs of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, which is the location of support for those seeking to serve the church in particular ways, usually by seeking to become a minister of word and sacrament, but also other avenues of service such as lay leadership, chaplain, and others. This is where we begin to prepare those who will come behind us to continue the presence of this particular faith tradition in the world.

Lines 53 -60 are for the only office required of a presbytery, the Stated Clerk. Currently, we have a part-time Stated Clerk, managing all the required duties of said office, and participating in the larger, visible gatherings of the presbytery. In this model the Stated Clerk requires support from our office staff and other volunteers.

The direction set before the presbytery is to hire a full-time Stated Clerk, with the Stated Clerk assuming a larger role in the administration of our presbytery and many of its committees. Such a position as this entitles the individual to have full financial support-salary, benefits, and support from the whole of the presbytery.

Lines 61 -68 are our staff. These are individuals who work to keep the administrative side of the presbytery functioning well and in an orderly fashion. Many talents are represented in these lines, and these individuals' work can often go unnoticed, until that position is vacated.

Lines 69 -73 represent the model of leadership envisioned by us. While not wanting to dwell on what has now become the past, we see that our hoped-for leadership will be coming into a situation with many challenges and fewer assets available to face those challenges. To be "forward thinking," this amount may change as we come closer to finding that individual sometime in the budget year of 2025.

Line 74 you will see the term Total Fixed Expenses. These are the obligations we have embraced to provide that the presbytery works in the environment it exists. They can only be changed by actions of the presbytery, making choices that will have ripple effects on the working of the presbytery.

The rest of the budget proposal before are our "missional activities" or engagement with aspects of our lives in community.

Line 77-87 encompasses New Worshiping Communities, our denomination's plan for creating communities of faith that may or may not look like what we know. The proposal before the presbytery is to use restricted funds held by the presbytery in trust to fund NWC. This action allows the presbytery to fund NWC withheld assets, to meet current funding needs now. Now, these restricted funds will carry NWC for several years, so, funding in this manner does not excuse the presbytery of seeking to maintain support for NWC.

Lines 89-92 is how Presbyterianism is presented to the college campuses in our presbytery. Each has ties to local congregations as well as from the presbytery. It is not possible in two or three lines of text to explain how this impacts a church in particular, but it serves the church larger by keeping faith expressions on campuses. Yes, there is a reduction from their requests, and this will put fundraising needs upon their already in place funding procedures.

Lines 94-109 are specialized ministry programming entities. These are places that the presbytery has chosen to follow the lead and the hearts of many of its members to engage in direct ministry with the community around us. It is possible to find each of these ministries on the POJ website; if you do not know what one is or does, you will find a good first informative description of them on the website.

Lines 110-114 encompasses agreements made to ministries that function beyond the scope of our presbytery. Camp Hanover is one of those functions. The other one listed and funded is an Habitat ministry that began as a ministry initiated by churches in the Charlottesville area to aid in providing affordable housing. These commitments are unique in that they have a strong element of “contract or covenant” woven through the relationship.

Which brings us to Line 115, which is a sum of these askings.

Dropping down to Lines 117-119 you will find the lines Discretionary Expense Total and Fixed Expenses, which when added together, yields Line 119, the Proposed Budget for 2025.

The balance of this page is our projected income, the giving that our congregations prayerfully choose to send to the presbytery (which is not the presbytery, but “US” in truth). These are lines familiar to many who have seen past budgets, apart from Line 126, which is the offset for the expenses of NWC that will come from a restricted fund of the presbytery.

Line 129 is expected/planned income amount for 2025. It represents the connection between individual congregations and their sister congregations in providing support for ministry, mission, and presence in our portion of Virginia. This is our way forward!

Line 134 details the difference between expected income and expected expenses/ministry support. It is a deficit.

Lines 138 -143 represent a basic math procedure: By decreasing funds to cover the deficit, what percentage of that fund will that withdrawal be? Please take this as a “snapshot;” there are no future calculations of “return on investment, no anticipated bequests or property sales, no financial planning at all.” It is a simple math problem that represents a one-day analysis of the figures.

The guidance of the POJ membership will fill in the blanks.

The balance of the document details a breakdown of the costs presented for the General Presbyter and Full Time Stated Clerk. It is formatted much like what many will see as “Terms of Call.” Remember also, the terms of call are negotiated contracts, and subject to changes.

I tend to view budgets as a road map (thinking more of the one I knew from the 1970’s to late 1980’s, one that you unfolded, highlighted the route to take, look at the towns you would pass, one that you kept in the glove box in your car in case you got lost, and one that could just be torn up and you get a new one). GPS is fine, of course, but it makes you follow its steps, and when you deviate from its pre-determined route, “Recalculating, recalculating” over and over again until you relent and follow its direction. Of course, if you deviate enough, it will say, essentially, “Ok, we will do it your way, let’s try this route instead!”

Budget Subcommittee of Mission Council
Kerry