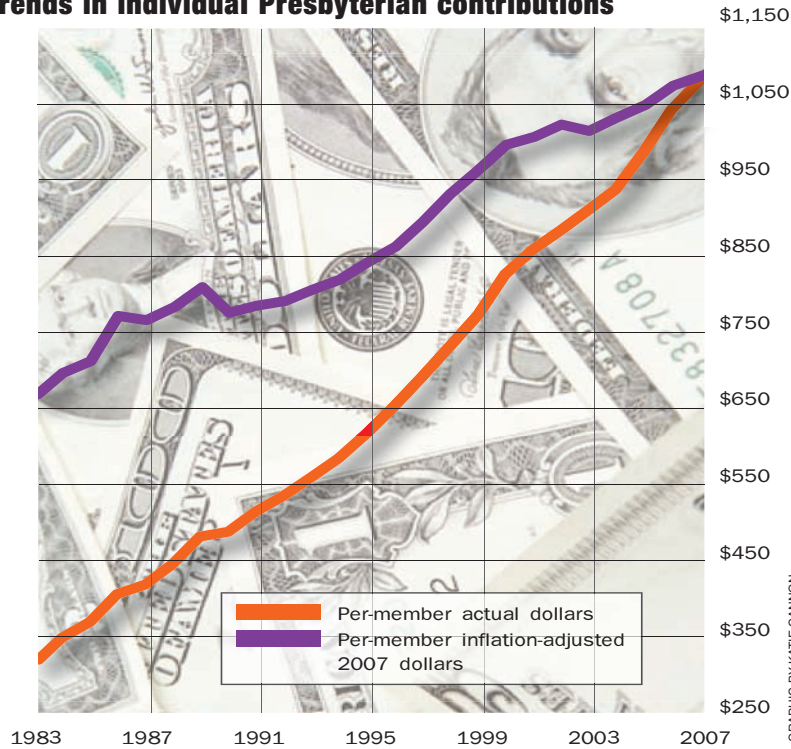


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM

Trends in individual Presbyterian contributions



What the research shows

These findings are remarkable. Despite many fewer members, Presbyterian congregations received more total contributions in 2007 than they did a quarter-century before, even after controlling for inflation. Members increased their giving, on average, by almost two-thirds. Had the per-member giving rate stayed the same after 1983, total contributions in 2007 would have been only \$1.5 billion.

Presbyterians' willingness to make ever-larger donations has mitigated the financial impact of concurrent membership losses. What would the effect on Presbyterian mission and program have been had contributions in 2007 been almost \$1 billion less? They would have been many and quite severe.

I began this research hoping to gain insight on how Presbyterian contributions varied during economic recessions, with an eye toward estimating possible consequences of the current downturn. Interestingly, I didn't find any association.

Is it likely that giving will continue to grow, despite weak economic conditions? I wouldn't go that far; the other recessions since 1983 were both relatively brief and mild, not something experts are predicting this time. Still, I'm more hopeful now than before this analysis, revealing as it does the long-term trend of increasing financial commitment of Presbyterians to their church. □

Presbyterian per-member giving grows

Some months ago I examined the long-term slide in membership numbers within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Despite these steady net losses, donations from individuals to congregations actually increased over the same period, even after accounting for inflation:

- **From 1983 to 2007, contributions from individuals to PC(USA) congregations* more than doubled**, from around \$1 billion to \$2.4 billion.
- **Adjusting for inflation diminishes the gain, but contributions still grew by 16 percent** in real dollars over this period (\$1 billion in 1983 is equivalent to \$2.1 billion in 2007 dollars).
- **Per-member giving grew from \$317 to \$1,082 in actual dollars over the same period** (240 percent), or \$661 to \$1,082 (64 percent) after adjusting for inflation.
- **The highest inflation-adjusted total (in 2007 dollars) was \$2.5 billion**, which occurred in 2000, 2001, and 2002, while the highest inflation-adjusted per-member total was \$1,082 in 2007.
- **The lowest inflation-adjusted totals occurred in 1983: \$2.1 billion overall and \$661 per member.**

*Contributions from living donors to congregations for program and mission, but excluding donations to capital projects.

OTHER FINDINGS

www.pcusa.org/research

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