



## THE BIBLE FINDINGS FROM THE AUGUST 2006 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 fourth survey completed by the 2006-2008 Panel, sampled in the fall of 2005.

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## FREQUENCY OF BIBLE READING

### **Personal Bible Reading**

- ✓ Almost all panelists report having read the Bible on their own in the year prior to the survey (members, 91%; elders, 96%; pastors, 100%; specialized clergy, 98%). Fewer report having done so in the prior *week* (67%; 70%; 99%; 87%).
- ✓ Only a minority of laity report reading the Bible on their own in the prior week either “at least daily” (members, 18%; elders, 17%) or “often, but not daily” (16%; 17%). Similarly, only minorities report in the prior year having done so either “daily/almost daily” (26%; 28%) or “weekly/almost weekly” (21%; 20%).
- ✓ Three in four pastors and half of specialized clergy had in the prior week read the Bible own their own “at least daily” (39%; 25%) or “often, but not daily” (35%; 24%). Many more had read it or heard it read either “daily/almost daily” (70%; 44%) or “weekly/almost weekly” (24%; 26%) in the prior year.

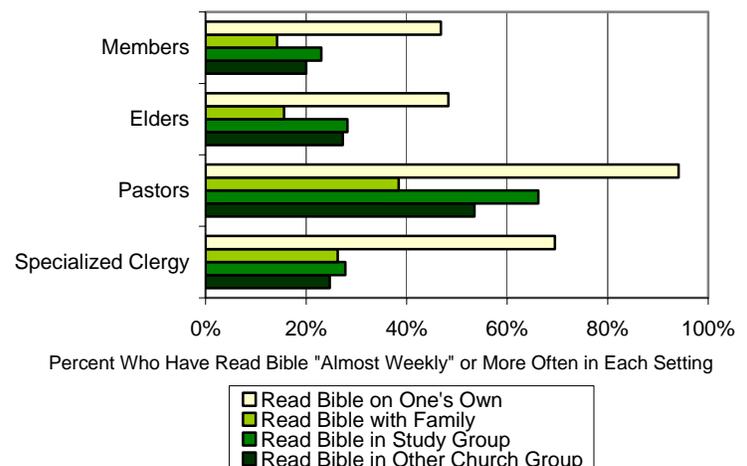
### **Bible Reading with Family**

- ✓ Sizable majorities of members (62%), elders (66%), pastors (91%), and specialized clergy (78%) report reading the Bible “with family or friends” in the prior year. Very few had done so “daily/almost daily” (3%; 3%; 6%; 5%) or even “weekly/almost weekly” (11%; 13%; 32%; 22%).
- ✓ Frequencies of reading the Bible with family in the prior week are lower (totals having read it “at least daily” or “often, but not daily” are: members, 4%; elders, 5%; pastors, 13%; and specialized clergy, 9%).

### **Bible Reading in Groups**

- ✓ Most pastors but fewer other panelists report reading the Bible “in connection with a group devoted specifically to Bible study” in the last week (members, 27%; elders, 31%; pastors, 62%; specialized clergy, 30%), although majorities of all four groups have done so in the past year (59%; 65%; 96%; 70%).
- ✓ In the last year, one in four laity (members, 23%; elders, 28%) and specialized clergy (28%) have read the Bible “weekly/almost weekly” as part of a Bible study group, as have two in three pastors (66%).
- ✓ Most panelists have read the Bible in other sorts of church groups in the past year, but few have done so as often as “weekly/almost weekly” (members, 20%; elders, 27%; pastors, 54%; specialized clergy, 25%).

**Figure 1. Frequency of Bible Reading in Past Year**

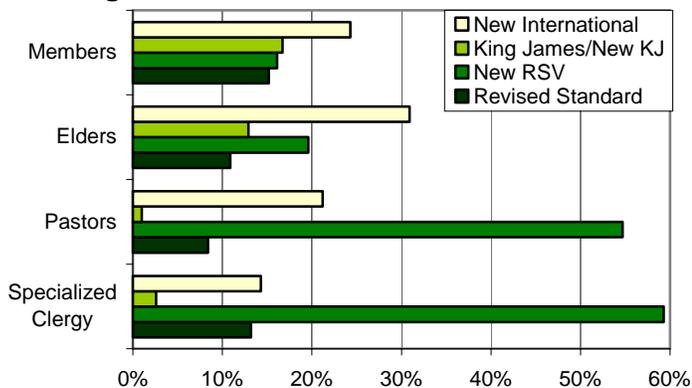


# INDIVIDUAL BIBLE READING

## Preferred Translation

- ✓ Asked their preferred English translation of the Bible, one-third of laity choose the Revised Standard or New Revised Standard Versions (members, 31%; elders, 30%) and a similar number the New International Version (24%; 31%). One in six prefer the King James or New King James Versions (17%; 13%).
- ✓ Most ministers prefer the New Revised Standard (pastors, 55%; specialized clergy, 59%) or Revised Standard (8%; 13%) Versions. They choose only one other translation in significant numbers: the New International Version (21%; 14%).

**Figure 2. Most Preferred Translations**



## Making a Selection

- ✓ Panelists who had undertaken “Bible study or reading on your own” in the year prior to the survey used a variety of approaches to select what passages to read:
  - Reading a particular book from beginning to end (used by 48% of members, 58% of elders, 68% of pastors, and 54% of specialized clergy)
  - Reading selections from the lectionary (26%; 36%; 72%; 74%)
  - Reading selections from *Daily Prayer* or *The Mission Yearbook of Prayer and Study* (21%; 24%; 26%; 23%)
  - Reading selections from a devotional magazine like *These Days* (49%; 50%; 34%; 37%)
  - Reading passages at random (64%; 66%; 63%; 59%)

## What Was Read

- ✓ Most panelists read “about equally from both the Old and New Testaments” (members, 61%; elders, 64%; pastors, 73%; specialized clergy, 75%). Most of the rest read “mostly” or “entirely from the New Testament” (29%; 32%; 24%; 19%). Very few read “mostly” or “entirely from the Old Testament” (10%; 4%; 3%; 6%).

## Reasons for Reading

- ✓ Large majorities report that they “always” or “often” read the Bible looking for:
  - Inspiration (members, 76%; elders, 75%; pastors, 91%; specialized clergy, 83%)
  - Guidance (68%; 66%; 73%; 63%)
  - Information (66%; 64%; 76%; 65%)
- ✓ Fewer report reading the Bible to find:
  - Comfort (members, 51%; elders, 46%; pastors, 44%; specialized clergy, 39%)
  - Entertainment (5%; 4%; 6%; 5%)

## Time Spent Reading

- ✓ The median time spent reading the Bible in a typical sitting was 30 minutes for members, pastors, and specialized clergy, and 25 minutes for elders.
- ✓ All but a very few panelists report reading the Bible for 10 or more minutes at a time, typically, with most doing so for more than 15 minutes (members, 72%; elders, 71%; pastors, 78%; specialized clergy, 79%). At the other extreme, very few report reading for more than an hour (2%; 2%; 4%; 2%).

## Where Reading Occurred

- ✓ Almost every panelist did their individual Bible reading “at home” at least occasionally, with large majorities doing so “very often” or “often” (members, 81%; elders, 79%; pastors, 67%; specialized clergy, 82%).
- ✓ Relatively few laity but most ministers report reading the Bible “very often” or “often” in the prior year at “my office/place of work” (members, 8%; elders, 10%; pastors, 87%; and specialized clergy, 55%).

## Study Aids

- ✓ Resources that 10% or more in each group report using “regularly as part of your Bible reading and study” are:
  - A study Bible (members, 64%; elders, 67%; pastors, 82%; specialized clergy, 70%)
  - A Bible commentary (38%; 44%; 92%; 76%)
  - A PC(USA) study curriculum (28%; 28%; 22%; 16%)
  - A Bible study from the Web (14%; 13%; 20%; 21%)
  - Company of Pastors or Order of Elders materials (12%; 15%; 10%; 11%)
- ✓ Less commonly used resources include:
  - Kerygma (members, 3%; elders, 4%; pastors, 12%; specialized clergy, 5%)
  - Disciple Bible Study (3%; 4%; 6%; 2%)
  - Bethel Bible Study (2%; 2%; 2%; 1%)

## READING THE BIBLE WITH OTHERS

### Frequency of Reading with Family or Friends

- ✓ As previously noted (p. 1), majorities in all Panel groups report reading the Bible “with family or friends” in the prior year. But many had done so infrequently; the percentages reporting that they read the Bible with family or friends at least “once every 2-3 weeks” in the last year are: members, 20%; elders, 22%; pastors, 52%; specialized clergy, 36%.

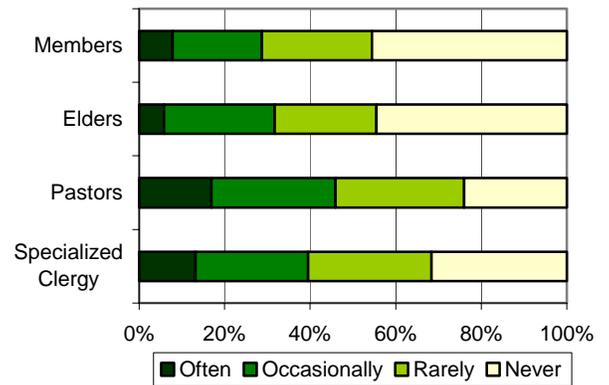
### Times and Seasons of Family Bible Reading

- ✓ Large majorities of panelists share a household with one or more relatives: members, 74%; elders, 78%; pastors, 85%; and specialized clergy, 78%. Panelists in these households were asked additional questions about Bible reading with family members.
- ✓ In very few of these family households do panelists typically read the Bible “at meals on a daily basis” (members, 4%; elders, 4%; pastors, 5%; specialized clergy, 2%). Somewhat more do so “at meals on an occasional basis” (17%; 17%; 23%; 23%).
- ✓ Relatively few family households read the Bible together “at a regular time set aside for Bible reading or study” (members, 12%; elders, 13%; pastors, 22%; specialized clergy, 18%).
- ✓ At major Christian celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, “family members typically read the Bible together” in many lay (members, 45%; elders, 43%) and most ministerial (pastors, 65%; specialized clergy, 64%) households.
- ✓ However, very few typically read the Bible together with family members on “birthdays or anniversaries” (members, 5%; elders, 6%; pastors, 7%; specialized clergy, 6%).

### Reading to Children and Grandchildren

- ✓ Most panelists report that they have a child or grandchild less than 18 years of age (members, 65%; elders, 62%; pastors, 63%; specialized clergy, 56%).
- ✓ Among these panelists, majorities had read “Bible passages or stories at home to a child or grandchild” in the last year (members, 54%; elders, 56%; pastors, 76%; and specialized clergy, 68%).
- ✓ Percentages who had read the Bible or Bible stories to a child or grandchild “often” or “occasionally” are: members, 29%; elders, 32%; pastors, 46%; specialized clergy, 40%.

**Figure 3. Frequency of Bible Reading to Children and Grandchildren\***



\*Asked only of those with children or grandchildren aged less than 18 years

### Participation in Bible Study Groups

- ✓ As previously noted (p. 1), majorities report having read the Bible in the previous year “in connection with a group devoted specifically to Bible study” (members, 59%; elders, 65%; pastors, 96%; specialized clergy, 70%).
- ✓ Some had read the Bible in the previous year as “preparation for attending a Bible study group” (members, 40%; elders, 36%; pastors, 38%; specialized clergy, 21%), while an overlapping number had done so in “preparation for teaching or leading a Bible study” (18%; 26%; 83%; 51%).
- ✓ Panelists in Bible study groups report using a variety of “methods or formats” to guide their group reading:
  - Reading a particular book of the Bible from beginning to end (members, 62%; elders, 62%; pastors, 64%; specialized clergy, 60%)
  - Reading passages at random (42%; 45%; 30%; 30%)
  - Reading selections from the lectionary (26%; 25%; 35%; 36%)
  - Reading selections from *Daily Prayer* or *The Mission Yearbook of Prayer and Study* (13%; 16%; 8%; 14%)
  - Reading from a devotional magazine such as *These Days* or *Upper Room* (22%; 23%; 12%; 16%)

### Listening to Tapes

- ✓ Among those who did individual Bible reading in the prior year, many listened to “radio programs or audio recordings” or “watched television programs or video/tapes/DVDs” on which the Bible is read (members, 38%; elders, 35%; pastors, 32%; specialized clergy, 23%).

# BIBLE READING IN WORSHIP SERVICES

## Number and Types of Readings

- ✓ Almost half of elders (48%) and a majority of pastors (58%) recall the reading of a psalm at the most recent worship service they attended. An overlapping 20% and 22%, respectively, recall the singing of a psalm.
- ✓ Besides a sung or read psalm, large majorities also recall that at least one other passage of scripture was read aloud at the most recent service they attended. Most of these panelists indicate that two other passages were read. The responses of pastors are: one other passage, 31%; two other passages, 52%; three other passages, 16%.
- ✓ Combining psalms with other passages yields a median of three Bible passages read in the most recent worship service, according to pastors. Overall, 14% report one reading; 34%, two; 40%, three; and 13%, four.

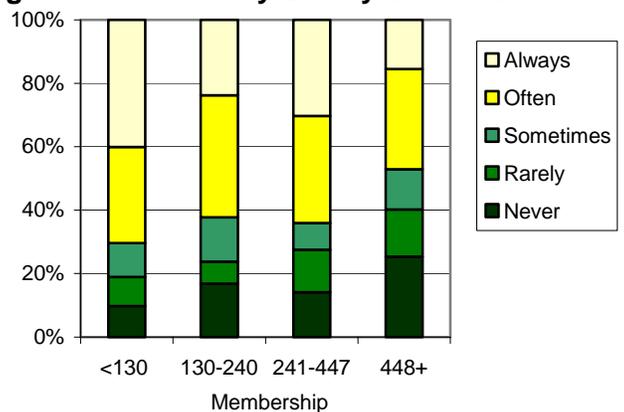
## Introducing Passages

- ✓ When the Bible was read during the most recent worship service that panelists attended, also included were, with varying frequency:
  - A brief historical or contextual introduction (59% of elders and 58% of pastors so report)
  - A brief introduction to the meaning of the text (59%; 51%)
  - An announcement of the book and chapter of the passage or passages (99%; 98%)
  - An invitation to worshippers to follow along in their own or a pew Bible (86%; 73%)

## Use of the Lectionary

- ✓ A majority of elders (57%) and pastors (61%) report that a lectionary is used “always” or “often” to “choose scriptures for your congregation’s worship.” Few report that it is “never” used (6%; 16%), although 26% of elders respond “don’t know.”
- ✓ Similarly, 60% of elders and 62% of pastors report that the sermons in their congregations are either “always” or “often” based on “the lectionary reading for that Sunday.”
- ✓ Less often are sermons based on “preaching through a book of the Bible” (30% of elders and 18% of pastors indicate that is the case “always” or “often”) or “themes or topical issues” (34%; 29%).
- ✓ Use of lectionary readings as the basis for sermons is more common in smaller than in larger membership congregations (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Lectionary Use by Size of Church**



	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed .....	1,064	1,149	1,456
Number returned .....	474	585	890‡
Response rate .....	44%	50%	61%

‡Of the 890 returned surveys, 610 came from pastors and 276 from specialized clergy; 4 were not classifiable.

The survey was mailed in mid-August 2006, with returns accepted through late November 2006. 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# 65100-06293). It includes tables showing percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

**For more information on the Office of Theology and Worship**, the sponsor of this survey, go to [www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship](http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship).

## 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  
[www.pcusa.org/research/panel](http://www.pcusa.org/research/panel)