Looking ahead

The prediction		
	Elders Pastors	
Women pastors More congregations will have a woman as pastor.	82% 89%	True12%20002010Congregations with women pastors
Diversity More congregations will have racial-ethnic diversity in their membership.	66% 65%	True 2% 2000 2010 Racially diverse congregations
No pastor More congregations will lack an installed pastor.	26% 74%	True35%44%20002010Congregations without installed pastor
Older members More Presbyterians will be older than 65.	76% 73%	34% 40% 2000 2010 Members older than 65 65
Worship times More congregations will offer worship opportunities other than Sunday morning.	70% 85%	False No change. 8% 2000 2000 2010 Congregations with non-Sunday worship
Synods Synods will disappear.	45% 92%	False Synods still exist, but most have fewer functions.
General Assembly General Assembly will meet less often.	52% 77%	True The PC(USA) switched to biennial assemblies after 2004.
Schism PC(USA) membership will declir because a large group splits off to form a new denomination.	42% 73% ne	False No split, but this possibility is being seriously discussed.

» Other findings www.pcusa.org/research

What the research shows

The ability of Presbyterians to foresee the church's future, at least on most of these topics, has been fairly good. Of course, many of these predictions followed trends well underway prior to 2001, so it wouldn't have taken Nostradamus to anticipate their continuation. Yet some anomalies have occurred.

Most obviously, large majorities anticipated growth in the number of congregations offering worship services on evenings or weekdays. That makes sense: people lead busy lives, and an increasing number of alternative activities are available on Sunday mornings. Yet regular worship offerings are rarely found outside the prenoon hours on Sunday.

On other issues, many more pastors than elders correctly predicted particular outcomes, yet on two issues—the disappearance of synods and the likelihood of schism—elders have been significantly more accurate. One might think that pastors, with their greater involvement in the larger PC(USA), would be more perceptive about denominational trends. Nevertheless, in these instances outcomes that seemed inevitable to most pastors have not occurred.

So far, at least. Pastors may yet prove the wiser group: ongoing developments in the PC(USA) suggest that synods could disappear and a schism may occur soon. I don't pretend to know how this will play out, but I will venture one new prediction for 2012 based on what is apparent now: this year's General Assembly meeting will be very, very interesting!

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