The Presbyterian Panel
The August 2003 Survey

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 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 fourth survey completed by the 2003-2005 Panel, initially sampled in the fall of 2002.

Note: All panelists were sent a copy of the July/August 2003 issue of Presbyterians Today and asked to read it before responding to the questionnaire.

Awareness and Evaluation

Familiarity with Presbyterians Today (PT)

- One in ten members, one in four elders, and 55% of pastors subscribe to Presbyterians Today. Another 15%, 11%, and 25% subscribed in the past.

- 96% of pastors but only 28% of members and 44% of elders are either very familiar or generally familiar with Presbyterians Today.

Rating the July/August 2003 Issue

- Large majorities in every group rated the “overall quality” of the content, writing, visual design, and photographs in the July/August 2003 issue as moderately high, high, or very high. Almost no one rated any of these aspects as poor (3% or less).

Choosing Adjectives to Describe the Magazine

- When given pairs of words that might describe PT, more elders chose:
  - Interesting (65%) than bland (10%)
  - Inspiring (43%) than uninspiring (21%)
  - Attractive (68%) than unattractive (5%)
  - Liberal (28%) than conservative (21%)
  - Contemporary (46%) than traditional (9%)

Interest in Articles and Features

- Majorities in at least one group express very high or high personal interest in these items in the July/August 2003 issue:
  - “General Assembly report” (members, 62%; pastors, 73%)
  - “Biblical Explorations” (52%; 53%)
  - “Q&A” (52%; 53%)
  - “Church in Society” (55%; 51%)
  - “Spiritual Fitness” (50%; 56%)
  - “UpFront” (50%; 44%)
  - “Cover story on church architecture” (41%; 51%)
  - “SpotLight” (45%; 52%)

PT Web Visits

- One in 12 members, one in eight elders, and one in four pastors have visited “the Presbyterians Today Web page in the past year.”
ON THE FUTURE

Likelihood of Subscribing

✓ A quarter of members, a third of elders, 64% of pastors and 57% of specialized clergy are very likely or likely to subscribe to PT (or renew, if already a subscriber) at the current annual rate of $15.95.

✓ Changes that would make sizable numbers of members more likely to subscribe include:
  • More articles about Presbyterian beliefs (57%)
  • More articles on “hot-button” issues (50%)
  • More successful church program ideas (49%)
  • More articles on everyday living (47%)

✓ If given a free subscription, 28% of elders would read all of every issue, 35% would read more than half, and 20% would read about half.

Future of Presbyterians Today

✓ Majorities strongly agree or agree that “by informing Presbyterians about other parts of the church and our shared mission, Presbyterians Today does a good job of binding the church together” (members, 58%; elders, 56%; pastors, 66%).

✓ Most pastors (58%) and specialized clergy (61%) and sizable minorities of members (37%) and elders (43%) indicate that it’s very important that the PC(USA) continue to publish Presbyterians Today.

PT and the PC(USA)

✓ A third of members and 44% of pastors would like Presbyterians Today to put more emphasis on “PC(USA) programs and ministries,” while fewer than one in ten want less emphasis.

✓ Large majorities in every group (elders, 63%; pastors, 71%) report that “the fact that PT is published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) makes them more likely “to want to read it.”

Future Communications from the PC(USA)

✓ When asked to select their “most preferred” way of “receiving information about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” choices included:
  • In a magazine (members, 43%; pastors, 47%)
  • Through bulletin/newsletter inserts (25%; 3%)
  • In a print newsletter or newspaper (12%; 12%)
  • Through an e-mail newsletter (6%; 20%)

✓ A third of laity and most ministers are “interested in subscribing to a monthly online publication that presents information about the PC(USA).” But less than half would subscribe if there were a fee.

✓ Among the subset willing to pay for an e-mail subscription, the median amount they would be willing to pay per year is $10.

---

Members | Elders | Ordained Ministers
---|---|---
Number of surveys mailed ................................................................. 1,076 | 1,296 | 1,407
Number returned ................................................................................. 408 | 581 | 720‡
Response rate .......................................................... 37% | 44% | 51%

‡Of the 720 returned surveys, 474 came from pastors and 246 from specialized clergy.

This survey was initially mailed in August 2003, and returns were accepted through mid-November 2003. 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 the August 2003 Presbyterian Panel results, a longer report with additional charts is available for $10. Contact PDS (1-800-524-2612) and order PDS# 65100-03279. It includes an appendix with percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

For more information on Presbyterians Today, contact Eva Stimson (888-728-7228 ext. 5635; estimson@ctr.pcusa.org).

LISTENING TO PRESBYTERIANS SINCE 1973
The Presbyterian Panel
A Ministry of the General Assembly Council
Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville KY 40202-1396
http://www.pcusa.org/research