



The Presbyterian Panel

Listening to Presbyterians



REPORT

PRESBYTERIANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THE FEBRUARY 2001 SURVEY

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ More panelists see religion's influence on society as *decreasing* rather than *increasing*, although many see its influence as *staying about the same*. (p. 1)
- ✓ Panelists are split evenly on whether or not religion will have *more* or *less* influence on society in 2050. (p. 1)
- ✓ Most panelists are *optimistic* about the future of the Christian church and of their own congregation. (p. 1)
- ✓ Trends that 40% or more of panelists believe will affect Presbyterian churches the most between now and 2050 include *more people in non-traditional families, people living longer, consumerism/materialism, and increasing racial ethnic diversity*. (p. 2)
- ✓ From a list of eight items, "form of church government" is rated by more panelists than any of the others as a *very distinctive* feature of the PC(USA). (p. 3)
- ✓ Majorities in every sample *agree* that being Presbyterian is an "important part of my identity as a Christian." (p. 4)
- ✓ Most laity believe that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is giving adequate answers to "the moral problems and needs of individuals," but most clergy do not. (p. 4)
- ✓ Large majorities *don't like* the idea of creating non-geographical presbyteries for groups of more liberal or more conservative congregations. (p. 5)
- ✓ Three in four pastors and small majorities of laity want a "*big-tent*" church that tolerates diversity of beliefs over a strict church that requires more uniformity of belief and practice. (p. 5)
- ✓ Most panelists want "less conflict in the PC(USA)," but even more are "willing to tolerate different viewpoints in the church even if it spills over into conflict sometimes." (p. 5)
- ✓ Majorities expect that by 2050 more PC(USA) congregations will have women as pastors, will have racially and ethnically diverse memberships, and will offer worship opportunities on days other than Sunday. (p. 6)
- ✓ Large majorities of pastors and a small majority of elders believe that by 2050 General Assemblies will meet every two or three years rather than annually. (p. 6)
- ✓ Most pastors and other clergy believe that by 2050 that there will have been a major schism in the PC(USA), a view held by only a minority of members and elders. (p. 7)
- ✓ A quarter of members, elders, and pastors indicate that it is *essential* to them, personally, that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continue as a denomination. (p. 7)
- ✓ Small majorities of members, elders, and pastors think it is *very likely* that their congregation will continue to exist in 2050. (p. 9)
- ✓ Opinions are divided on whether national church conflicts have an effect on panelists' congregations. (p. 9)
- ✓ Two-thirds of panelists have one or more adult children. Most adult children are married, and among laity, a majority have children of their own. (p. 10)
- ✓ A majority of pastors' adult children, and four in ten of those of members, elders, and specialized clergy, are *very active* or *generally active* in a church. About half of the active adult children of members and elders and two-thirds of those of pastors attend a Presbyterian church. (p. 10)
- ✓ Reported church participation of adult children is greatest among those who are *both* married *and* have children of their own. (p. 11)

OVERVIEW

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally-representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders (lay leaders), and ordained ministers. For analysis, 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 sixth survey completed by the 2000-2002 Panel. The first half uses text and graphics to highlight important and useful findings. An appendix follows with comparative tables that display the percentage distribution of responses to every question for each of the four Panel groups.

Questionnaires were mailed February 16, 2001. Non-responders were sent a postcard reminder on March 8. Returns were accepted through April 2001. Response rates for this survey are: members, 51%; elders, 56%; ministers, 64%. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. As a general rule, differences of less than 8% are not statistically meaningful.

In this report, the term *median* refers to the middle number in an ordered distribution. For example, the median age for a group of people aged 12, 21, 28, 35, and 64 years would be 28 years. The term *mean* refers to the mathematical average of values in a distribution; in the example, the mean age would be calculated as: $(12+21+28+35+64)/5$, or 32 years.

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This survey was conceived and the questionnaire developed by The Presbyterian Panel.

Additional Copies:

Additional copies of this *Report* may be purchased for \$6 from PDS—call 800-524-2612 and request item number 65100-01268. Copies of a four-page *Summary* of results are available for \$2 each directly from Research Services. Call for information on quantity discounts (888-728-7228 ext. 2040).

Panel on the Web:

Summaries of recent surveys and a catalogue of Panel topics are available on-line at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Web site: <<http://www.pcusa.org/rs/rshtml.htm>>. Scroll down and click on “Presbyterian Panel.”

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CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

Religion's Influence on Society

- ✓ Most panelists believe that religion has either a *great amount* (25% of members and 23% of pastors so report) or *some* (58% and 53%, respectively) influence “on American life right now.” No more than 4% in any of the four Panel groups characterize religion’s influence as *very great*.
- ✓ Majorities of pastors (54%) believe that religion's influence on American life is *decreasing*, as do 33% of members and 35% of elders. Among lay panelists, the most common response is *staying about the same* (41% of members and 39% of elders so report, compared to 27% of pastors). A quarter of members (25%) and elders (26%), one in six pastors (18%), and one in seven specialized clergy (15%) choose *increasing* as their response.
- ✓ Panelists who believe that religion has a *very great amount* or a *great amount* of “influence . . . on American life right now” are much more likely than other panelists to indicate that religion’s influence on American society is *increasing*. Among members, for example, 44% in this subset do so, while only 21% of members who think religion has only *some* or a *little* influence on society at this time also think that influence is *increasing*. Just 8% of members who think religion has *only a very small amount* or *no* influence think that its influence is *increasing*.
- ✓ Opinions are divided on whether religion will have more or less influence on American society in 2050 than it does today. About half of members respond either *stay about the same* (34%) or *no opinion* (14%), while the other half split evenly between *more* (27%) and *less* (24%). Among pastors, the responses are: *stay about the same*, 23%; *no opinion*, 10%; *more*, 30%; *less*, 37%.
- ✓ Panelists who believe that religion has a *very great amount* or a *great amount* of “influence . . . on American life right now” are much more likely than other panelists to indicate that religion will have *more* influence in 2050 than it does today (38% of this subset of members so report, compared to 25% of members who think the current influence is *some* or a *little*, and 16% who think it is *only a very small amount* or *none* at present).

Outlook for the Church

The first question asked, in this order, for opinions on “the future of”:

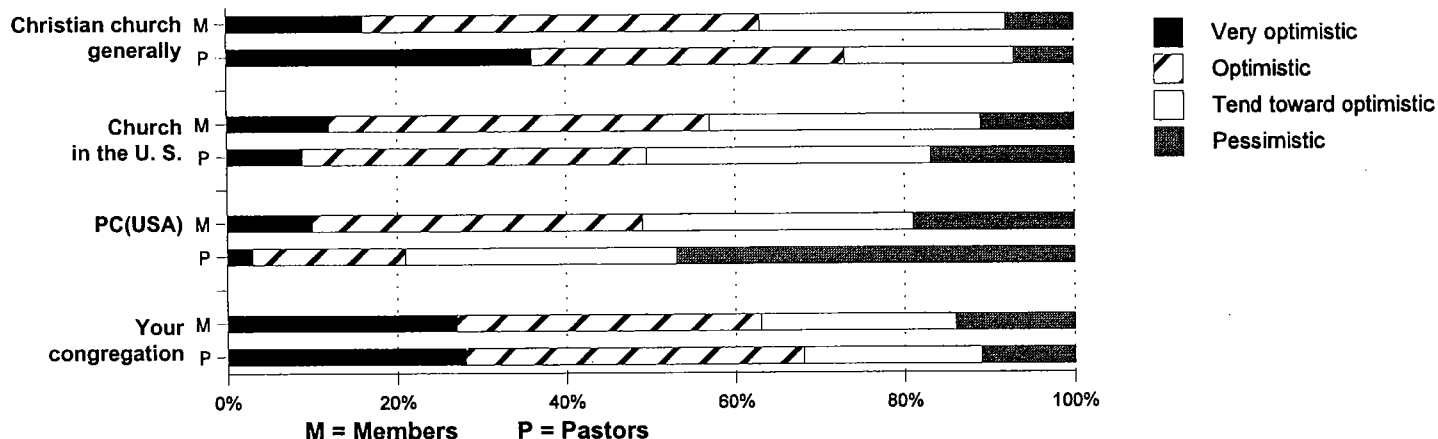
- “the Christian Church generally”
- “the church in the United States”
- “the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”
- “your own congregation”

Besides *no opinion*, which 3% or fewer selected, the six response choices ranged from *very optimistic* to *very pessimistic*. At least three interesting patterns emerge:

1. Most everyone is to some degree optimistic concerning the future of the church in each of the various expressions, with one exception (see paragraph 2, below). Otherwise, the variation in response is largely among degrees of optimism rather than between optimism and pessimism.
2. The exception is found among clergy, who are much more likely than laity to have a gloomy perspective on the PC(USA). While 46% of pastors and 39% of specialized clergy are either *very pessimistic*, *pessimistic*, or *tend toward pessimistic* regarding the future of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), only 19% of members and 23% of elders hold pessimistic views. (In all samples, the large majority of pessimistic responses are of the *tend toward pessimistic* variety.)
3. Optimism tends to be greater for the most remote (“the Christian church generally”) and the most familiar (“your own congregation”) expressions of the church, especially among clergy.

CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

Figure 1
Perspectives on the Future Church



Forces Shaping Future Churches

- ✓ Panelists were asked to select “up to three” from a list of 15 “broad trends or patterns” (including “other”) that they think “will have the most impact on how Presbyterian churches in the United States [will] look in 2050.” Table 1 shows the responses for members, elders, and pastors, in order (based on members’ responses) from most frequently selected to least frequently selected.

Table 1
Societal Trends and Patterns that Panelists Believe Will Have the Most Impact on the Nature of Presbyterian Churches in 2050

	Members	Elders	Pastors
	<i>percent choosing each item*</i>		
more people in non-traditional families	47%	47%	45%
people living longer	40%	34%	32%
consumerism/materialism	33%	35%	49%
increasing racial-ethnic diversity	32%	36%	39%
economic trends	20%	22%	15%
growth of the Internet	18%	17%	19%
more educated population	18%	17%	6%
decline in civic involvement	17%	18%	20%
fewer children per family	17%	18%	15%
medical advances	14%	11%	6%
other developments in science and technology	10%	11%	12%
other (specify)	6%	8%	13%
war and terrorism	6%	6%	4%
growth of large, multi-national corporations	6%	4%	6%
genetic engineering	3%	4%	4%

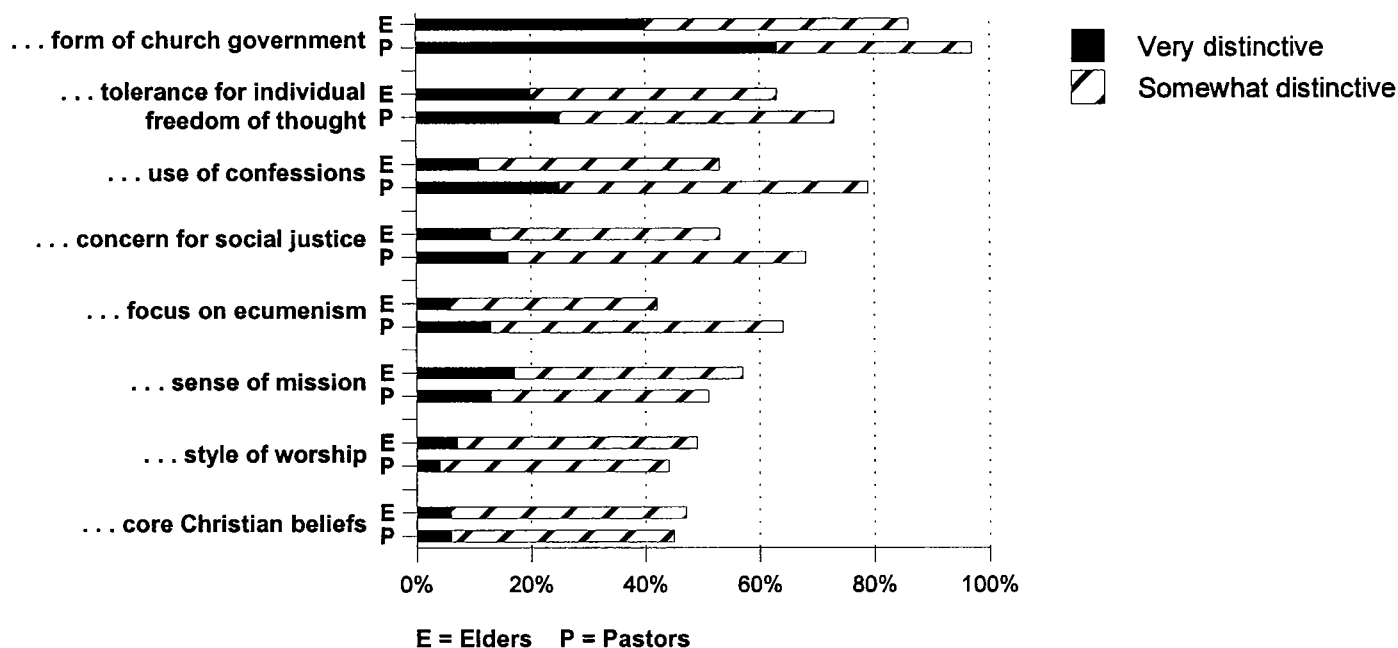
*Respondents could choose up to 3 items

- ✓ Specific entries in the “other (specify)” option range widely. Some examples include: “an unforeseeable event”; “increasing acceptance of diverse sexual orientations”; “family pressures”; “increased ‘individualization’ of religion/spirituality”; “cultural amoralism”; “increasingly overscheduled/overcommitted parents and children”; and “theological schism.”

Presbyterian Distinctiveness

- ✓ In every sample, “form of church government” is the one feature of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that the largest percentage of panelists rate as *very distinctive*. In all, 28% of members, 40% of elders, 63% of pastors, and 58% of specialized clergy respond *very distinctive*.
- ✓ No other PC(USA) feature (from a list of eight) is rated as *very distinctive* by a majority in any sample. At the opposite end is “focus on ecumenism,” which only 6% of elders and 15% of pastors believe is a *very distinctive* feature of the PC(USA), and style of worship (7% and 7%).

**Figure 2
Opinions on What Makes
Presbyterian Churches Distinctive**



- ✓ Majorities of members (55%) and elders (51%) *neither agree nor disagree* with the statement, “the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a clearer understanding of the church’s mission in the world today than do most other denominations.” Of the rest, slightly more *strongly disagree* or *disagree* (e.g., 24% among members) than *strongly agree* or *agree* (21%). Among clergy, that gap is wider (e.g., among specialized clergy 41% *strongly disagree* or *disagree*, compared to 24% who *strongly agree* or *agree*). A third of specialized clergy (34%) respond *neither agree nor disagree*.
- ✓ More members who describe themselves as *theologically liberal* than *theologically conservative* rate Presbyterians as *not distinctive* when it comes to “core Christian beliefs”: 63% of theologically liberal members rate Presbyterians as *not distinctive* on core beliefs, compared to 46% of theological conservatives. However, elders’ and pastors’ views on this issue do not differ by theological stance.

Importance of Being Presbyterian

- ✓ Majorities of members (61%), elders (64%), pastors (79%), and specialized clergy (76%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that “my denominational affiliation is an important part of my identity as a Christian.” Nevertheless, majorities of members (60%), elders (58%), and specialized clergy (55%), and half of pastors, *strongly agree* or *agree* that “there are several other denominations where I could belong/serve and be just as satisfied.”
- ✓ Were they to move to a new community, only 15% of members and elders and 27% of both minister groups would limit their search for a new congregation to those affiliated with the PC(USA). Most (members, 68%; pastors, 62%) would look for a *Presbyterian [church] first, then others if need be*, and 17% of members and 11% of pastors would look for *one that fits my needs, regardless of “brand.”*
- ✓ More members raised in the Presbyterian church than members raised in other Christian traditions select *Presbyterian only* (18% compared to 13%) or *Presbyterian first, then others if need be* (73% compared to 64%) to describe how they would go about looking for a church in a new community.
- ✓ Large minorities of members (44%) and elders (39%) believe that, of other denominations, the Methodist Church “comes closest to embodying those features of Presbyterian churches that are most important to you.” Next highest are the United Church of Christ (members, 12%; elders, 14%) and Reformed churches (9% and 12%). Among pastors, Reformed churches are highest (34%), followed by UCC (24%) and Methodist (14%). Among specialized clergy, UCC is highest (41%), followed by Reformed (21%), Methodist (10%), and Lutheran (10%).
- ✓ To the statement, “Christians should remain loyal to one denomination throughout their adult lives,” more panelists *disagree* than *agree*, although a third in every sample respond *neither agree nor disagree*. For example, among members, 17% respond *strongly agree* (3%) or *agree* (14%); 37%, *neither agree nor disagree*; and 46%, *disagree* (38%) or *strongly disagree* (8%).

A Presbyterian Report Card

- ✓ More members and elders respond *yes* than *no* when asked whether or not the “Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is giving adequate answers” to various contemporary concerns. Among both clergy groups, however, more respond *no* when the focus is personal or spiritual matters, but *yes* when it is societal issues.

Table 2
Answers to Problems: An Evaluation of the PC(USA)

	Members			Pastors		
	Yes	Not Sure	No	Yes	Not Sure	No
Is the PC(USA) giving adequate answers to:						
the moral problems and needs of individuals? ..	47%	23%	30%	39%	9%	52%
the problems of family life?	50%	25%	25%	38%	12%	50%
people’s spiritual needs?	66%	15%	18%	40%	10%	49%
the problems of society, in general?	41%	29%	31%	49%	11%	40%
the problems of local communities?	46%	27%	27%	37%	18%	44%

- ✓ Among members and pastors, more theological liberals than theological conservatives believe the PC(USA) is “giving adequate answers to the moral problems and needs of the individual.” Among members, 53% of liberals but only 42% of conservatives respond *yes* to this statement. A similar pattern obtains for “the problems of family life” (57% of liberal members compared to 45% of conservatives believe the PC(USA) is “giving adequate answers”) and “people’s spiritual needs” (73% and 60%). Among elders, however, more theological moderates than either conservatives or liberals believe Presbyterians are giving adequate answers on these two issues.

- ✓ Concerning “the problems of society, in general”:
 - Among members, theological liberals, moderates and conservatives hold similar views on the adequacy of Presbyterian answers
 - Among elders, more theological moderates than liberals or conservatives believe that the PC(USA) is giving adequate answers
 - Among pastors, more theological liberals than moderates or conservatives believe that the PC(USA) is giving adequate answers

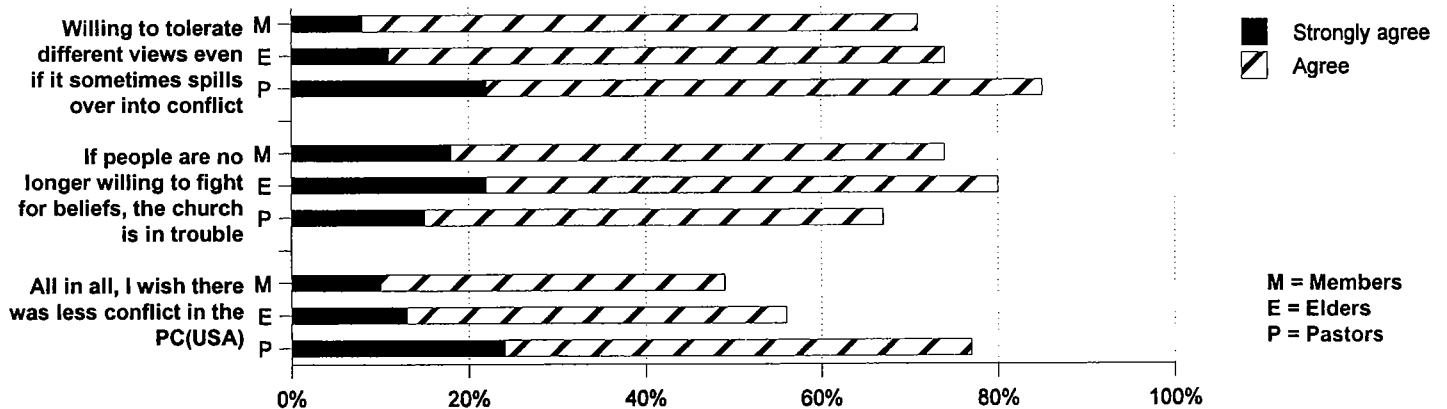
Unity and Diversity

- ✓ Large majorities in all Panel groups (79% or more) *don't like* the possibility of creating “non-geographical presbyteries” for groups of more liberal or more conservative congregations.
- ✓ Members and elders closely divide on the issue of tolerance versus conformity in church life. Small majorities of both groups (52% and 55%) favor a “big-tent” church that tolerates diversity of beliefs and practices, while almost as many (47% and 45%) favor a strict church that requires more uniformity of belief and practice. Pastors opt three to one (75% to 25%) for the “big tent” approach.
- ✓ Similarly, panelists are closely divided on whether or not “keeping people together in the church is more important than enforcing discipline.” Among members, 42% respond *strongly agree* (6%) or *agree* (36%); 28%, *neither agree nor disagree*; and 30%, *strongly disagree* (4%) or *disagree* (26%). Among pastors, the pattern is skewed more toward the disagree side: 31% of pastors respond *strongly agree* (5%) or *agree* (26%); 23%, *neither agree nor disagree*; and 45% either *strongly disagree* (12%) or *disagree* (33%).

Opinions on Conflict

- ✓ Around half of members (49%) and elders (56%), three-fourths of pastors (77%), and two-thirds of specialized clergy (67%) want “less conflict in the PC(USA).”
- ✓ Nevertheless, large majorities in every sample *strongly agree* or *agree* (e.g., members, 74%; pastors, 67%) that “if people are no longer willing to fight for their beliefs, the church is in trouble.”
- ✓ Similarly, 71% of members, 74% of elders, 85% of pastors, and 92% of specialized clergy *strongly agree* or *agree* that they’re “willing to tolerate different viewpoints in the church even if it spills over into conflict sometimes.”

Figure 3
Opinions on Conflict



Congregational Patterns

- ✓ Majorities in every sample expect increases by 2050 in the percentage of PC(USA) congregations nationally that:
 - have women as pastors (e.g., elders, 82%; specialized clergy, 87%)
 - have “racially or ethnically diverse memberships” (66%, 67%)
 - offer worship opportunities on days besides Sunday (70%, 83%)
 - have relatively more members aged 65 or older (76%, 80%)

- ✓ Most ministers (pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 67%) expect an *increase* in the percentage of congregations with “no installed pastor of any kind.” Majorities of members (elders are similar) respond *little or no change* (36%) or *not sure* (34%).

- ✓ Only among specialized clergy does a majority (52%) expect increases in the relative number of congregations with “a pastor of a different racial-ethnic background than the majority of the members.” The percentages holding this view in the other groups are: members, 38%; elders, 42%; and pastors, 40%. Few in any sample expect a *decrease* (the range is 2% to 4%); most of the rest expect *little or no change* (e.g., members, 43%; pastors, 48%).

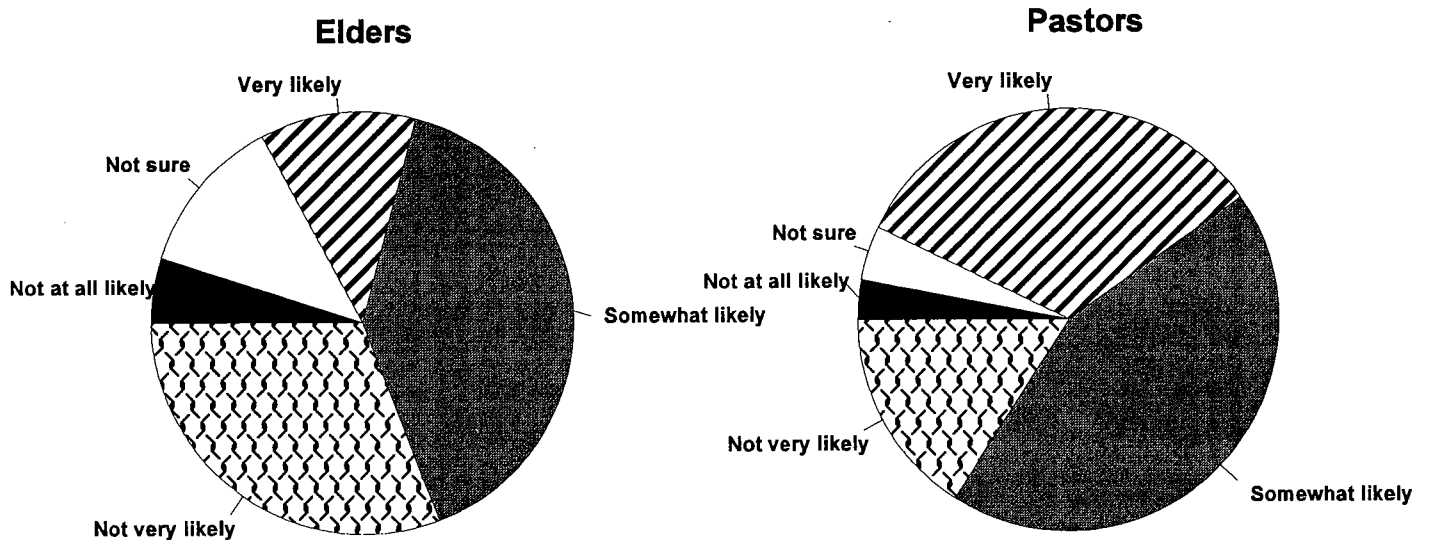
Governance

- ✓ Majorities in all samples, ranging from 54% of members to 74% of pastors, believe it is *very likely* or *somewhat likely* that by 2050 PC(USA) congregations will “have more autonomy.”

- ✓ More than nine in ten pastors and 79% of specialized clergy believe it *very likely* or *somewhat likely* that by 2050 “synods [will] no longer exist as governing bodies.” Only 45% of elders and 31% of members hold this view.

- ✓ Three-fourths of both minister groups, a slim majority of elders, and 43% of members believe it *very likely* or *somewhat likely* that by 2050 General Assembly meetings will occur only every two or three years.

Figure 4
Likelihood that General Assemblies
Will Meet Less Often by 2050



CHANGE IN THE PC(USA)

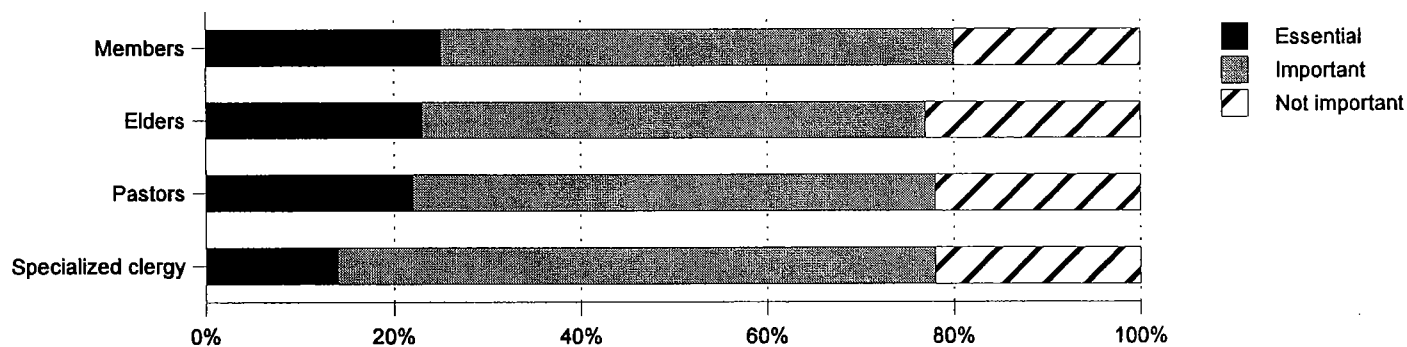
Pastors' Salaries

- ✓ Large majorities in every sample believe it is *not very likely* or *not likely at all* that by 2050 pastors' salaries will be paid by the national church instead of the local congregation (e.g., elders, 78%) or that pastors will "make the same pay regardless of the size or wealth of their congregation" (e.g., elders, 86%).

Prospects for Merger or Schism

- ✓ Majorities of members (60%) and elders (56%) believe it *not very likely* or *not at all likely* that by 2050 the PC(USA) will have merged out of existence. Pastors' views are more evenly divided, with 48% believing such an outcome is *very likely* (12%) or *somewhat likely* (36%) and 46% that it is *not very likely* (33%) or *not likely at all* (13%). Only among specialized clergy is a merger deemed likely by a majority (53%).
- ✓ Large majorities of pastors (73%) and specialized clergy (67%) believe it is *very likely* or *somewhat likely* that by 2050 "a large group will have split off [from the PC(USA)] to form a new denomination." Elders are more evenly divided on this possibility (42% believe it *very likely* or *likely*, and 43%, *not very likely* or *not at all likely*), and more members think it *unlikely* (46%) than *likely* (34%).
- ✓ Around a fourth of members (25%), elders (23%), and pastors (22%), and a seventh of specialized clergy (14%), report that it is *essential* to them, personally, "that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continue to exist as a separate denomination." Most others respond *important*. More members who grew up in the Presbyterian tradition (31%) than those who were raised in another denomination (21%) see the continuation of the PC(USA) as *essential*.

Figure 5
Importance of the PC(USA)
Continuing to Exist



- ✓ Of the minority of respondents who report that it is *not important* to them that the PC(USA) continue to exist, most hold out *hope for church unity* (e.g., 56% of this subset of elders—14% of all elders—and 69% of this subset of specialized clergy—16% of all specialized clergy). But a few, including 20% of this subset of members (4% of all members), *just don't care*.

CHANGE IN PANELISTS' CONGREGATIONS

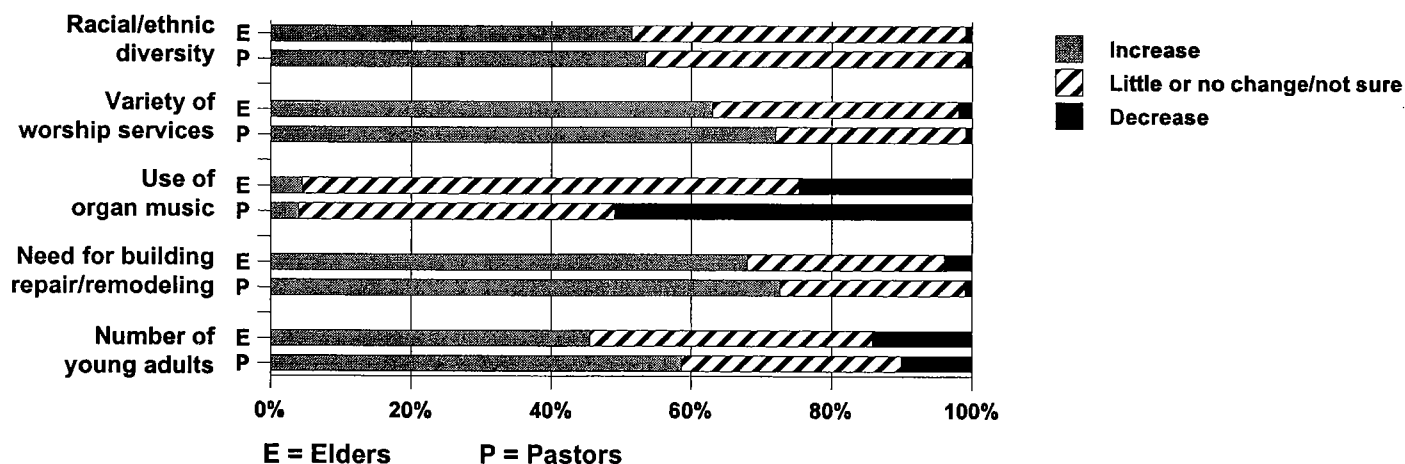
Increases Anticipated

- ✓ More panelists in every group expect increases than expect decreases over the next 25-50 years in their congregations':
 - racial ethnic diversity (e.g., 51% of elders expect *an increase* and 1%, *a decrease*)
 - the need for repair/remodeling of facilities (68%, 4%)
 - membership size (50%, 17%)
 - number of young adults who actively participate (45%, 14%)
 - the average age of members (51%, 16%)
 - local ecumenical cooperation (59%, 2%)
 - the variety of worship services offered (63%, 2%)
 - use of technology in worship (66%; none)
 - use of a live contemporary-music band in worship (46%, 5%)
 - use of recorded music soundtracks (31%, 6%—although even more, 42%, expect *little or no change*)
 - financial health (35%, 17%—but more, 39%, expect *little or no change*)

Decreases Anticipated

- ✓ In every group, more panelists expect decreases than expect increases in their congregation's "use of organ music in worship" over the next 25-50 years (e.g., among elders, 14% expect *an increase* and 22% *a decrease*, with 59% expecting *little or no change*).

Figure 6
Forecasts For One's Own Congregation Over Next 25-50 Years



Mixed Opinions

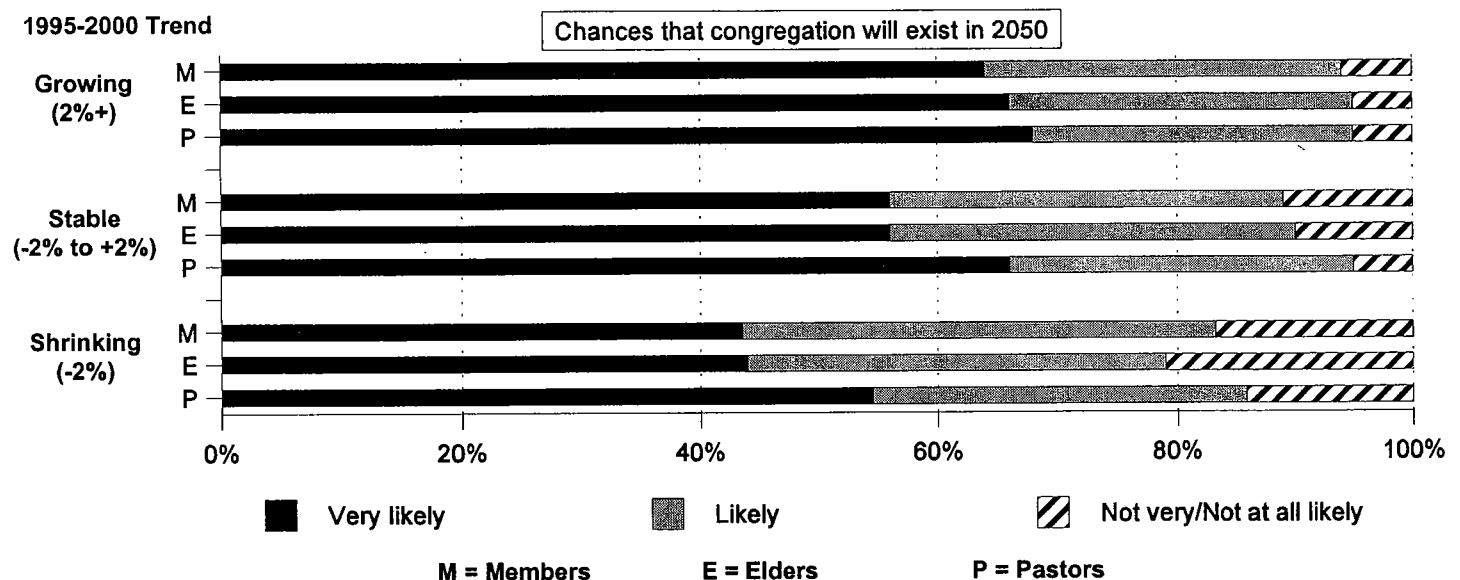
- ✓ About half of members and elders believe that over the next 25-50 years there will be *little or no change* in the "ease with which lay leadership positions are filled" in their congregation. Pastors and specialized clergy are more divided, with roughly a third of each group expecting *an increase* (e.g., pastors, 29%), *a decrease* (26%), or *little or no change* (36%).

CHANGE IN PANELISTS' CONGREGATIONS

Congregation's Survival Chances

- ✓ Majorities of members (53%), elders (53%), and pastors (60%) think it is *very likely* that their congregation “will exist in 2050.” Only 12%, 14%, and 10%, respectively, think it is *not very likely* or *not at all likely*.
- ✓ More members and elders in growing than in stable or shrinking congregations are optimistic about their congregations' future. More pastors in growing or stable than in shrinking congregations are optimistic about their congregations' future.

Figure 7
Opinions on Own Congregation's
Future by Its Recent Membership Trend



- ✓ Among laity who believe their congregation will disappear during the next 50 years, a majority indicate that factors associated with an aging membership and loss of young people (members, 51%; elders, 53%) are the most important reasons for this outcome. Among pastors and specialized clergy, a third give similar reasons.

Other Opinions

- ✓ Opinions divide evenly on whether or not “conflict at the presbytery or General Assembly level has little effect on my congregation.” Among pastors, for example, 45% *agree* and 45% *disagree*.
- ✓ Majorities (elders, 65%; pastors, 74%) prefer a congregation where *people hold different views and openly discuss their disagreements* to one where *people all hold more or less the same views* (31%; 24%) or one where *people all hold different views but keep them to themselves* (3%; 2%).

PANELISTS' ADULT CHILDREN AND THEIR CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Demographic Profile

- ✓ Around two-thirds of members, pastors, and specialized clergy, and three-fourths of elders, have one or more adult children.
- ✓ Among panelists with at least one child, the average (mean) number of adult children ranges from 2.3 among pastors to 2.6 among members.
- ✓ On average (mean), the adult children of laity are in their mid-thirties (members, 36.9 years; elders, 34.4 years), while adult children of specialized clergy (31.8 years) and, especially, pastors (27.0), are younger.
- ✓ Majorities of the adult children of members (65%), elders (59%), and specialized clergy (54%) are currently married. Among pastors, 45% of adult children are married.
- ✓ Among members and elders with adult children, a majority of those children have offspring of their own (59% of the adult children of members and 54% of the adult children of elders have one or more children). Put differently, 40% of members, 42% of elders, 23% of pastors, and 27% of specialized clergy are grandparents.

Children's Churchgoing

- ✓ Four in ten adult children of members are either *very* (25%) or *generally* (16%) active in church. The rate is similar among specialized clergy (26% and 17%), but somewhat higher among elders (27% and 21%) and, especially, pastors (33% and 19%).
- ✓ Of the adult children of panelists, anywhere from a third (members and specialized clergy) to a quarter (elders) to a fifth (pastors) are *not at all* active in church.
- ✓ Only among specialized clergy is the percentage of churchgoing adult children the highest among children who are Presbyterians, at 41%. In the other samples, it is either those in other mainline denominations (children of pastors) or in the "Baptist or other" category (children of members, elders) who have the highest percentage of *very active* participants. In fact, among churchgoing adult children, Presbyterians have the lowest *very active* percentage among elders, while Catholics are lowest in the other three Panel groups.

Table 3
Church Participation of Adult Children by Denomination

	<u>Adult Child's Denominational Affiliation</u>			
	PCUSA	Other Mainline*	Catholic	Baptist and Other**
	<i>percent "very active"</i>			
Members	40%	51%	20%	54%
Elders	30%	47%	50%	62%
Pastors	41%	62%	38%	53%
Specialized clergy	41%	39%	25%	38%

* "Mainline" includes Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, and United Church of Christ

** "Other" includes all other, mainly evangelical denominations and independent or non-denominational churches

PANELISTS' ADULT CHILDREN AND THEIR CHURCH PARTICIPATION

- ✓ Among members, elders, and pastors, more older than younger adult children are *very active* in a church. Among pastors, for example, 40% of adult children aged 40 or more and 43% of those aged 35-39 are *very active*, compared to 29% of adult children aged 18-24 and 30% of those 25-29.

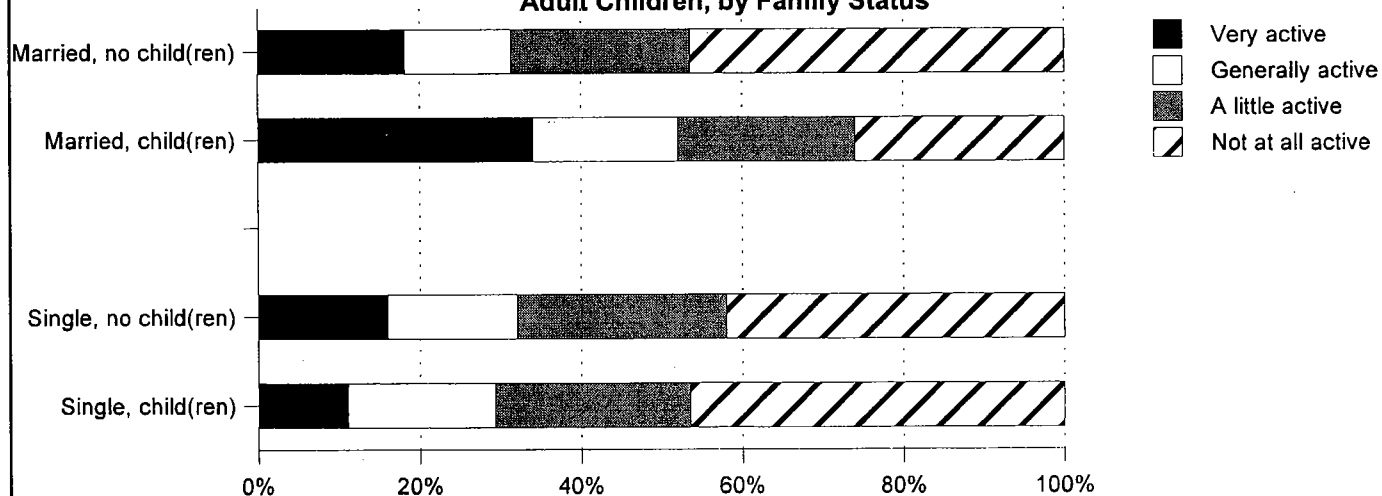
Children, Marriage, and Churchgoing

Married adult children of panelists attend church more actively than unmarried adult children, and adult children with children of their own attend church more actively than adult children who are childless. But since most adult children with children of their own are married, and most married adult children have children of their own, the question remains: does marriage alone or the presence of children alone affect the churchgoing of adult children in a positive direction, or are both necessary for this to happen? The figure below provides an answer. (Only members are shown, but the pattern is very similar in the other samples.)

Of the four combinations of marital status and presence of children shown in the figure, one—married with children—is distinctive from the other three. Married adult children with children of their own are much more likely to be described by their panelist parents as *very active* in church—34%, compared to no more than 18% in any of the other categories. At the other extreme, only 26% of adult children who are married and have children are described as *not at all active*, compared to a minimum of 42% in the other three categories.

In short, it's not marriage alone or having a child by itself that is associated with greater church participation; it's the combination of the two. Only when adult children are both married and have children of their own do we find noticeably greater rates of church involvement.

Figure 8
Church Participation of Members'
Adult Children, by Family Status



THE PRESBYTERIAN PANEL

PRESBYTERIANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY—The February 2001 Survey

Note to ministers on questions about your congregation: If you are a pastor of more than one congregation, respond in terms of the larger/est one. If specialized clergy and you do not attend the same congregation regularly, leave blank.

	Members	Elders	Ministers
Number of questionnaires mailed	1,154	1,089	1,467
Number of questionnaires returned	595	615	940 *
Percent returned	51%	56%	64%

* 732 pastors; 208 specialized clergy

Q-1. Are you very optimistic or very pessimistic or somewhere in between concerning the future of:

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
a. the Christian church generally?				
very optimistic	16%	19%	36%	29%
optimistic	46%	43%	37%	32%
tend toward optimistic	29%	29%	20%	26%
tend toward pessimistic	7%	7%	4%	10%
pessimistic	1%	1%	2%	2%
very pessimistic	*	—	*	1%
no opinion	1%	1%	*	—
b. the church in the United States?				
very optimistic	12%	14%	9%	7%
optimistic	44%	43%	41%	39%
tend toward optimistic	32%	31%	34%	32%
tend toward pessimistic	8%	9%	13%	17%
pessimistic	2%	2%	3%	4%
very pessimistic	*	1%	1%	2%
no opinion	1%	1%	1%	—
c. the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?				
very optimistic	10%	10%	3%	4%
optimistic	39%	36%	18%	22%
tend toward optimistic	32%	30%	32%	35%
tend toward pessimistic	14%	16%	25%	21%
pessimistic	4%	4%	14%	13%
very pessimistic	1%	3%	7%	5%
no opinion	1%	1%	*	1%
d. your own congregation?				+
very optimistic	27%	32%	28%	17%
optimistic	35%	34%	39%	31%
tend toward optimistic	23%	19%	21%	23%
tend toward pessimistic	10%	10%	7%	15%
pessimistic	2%	3%	2%	7%
very pessimistic	1%	2%	2%	3%
no opinion	2%	*	*	3%

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

— = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

n = number of respondents eligible to answer this question

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more on this question (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

◆ = percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could make more than one response

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-2. How much influence do you think religion as a whole has on American life right now?				
a very great amount	2%	3%	3%	4%
a great amount	25%	26%	23%	27%
some	58%	58%	53%	52%
a little	10%	8%	13%	12%
only a very small amount	5%	4%	8%	5%
none	—	*	—	—
no opinion	*	—	*	1%

Q-3. Do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence, or is it staying about the same?				
increasing	25%	26%	18%	15%
decreasing	33%	35%	54%	46%
staying about the same	41%	39%	27%	38%
no opinion	*	1%	1%	1%

Q-4. Do you think religion will have more or less influence on American life in 2050 than it does today, or will its influence stay about the same?				
more	27%	31%	30%	19%
less	24%	26%	37%	35%
stay about the same	34%	29%	23%	33%
no opinion	14%	15%	10%	13%

Q-5. What broad trends or patterns in society (and the world) do you think will have the most impact on how Presbyterian churches in the United States look in 2050? (✓ up to *three*.)

	◆	◆	◆	◆
consumerism/materialism	33%	35%	49%	44%
decline in civic involvement	17%	18%	20%	20%
economic trends	20%	22%	15%	21%
fewer children per family	17%	18%	15%	12%
genetic engineering	3%	4%	4%	4%
growth of large, multi-national corporations	6%	4%	6%	9%
growth of the Internet	18%	17%	19%	16%
increasing racial-ethnic diversity	32%	36%	39%	41%
medical advances	14%	11%	6%	8%
more educated population	18%	17%	6%	6%
more people in non-traditional families	47%	47%	45%	42%
people living longer	40%	34%	32%	30%
war and terrorism	6%	6%	4%	6%
other developments in science and technology	10%	11%	12%	16%
other (specify): _____	6%	8%	13%	14%

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Q-6. Of the trends listed above, which *one* do you think will have the *most* influence on Presbyterian churches? (Write the number on the line.) _____

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
consumerism/materialism	14%	13%	25%	21%
decline in civic involvement	5%	5%	4%	3%
economic trends	7%	6%	3%	5%
fewer children per family	5%	5%	3%	6%
genetic engineering	1%	1%	*	1%
growth of large, multi-national corporations	*	*	1%	2%
growth of the Internet	3%	4%	4%	3%
increasing racial-ethnic diversity	12%	19%	18%	18%
medical advances	2%	1%	1%	2%
more educated population	9%	7%	2%	2%
more people in non-traditional families	20%	21%	16%	13%
people living longer	14%	9%	11%	9%
war and terrorism	1%	2%	1%	2%
other developments in science and technology	3%	2%	2%	2%
other (specify): _____	5%	6%	10%	10%
unsure or don't know	1%	—	*	—

Q-7. What changes, if any, do you think will occur in your congregation over the next 25-50 years in the following areas?

a. use of technology in worship				+
an increase	61%	66%	80%	66%
a decrease	*	—	1%	1%
little or no change	23%	25%	16%	29%
not sure	15%	8%	4%	5%
b. the racial ethnic diversity of the membership				+
an increase	49%	51%	54%	59%
a decrease	1%	1%	1%	1%
little or no change	42%	42%	40%	33%
not sure	8%	5%	6%	8%
c. the size of the membership				+
an increase	47%	50%	54%	37%
a decrease	15%	17%	20%	29%
little or no change	27%	24%	16%	23%
not sure	12%	8%	10%	11%
d. the variety of worship services offered				+
an increase	56%	63%	72%	63%
a decrease	1%	2%	1%	2%
little or no change	35%	30%	22%	27%
not sure	8%	5%	5%	8%
e. the number of young adults who actively participate				+
an increase	42%	45%	58%	35%
a decrease	16%	14%	10%	22%
little or no change	31%	30%	21%	32%
not sure	10%	10%	10%	11%

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Q-7. What changes, if any, do you think will occur in your congregation over the next 25-50 years in each of the following areas? (Cont.)

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
f. the ease with which lay leadership positions are filled				+
an increase	17%	17%	29%	24%
a decrease	24%	26%	26%	27%
little or no change	48%	48%	36%	35%
not sure	11%	9%	8%	14%
g. financial health				+
an increase	30%	35%	42%	35%
a decrease	17%	17%	20%	29%
little or no change	40%	39%	31%	28%
not sure	12%	9%	8%	9%
h. the need for repairs or remodeling of the facilities				+
an increase	65%	68%	69%	67%
a decrease	4%	4%	6%	3%
little or no change	28%	25%	24%	23%
not sure	4%	3%	1%	7%
i. the average age of the membership				+
an increase	53%	51%	45%	55%
a decrease	16%	16%	26%	13%
little or no change	22%	26%	24%	24%
not sure	9%	7%	5%	8%
j. cooperation with churches of other denominations in your neighborhood/community				+
an increase	57%	59%	51%	50%
a decrease	1%	2%	5%	6%
little or no change	36%	35%	40%	39%
not sure	6%	4%	4%	5%
k. use of organ music in worship				+
an increase	14%	14%	4%	6%
a decrease	20%	22%	51%	35%
little or no change	61%	59%	42%	51%
not sure	5%	4%	3%	8%
l. use of a live contemporary-music band in worship				+
an increase	43%	46%	54%	46%
a decrease	3%	5%	4%	4%
little or no change	34%	30%	27%	32%
not sure	20%	19%	15%	18%
m. use of recorded music/soundtracks during worship				+
an increase	28%	31%	39%	37%
a decrease	7%	6%	5%	5%
little or no change	41%	42%	40%	37%
not sure	24%	21%	16%	21%

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	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-8. More broadly, what changes do you envision for Presbyterians nationally in terms of . . .				
a. the relative number (percentage) of congregations:				
a1. with a woman as pastor (solo or head of staff)?				
an increase	77%	82%	89%	87%
a decrease	4%	4%	4%	4%
little or no change	13%	12%	5%	7%
not sure	6%	3%	1%	2%
a2. with a racially or ethnically diverse membership?				
an increase	66%	66%	65%	67%
a decrease	2%	2%	3%	3%
little or no change	25%	26%	28%	25%
not sure	7%	6%	3%	4%
a3. with a pastor of a different racial-ethnic background than the majority of the members?				
an increase	38%	42%	40%	52%
a decrease	3%	4%	4%	2%
little or no change	43%	42%	48%	40%
not sure	16%	13%	8%	6%
a4. that offer worship opportunities other than on Sunday morning?				
an increase	65%	70%	85%	83%
a decrease	1%	2%	1%	1%
little or no change	24%	20%	11%	14%
not sure	9%	8%	2%	3%
a5. that have no installed pastor of any kind?				
an increase	18%	26%	74%	67%
a decrease	12%	9%	4%	4%
little or no change	36%	33%	12%	17%
not sure	34%	32%	10%	12%
b. the relative number (percentage) of members who are over age 65?				
an increase	75%	76%	73%	80%
a decrease	6%	7%	9%	6%
little or no change	13%	13%	13%	10%
not sure	5%	4%	6%	4%

Q-9. By 2050, how likely are we to see each of these changes in the PC(USA) nationally?

a. pastors are assigned to congregations by a regional church leader, much as Methodists do today				
very likely	6%	5%	3%	6%
somewhat likely	17%	16%	13%	16%
not very likely	43%	49%	49%	52%
not at all likely	16%	19%	32%	20%
not sure	18%	11%	3%	5%

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		Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-9. By 2050, how likely are we to see each of these changes in the PC(USA) nationally?					
(Cont.)					
b. congregations have more autonomy					
	very likely	12%	14%	22%	18%
	somewhat likely	42%	44%	52%	48%
	not very likely	25%	24%	20%	25%
	not at all likely	3%	2%	3%	2%
	not sure	18%	16%	3%	7%
c. synods no longer exist as regional governing bodies					
	very likely	8%	14%	54%	42%
	somewhat likely	23%	31%	38%	37%
	not very likely	38%	31%	4%	12%
	not at all likely	7%	8%	1%	1%
	not sure	24%	16%	3%	7%
d. General Assemblies meet less often, say every 2 or 3 years, instead of annually					
	very likely	9%	12%	33%	30%
	somewhat likely	36%	40%	44%	46%
	not very likely	33%	31%	16%	19%
	not at all likely	7%	5%	3%	2%
	not sure	16%	12%	4%	3%
e. pastors' salaries are paid by the national church rather than by the local congregation					
	very likely	2%	3%	2%	3%
	somewhat likely	12%	12%	9%	13%
	not very likely	47%	55%	54%	52%
	not at all likely	24%	23%	31%	25%
	not sure	15%	7%	4%	7%
f. the PC(USA) no longer exists as such, having merged with one or more other denominations					
	very likely	3%	5%	12%	12%
	somewhat likely	22%	28%	36%	41%
	not very likely	42%	40%	33%	31%
	not at all likely	18%	16%	13%	12%
	not sure	16%	11%	6%	5%
g. pastors make the same pay regardless of the size or wealth of their congregation					
	very likely	1%	2%	2%	2%
	somewhat likely	7%	6%	6%	5%
	not very likely	54%	56%	52%	52%
	not at all likely	28%	30%	38%	38%
	not sure	9%	5%	2%	3%

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	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-9. By 2050, how likely are we to see each of these changes in the PC(USA) nationally?				
<i>(Cont.)</i>				
h. overall PC(USA) membership is much smaller because a large group will have split off to form a new denomination				
very likely	6%	11%	24%	17%
somewhat likely	28%	31%	49%	50%
not very likely	39%	36%	17%	16%
not at all likely	7%	7%	2%	4%
not sure	20%	15%	8%	13%
Q-10. How distinctive are Presbyterian churches from other churches when it comes to:				
a. core Christian beliefs?				
very distinctive	9%	6%	6%	6%
somewhat distinctive	36%	41%	39%	41%
not very distinctive	47%	45%	47%	46%
not at all distinctive	5%	6%	8%	7%
not sure	3%	2%	*	—
b. use of the Confessions?				
very distinctive	11%	11%	25%	21%
somewhat distinctive	33%	42%	54%	55%
not very distinctive	35%	31%	19%	21%
not at all distinctive	8%	7%	2%	3%
not sure	13%	9%	1%	1%
c. form of church government?				
very distinctive	28%	40%	63%	58%
somewhat distinctive	46%	46%	34%	34%
not very distinctive	18%	11%	3%	6%
not at all distinctive	1%	1%	*	2%
not sure	7%	2%		
d. style of worship?				
very distinctive	7%	7%	4%	2%
somewhat distinctive	40%	42%	40%	40%
not very distinctive	48%	45%	51%	53%
not at all distinctive	2%	4%	5%	6%
not sure	2%	2%	*	—
e. concern for social justice?				
very distinctive	15%	13%	16%	10%
somewhat distinctive	37%	40%	52%	59%
not very distinctive	37%	38%	28%	24%
not at all distinctive	4%	5%	2%	6%
not sure	7%	4%	1%	1%

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	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-10. How distinctive are Presbyterian churches from other churches when it comes to:				
(Cont.)				
f. tolerance for individual freedom of thought?				
very distinctive	17%	20%	25%	20%
somewhat distinctive	44%	43%	48%	51%
not very distinctive	28%	28%	23%	24%
not at all distinctive	5%	4%	4%	5%
not sure	7%	4%	1%	1%
g. focus on ecumenism?				
very distinctive	7%	6%	15%	16%
somewhat distinctive	33%	36%	51%	49%
not very distinctive	34%	37%	29%	30%
not at all distinctive	4%	5%	4%	5%
not sure	22%	15%	1%	1%
h. sense of mission?				
very distinctive	15%	17%	13%	10%
somewhat distinctive	45%	40%	38%	38%
not very distinctive	32%	32%	41%	42%
not at all distinctive	3%	6%	6%	9%
not sure	6%	4%	1%	1%

Q-11. How important is it to you, personally, that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continue to exist as a separate denomination?

essential	25%	23%	22%	14%
important	54%	52%	55%	62%
not important	20%	25%	24%	24%
unsure or don't know	*	—	—	—

Q-11a. [If "not important,"] Why?	n=118	n=150	n=173	n=48
hope for church unity	55%	56%	43%	69%
hope for split	1%	6%	15%	6%
hostility toward PCUSA	7%	11%	5%	—
just don't care	20%	10%	5%	4%
other: _____	18%	18%	31%	21%

Q-12. If you moved to a new community, what type of church would you look for? (✓ only one.)

Presbyterian only	15%	15%	27%	27%
Presbyterian first, then others if need be	68%	70%	62%	64%
one that fits my needs, regardless of "brand"	17%	15%	11%	9%

Q-13. Which would you prefer? A congregation where . . .

people all hold more or less the same views	38%	31%	24%	17%
people hold different views but keep them to themselves	6%	3%	2%	2%
people hold different views and openly discuss their disagreements	56%	65%	74%	81%
other comments written in	—	*	—	—

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	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-14. What do you think of the idea of creating non-geographical presbyteries to include groups of congregations, wherever they are located, brought together because they have a more liberal or conservative theological bent than most other Presbyterian congregations?				
like	20%	18%	18%	11%
don't like	79%	81%	82%	89%
unsure or don't know	1%	1%	1%	—
Q-15. Which is more important to you?				
a "big-tent" church that tolerates diversity of beliefs and practices	52%	55%	74%	85%
a strict church that requires more uniformity of belief and practice	47%	45%	25%	14%
other	1%	—	*	1%
Q-16. What other denomination do you think comes closest to embodying those features of Presbyterian churches that are most important to you? (✓ only one.)				
Baptist	7%	7%	3%	1%
Christian (Disciples)	5%	4%	4%	4%
Episcopal	6%	8%	5%	8%
Lutheran	9%	8%	7%	10%
Methodist	44%	39%	14%	10%
Reformed	9%	12%	34%	21%
Roman Catholic	2%	*	1%	1%
United Church of Christ	12%	14%	27%	41%
other (specify): _____	2%	4%	5%	4%
unsure or don't know	3%	3%	*	1%
Q-17. Generally speaking, do you think that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is giving adequate answers to:				
a. the moral problems and needs of the individual?				
yes	47%	45%	39%	39%
no	30%	35%	52%	52%
not sure	23%	20%	9%	8%
b. the problems of family life?				
yes	50%	47%	38%	37%
no	25%	29%	50%	45%
not sure	25%	24%	12%	18%
c. people's spiritual needs?				
yes	66%	68%	40%	38%
no	18%	20%	49%	49%
not sure	15%	12%	10%	13%
d. the problems of society, in general?				
yes	41%	42%	49%	39%
no	31%	35%	40%	49%
not sure	29%	24%	11%	13%

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	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-17. Generally speaking, do you think that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is giving adequate answers to:				
(Cont.)				
e. the problems of local communities?				
yes	46%	42%	37%	31%
no	27%	33%	44%	52%
not sure	27%	25%	18%	17%
Q-18. Overall, how likely do you think it is that your congregation will exist in 2050?				
very likely	53%	53%	60%	40%
likely	35%	33%	30%	33%
not very likely	11%	12%	8%	24%
not at all likely	1%	2%	2%	3%
Q-18a. If you answered "not very likely or not at all likely,"				
what do you think will cause it to disappear?	◆	◆	◆	◆
	n=71	n=87	n=72	n=49
membership decline, aging membership, no youth	51%	53%	34%	35%
finances, lack of money	2%	3%	4%	5%
apathy	8%	6%	14%	2%
lack of ability to change, adapt	2%	6%	13%	10%
lack of pastor or other leadership	5%	1%	—	5%
poor location, bad local economy, people moving away	10%	10%	13%	12%
larger forces in church (PC USA or more generally; splits				
and mergers) or society that affects faith/beliefs	5%	6%	2%	5%
all other	19%	16%	20%	25%
Q-19. Listed below are a number of statements concerning the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). For each statement, indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.				
a. my denominational affiliation is an important part				
of my identity as a Christian				
strongly agree	20%	20%	33%	30%
agree	41%	44%	46%	46%
neither agree nor disagree	22%	20%	9%	14%
disagree	13%	12%	9%	10%
strongly disagree	3%	3%	3%	1%
b. while they may have disagreements from time to time, Christians				
should remain loyal to one denomination throughout their adult lives				
strongly agree	3%	2%	5%	5%
agree	14%	13%	21%	15%
neither agree nor disagree	37%	37%	32%	34%
disagree	38%	42%	35%	40%
strongly disagree	8%	6%	6%	6%

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◆ = percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could make more than one response

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-19. Listed below are a number of statements concerning the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). For each statement, indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.				
(Cont.)				
c. there are several other denominations where I could belong/serve and be just as satisfied				
strongly agree	8%	10%	8%	5%
agree	52%	48%	42%	50%
neither agree nor disagree	21%	23%	20%	18%
disagree	17%	17%	26%	24%
strongly disagree	2%	2%	4%	2%
d. the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a clearer understanding of the church's mission in the world today than do most other denominations				
strongly agree	3%	4%	5%	2%
agree	18%	19%	20%	22%
neither agree nor disagree	55%	51%	35%	34%
disagree	21%	23%	34%	35%
strongly disagree	3%	3%	6%	6%
e. I'm willing to tolerate different viewpoints in the church even if it spills over into conflict sometimes				
strongly agree	8%	11%	22%	27%
agree	63%	63%	63%	65%
neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	8%	6%
disagree	13%	11%	6%	3%
strongly disagree	1%	1%	1%	—
f. conflict at the presbytery or General Assembly has little effect on my congregation				
strongly agree	4%	5%	8%	5%
agree	31%	34%	37%	31%
neither agree nor disagree	29%	16%	10%	17%
disagree	32%	42%	38%	44%
strongly disagree	3%	3%	7%	3%
g. if people are no longer willing to fight for their beliefs, the church is in trouble				
strongly agree	18%	22%	15%	19%
agree	56%	58%	52%	45%
neither agree nor disagree	20%	14%	20%	23%
disagree	6%	6%	12%	10%
strongly disagree	1%	1%	1%	2%
h. all in all, I wish there was less conflict in the PC(USA)				
strongly agree	10%	13%	24%	15%
agree	39%	43%	53%	52%
neither agree nor disagree	40%	34%	15%	20%
disagree	10%	10%	7%	12%
strongly disagree	1%	*	1%	1%

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Q-19. Listed below are a number of statements concerning the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). For each statement, indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.
(Cont.)

i. keeping people together in the church is more important than enforcing discipline

strongly agree	6%	8%	5%	9%
agree	36%	30%	26%	28%
neither agree nor disagree	28%	26%	23%	26%
disagree	26%	31%	33%	29%
strongly disagree	4%	5%	12%	7%

Q-20. Do you have any adult children, i.e., children ages 18 or older?

yes	68%	77%	64%	66%
no	32%	23%	36%	34%

Q-20a. If you answered "yes" to Q-20, please provide the following information about your adult children:

	n=385	n=457	n=459	n=128
Number				
median	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
mean	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.4
Age				
	+	+	+	+
median	38.0	35.0	27.0	32.0
mean	36.9	34.40	26.96	31.84
Married?				
yes	65%	59%	45%	54%
no	35%	41%	55%	46%
Have own child/ren?				
yes	59%	54%	36%	41%
no	41%	46%	64%	59%
How active in church?				
very	25%	27%	33%	26%
generally	16%	21%	19%	17%
a little	24%	25%	27%	25%
not at all	34%	27%	21%	32%
don't know	1%	1%	*	—
If active, what church?				
	n=315	n=387	n=414	n=100
don't know	7%	5%	3%	2%
PC(USA)	51%	49%	67%	55%
other	42%	46%	31%	43%

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	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Q-20a. If you answered "yes" to Q-20, please provide the (Cont.) following information about your adult children:				
What denomination if not PC(USA)?	n=96	n=124	n=119	n=25
Baptist	9%	12%	10%	12%
Disciples of Christ	3%	3%	2%	2%
Episcopal	6%	5%	11%	8%
Lutheran	11%	8%	4%	10%
Methodist	20%	17%	19%	12%
Reformed	1%	1%	1%	—
Roman Catholic	19%	14%	10%	8%
United Church of Christ	5%	8%	7%	—
all other	26%	32%	36%	48%

Q-21. Please use the space below to make additional comments.

[not tabulated]

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