



# The Presbyterian Panel

*Listening to Presbyterians*



## SUMMARY

### VOLUNTEERING AND OTHER TOPICS FINDINGS FROM THE FEBRUARY 2008 SURVEY

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders serving on session (lay leaders), and ordained ministers. For most analyses, ministers are split into two groups based on current call: *pastors*, serving congregations, and *specialized clergy*, serving elsewhere. New samples are drawn every three years. These pages summarize major findings from the ninth survey completed by the 2006-2008 Panel, sampled in the fall of 2005.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY

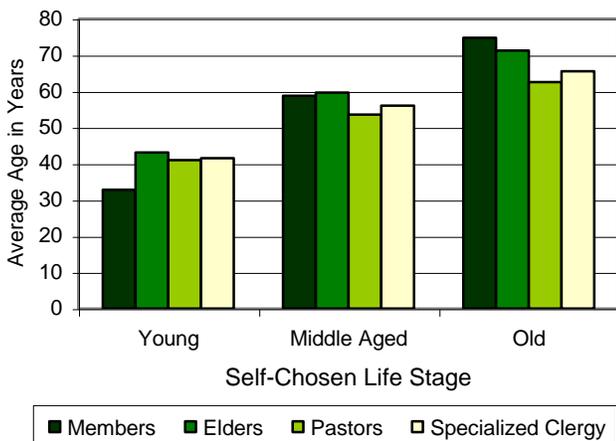
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## AGING

### Perceived Age

- ✓ On average, panelists perceive themselves to be considerably younger than their chronological age:
  - Members: actual average, 64 years; felt average, 54.
  - Elders: actual average, 63 years; felt average, 53.
  - Pastors: actual average, 54 years; felt average, 47.
  - Specialized clergy: actual average, 58 years; felt average, 49.
- ✓ On average, elders believe one becomes:
  - *Middle aged* between 50 and 54 years.
  - *Old* between 70 and 74 years.
  - *Very old* between 85 and 89 years.
- ✓ Among members, the average actual age in years is:
  - 33 for those who think they are *young*.
  - 59 for those who think they are *middle aged*.
  - 75 for those who think they are *old*.

**Figure 1. Average Ages by Life Stages**



Note: Only two panelists described themselves as "very old"

### Age-Related Concerns

- ✓ Asked how much they worry about six aging-related issues, using options ranging from 1, "not at all," to 7, "a great deal," elders worry on average the most about these three (pastors' averages also shown):
  - Healthcare availability/cost (elders, 4.6; pastors, 4.7).
  - Loss of independence/depending on others (4.4; 4.0).
  - Having an adequate lifelong income (4.0; 4.5).

### Aging Expectations

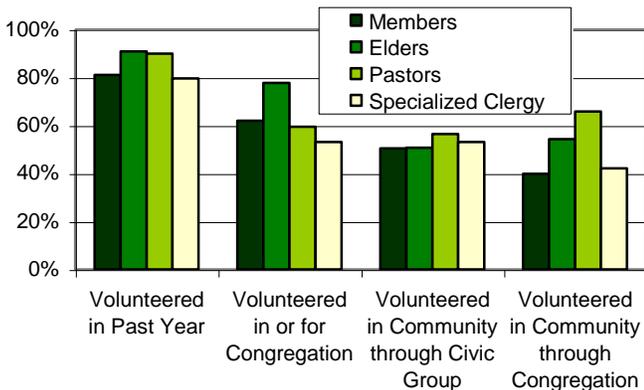
- ✓ When members rate 18 aging-related statements using options from 1, "definitely false," to 7, "definitely true," average scores indicate that they consider these five the most true (pastors' averages also shown):
  - One has a greater value to society if one is a "contributing" member (members, 5.3; pastors, 4.2).
  - Having more aches and pains is an accepted part of aging (5.0; 5.1).
  - I expect that as I get older, I will become more forgetful (4.8; 4.7).
  - It is an accepted part of aging to have trouble remembering names (4.6; 4.3).
  - Forgetfulness is a natural occurrence just from growing old (4.5; 4.3).
- ✓ Using the same response options, members on average rate these five statements as least true (pastors' averages also shown):
  - I expect that as I get older I will spend less time with friends and family (members, 2.5; pastors, 2.4).
  - Being lonely is just something that happens when people get old (2.5; 2.4).
  - It is normal to be depressed when you're old (2.6; 2.5).
  - I expect that others will not need me as much when I get old (3.4; 3.4).
  - Quality of life declines as people age (3.5; 3.3).

# VOLUNTEERING

## Who Volunteers and Where

- ✓ Large majorities report volunteering in their congregation or community over the prior year: members, 81%; elders, 91%; pastors, 90%; specialized clergy, 80%.
- ✓ Majorities of volunteers report having done volunteer work in each of these contexts:
  - In their congregation (members, 82%; elders, 92%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 73%).
  - In their community through a civic organization (67%; 59%; 66%; 69%).
  - In their community through their congregation (54%; 64%; 78%; 57%).
- ✓ Figure 2 shows the same results, but with percentages based on all panelists, not just those who had volunteered.

**Figure 2. Volunteering by Type**



- ✓ Among volunteers, the median number of hours spent volunteering in a typical month, by category, is:
  - In their congregation: members, 5; elders, 8; pastors, 4; specialized clergy, 6.
  - In their community through a civic organization: 3; 6; 5; 5.
  - In their community through the congregation: 5; 4; 5; 4.
- ✓ Of those who did some volunteering in the prior year, minorities report having been part of a group from their congregation or presbytery involved in a national or international project, such as (but not limited to) disaster relief: members, 20%; elders, 24%; pastors, 49%; specialized clergy, 31%.

## Volunteer Leadership

- ✓ Among volunteers, sizable minorities of laity and around half of ministers report serving as a leader in volunteer work in their community (members, 31%; elders, 38%; pastors, 54%; specialized clergy, 48%).

## Preferences for Volunteer Work

- ✓ Asked to rate their preferences for each of 19 types or aspects of volunteering (1=least prefer; 5=most prefer), on average lay panelists most prefer:
  - A particular cause you are passionate about (average scores: members, 3.8; elders, 3.8).
  - Helping someone with whom you are connected (3.8; 3.8).
  - An effort that uses your professional skills, expertise, and experience (3.8; 3.8).
  - An effort in your community, rather than nationally or internationally (3.8; 3.7).
  - Helping someone who is working to improve the lot of his or her family (3.7; 3.7).
- ✓ Preferences are similar for ministers, with the same five items receiving average scores between 3.6 and 4.0 for both pastors and specialized clergy.
- ✓ Pastors on average also have preferences for two others—leading a Bible study or teaching a Sunday school class, and activity that arises because of a specific need—and specialized clergy for working as part of a team or a group rather than independently (averages are 3.7 for all three).
- ✓ At the other extreme, all groups least prefer singing in a choir or playing in an ensemble or orchestra (average scores: members, 2.1; elders, 2.2; pastors, 2.5; specialized clergy, 2.6).
- ✓ Preferences are also low among laity for:
  - Leading a Bible study or teaching a Sunday school class (members, 2.6; elders, 2.5).
  - Leading an effort in your congregation, presbytery, synod, or the General Assembly (2.7; 2.9).
  - An effort to aid or help immigrants (3.0; 2.9).
  - Mentoring/supporting an adult who needs to develop a work ethic (3.0; 2.9).
  - Tutoring, coaching, mentoring, or supporting young people (3.0; 3.1).
  - An activity that provides compassionate care, like hospital visitation (3.0; 3.0).
  - Advocating for the rights of others (3.2; 3.1).
- ✓ Besides music, types or aspects of volunteering that relatively few in one or both minister groups prefer, on average, include:
  - Mentoring/supporting an adult who needs to develop a work ethic (average scores: pastors, 2.8; specialized clergy, 2.8).
  - Advocating for the rights of others (3.1; 3.3).
  - Leading an effort in your congregation, presbytery, synod, or the General Assembly (3.3; 3.0).

**Religious Views**

- ✓ Asked to rate the truthfulness of 21 statements about their own faith (1= definitely false, 7=definitely true) yields the highest averages for these three among laity:
  - My beliefs help me feel compassion/love for others (members, 6.3; elders, 6.3; pastors, 6.4; specialized clergy, 6.4).
  - I have a responsibility to help others (6.2; 6.2; 6.4; 6.3).
  - My faith involves all aspects of life (6.1; 6.1; 6.6; 6.5).
- ✓ Other statements rated more true than false on average (scores of 5.9 or more in at least one group) are:
  - I go to church mainly to worship (members, 5.8; elders, 5.8; pastors, 5.8; specialized clergy, 5.7).
  - In my life I experience the presence of the divine (5.8; 5.8; 6.4; 6.4).
  - It is important to me to spend time in private religious thought and reflection (5.8; 5.6; 6.3; 5.9).
  - I go to church because I feel part of a community (5.7; 5.9; 5.9; 5.7).
  - Nothing is as important to me as serving God (5.6; 5.6; 6.1; 5.7).
- ✓ Two statements are rated more false than true (average scores of less than 3.0) in at least one group:
  - I expect my religious beliefs and convictions to change in the next few years (members, 2.7; elders, 2.7; pastors, 3.7; specialized clergy, 3.8).
  - It doesn't matter so much what I believe as long as I live a moral life (2.9; 2.8; 2.2; 2.7).

**Family and Neighborhood Support**

- ✓ Most panelists get strong support from their family support network—"those family members who understand you and look out for your interests" (members, 66%; elders, 66%; pastors, 68%; specialized clergy, 63%). Most others report "adequate support."
- ✓ Only around half of laity and fewer ministers describe all or most of their family support network as living "nearby" (50%; 54%; 34%; 42%).

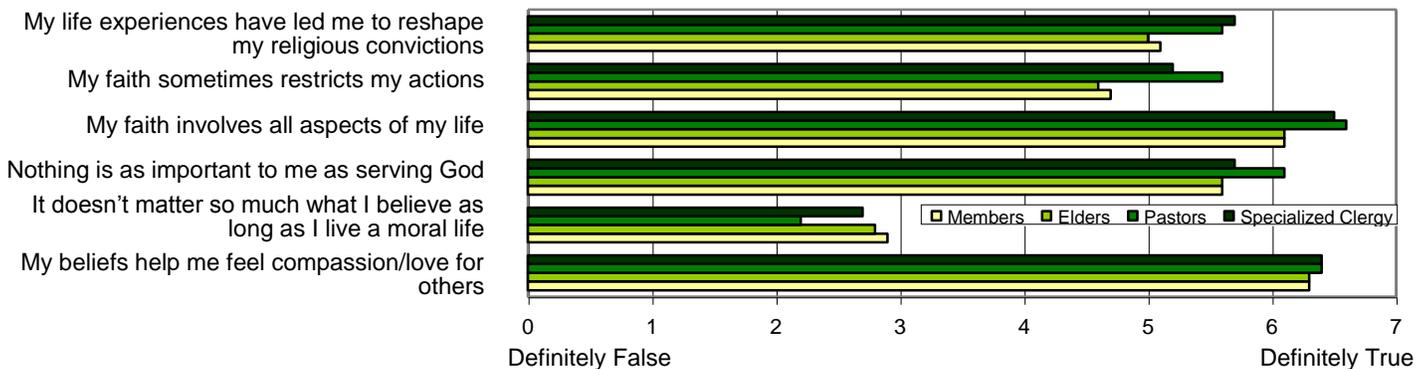
**Congregational Support**

- ✓ Most panelists report seeing or hearing from three or more other persons in their congregations (excluding relatives) outside of worship or church events in a typical month (members, 67%; elders, 74%; pastors, 86%; specialized clergy, 64%). This total includes one in five (or more) who see at least nine church members a month (19%; 23%; 55%; 20%).
- ✓ Somewhat fewer report being comfortable enough to talk about private matters with three or more members of their congregations (52%; 60%; 59%; 48%) or feel close enough to call on them for help (61%; 74%; 77%; 56%).

**Life Satisfaction**

- ✓ Of 18 statements related to life and life satisfaction, the same five are rated as most true on average in every group (range: 1=definitely false; 7=definitely true):
  - I have made plans for things I will be doing in a month or a year from now (members, 5.9; elders, 5.9; pastors, 6.0; specialized clergy, 6.1).
  - As I look back on my life, I am fairly well satisfied (5.8; 5.7; 5.7; 5.7).
  - I expect positive things to happen to me in the future (5.7; 5.6; 5.9; 6.0).
  - The things I do are as interesting to me as ever (5.6; 5.5; 5.6; 5.9).
  - Compared to other people my age, I look good (5.6; 5.6; 5.3; 5.5).
- ✓ Likewise, the items rated as least true are the same five statements in all groups (though in different order):
  - Compared to other people, I get down in the dumps too often (members, 2.1; elders, 2.2; pastors, 2.5; specialized clergy, 2.4).
  - This is the dreariest time of my life (2.2; 2.1; 2.1; 1.9).
  - When I think back over my life, I didn't get most of the important things I wanted (2.3; 2.4; 2.4; 2.3).
  - I feel old and somewhat tired (3.2; 3.3; 3.2; 3.3).
  - Despite what some people say, the lot of the average person is getting worse, not better (3.2; 3.4; 3.3; 3.6).

**Figure 3. Views on Selected Aspects of Personal Faith**



## SELF-EFFICACY AND OTHER TOPICS

### General Self-Efficacy

- ✓ Most panelists believe they have considerable control over their own fates, as average truth ratings on these statements show (1=definitely false; 7=definitely true):
  - I can usually handle what comes my way (members, 5.7; elders, 5.6; pastors, 5.7; specialized clergy, 5.8).
  - If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution (5.6; 5.5; 5.5; 5.6).
  - I can typically manage to solve most difficult problems if I try hard enough (5.6; 5.5; 5.1; 5.4).
- ✓ An exception is found for the statement, “If someone opposes me, I can usually find the means and ways to get what I want” (4.0; 4.0; 4.1; 4.1).

### Health-Related Self-Efficacy

- ✓ Most panelists also believe they have much control over their health, as average truth ratings for these statements show (1=definitely false; 7=definitely true):
  - I pretty much stay healthy by taking good care of myself and practicing prevention (members, 6.0; elders, 5.9; pastors, 5.7; specialized clergy, 5.7).
  - When I am ill, prayer gives me hope that I will recover (5.8; 5.8; 5.7; 5.5).
  - I am directly responsible for my health (5.6; 5.8; 5.7; 5.8).
- ✓ Consistently, panelists have low average truth scores for statements that ascribe health outcomes to chance:
  - It seems my health is greatly influenced by accidental happenings (members, 2.9; elders, 3.0; pastors, 2.9; specialized clergy, 3.0).
  - When I stay healthy, I am just plain lucky (3.1, 3.0, 2.8, 2.9).
  - Often I feel that no matter what I do, if I am going to get sick, I will get sick (3.2; 3.3; 3.2; 3.3).

### Perceived Influence of Others

- ✓ Asked how much influence “other people’s opinions and expectations for you and your peers” have in each of ten areas, on average panelists report the most influence for these three (1=not at all; 7=a great deal):
  - Your healthcare and treatment decisions (3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.3).
  - Your overall self-confidence (3.2; 3.3; 3.6; 3.3).
  - Your enthusiasm in planning for the future (average scores: members, 3.0; elders, 3.0; pastors, 3.2; specialized clergy, 3.1).
  - Your general decision-making (3.0; 2.9; 3.1; 2.9).
- ✓ The least influence, on average, is found for these items from the same list:
  - Your ability to provide care for small children (members, 2.4; elders, 2.6; pastors, 2.5; specialized clergy, 2.3).
  - Your likelihood of traveling without other family members (2.7; 2.7; 2.7; 2.6).

### Meaning and Purpose

- ✓ Most panelists perceive great meaning and purpose in their lives, on average labeling these positively worded statements as true (1=definitely false; 7=definitely true):
  - My life is meaningful (members, 6.0; elders, 6.1; pastors, 6.4; specialized clergy, 6.5).
  - I am part of a meaningful entity (6.0; 6.1; 6.4; 6.5).
  - I’ll remain motivated to carry on even in times of bad luck (5.6; 5.6; 5.7; 5.8).
 . . . and by labeling negatively worded statements as false:
  - I do a lot of things that I would rather not do (2.7; 2.6; 2.9; 2.5).
  - I often feel I have to prove myself (2.8; 2.6; 3.3; 3.0).

	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed* .....	726	913	1,270
Number returned.....	350	481	632‡
Response rate .....	48%	52%	49%

\*Estimated; true figures are likely +/-5 of estimated figures    ‡Of the 632 returned surveys, 418 came from pastors and 214 from specialized clergy

**The survey was mailed on March 6, 2008**, with returns accepted through early May 2008. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. As a general rule, differences of less than 8% between samples are not statistically meaningful.

**For more numbers and interpretation** of these results, a longer report with more charts is available for free on the Web ([www.pcusa.org/research/panel](http://www.pcusa.org/research/panel)) or for \$15 from PDS (1-800-524-2612; order PDS# 02056-08298). It includes tables showing percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

### LISTENING TO PRESBYTERIANS SINCE 1973

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