

A plea to Wiki

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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So, I was working on our church website and I decided to stop by Wikipedia for some quick information. When I clicked on the [Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#) link, I found all of this weird stuff, mostly odd gleefulness about the loss of membership in our denomination and the maligning of our missionary work (due to the fact that we don't send as many missionaries as we used to). It was as if the news of recent "rapid shrinking" was particular to the PC(USA) and isn't in step with most Protestants, including conservative evangelicals.

After much hostility, there was an entry on ECO, which (sadly) is not a movement for ecological justice. It's yet another Presbyterian offshoot of the Mother Church-- because the Evangelical PC, Orthodox PC, PC in America, the Bible PC didn't quite fit their needs, they had to form another one. The paragraph was a bit of an advertisement for the people who sought to be free of the conflict and decline. (That's what was written. Free of conflict... can Calvinists be free of conflict?)

Many of the **sources** cited the Layman and the Institute for Religion and Democracy—both groups have an agenda which contradicts our denominational stance on recognizing the call of all people to serve as ministers, elders and deacons, no matter what their sexual orientation might be. Many of the other citations came from Jewish groups who were frustrated by the work Presbyterians have done on behalf of the Palestinians.

There was more information on the site about our stance on the Israel/Palestine conflict than there was in the entire history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There was a whole section on property disputes and **nothing on how we are planting new worshipping communities**. There were several predictions, like how we were going to vote on a certain issue in 2012 or how many members our church will have in ten years.

**There was nothing on our theological beliefs**, except what was mentioned by those who start their own denominations. Liberalism and progressive theology was

maligned throughout.

There was a list of "**notable congregations.**" I'm not sure how a congregation becomes notable, except that there were a number of large churches listed.

There were hardly any positive narratives—nothing on [Francis Grimke](#), [Maggie Kuhn](#), [Mister Rogers](#), or [Anne Lamott](#). There was nothing about [Rick Ufford-Chase](#), [BorderLinks](#) or our work on immigration. There was nothing about our consistent support of women's causes or our longings for social justice. There were only two books in the "Further reading" section that are from the 21st century and only one by a woman.

Of course, I deleted a lot of the schadenfreude, but I didn't have a chance to construct much good to put up on the page. That is why I'm coming to you with this plea. **Can we start putting some thought and care into how we tell our story? No matter what denomination you might be a part of, can we begin to check our pages and tell a positive message?**

Like it or not, Wiki pages are here and they will probably stay. Everybody from third grade students to graduate level scholars use them. Even when Wikipedia cannot be cited, we still refer to them. We form history on that site. And for the PC(USA), the losers are telling our history. The hostile splinters are defining our body. So let's get to work.

- **Seminary students, you have written beautiful works on how the social gospel, feminist thought and liberation theology have been a gift to denominations, can you insert some of your well-crafted findings on the page?**
- **Scholars, can you add your voice? Can you assign the construction of a wiki entry for a history lesson? Or a theological paper?**
- **Advocacy groups, you have been working hard for the inclusion of LGBT members, can you write a paragraph about the struggles and the joy it is that all may freely serve?**
- **Political activists and our friends in the National Office, we have been fighting poverty, providing housing, and feeding people. We have**

**been working hard on passing sensible gun legislation and working for peacemaking. Can we include some of that work?**

- **Women's groups, you have been tireless in advocating for women's issues, let's tell the world about it. In a time where men in clergy collars are all over the news, telling us what sort of contraception we should be using, it would be refreshing to read about people of faith who care about women's health and choices.**
- **Theologians, where are you? Presbyterians, where are the links to Dr. Serene Jones, Dr. Cynthia Campbell, and Dr. Cynthia Rigby? We need something on the site about what we believe.**
- **What about the wonderful work that's being done with the environment and creation care?**
- **Is there someone in your denomination whom you admire? Can you link her or his book or website?**

It's time to tell the story of our flourishing thought and our dedicated activism. In a new generation, people are frustrated with the sexism, homophobia, Religious Right politics, and unscientific disregard of the earth. In the midst of this, we have an important history and struggle to tell.