



# The Presbyterian Panel

*Listening to Presbyterians*



## SUMMARY

### RELIGIOUS AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PRESBYTERIANS, 2005 FINDINGS FROM THE INITIAL SURVEY OF THE 2006-2008 PRESBYTERIAN PANEL

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 initial survey completed by the 2006-2008 Panel, sampled in the fall of 2005.

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## CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND INVOLVEMENT

### **Church Background**

- ✓ A majority of pastors (61%) and specialized clergy (69%) but only a minority of members (44%) and elders (46%) were raised in a Presbyterian congregation. Overall, 16% of members and 8% of pastors grew up Methodist, and 10% and 7%, respectively, grew up Baptist.
- ✓ The median number of years members have belonged to their current congregation is 16; for elders, 18.

### **Church Attendance and Participation**

- ✓ More than half of members (56%) and elders (60%) live within four miles of their congregation.
- ✓ More than six in ten members (65%) and eight in ten elders (87%) report that they usually attend worship services “every week” or “nearly every week.”
- ✓ A small majority of members (55%) and most elders (80%) take part three or more hours per month in other programs and activities of their congregation.

### **Congregational Leadership**

- ✓ Half of members (52%) have previously been ordained as elders, deacons, or both.
- ✓ More than four in ten elders (44%) and 6% of members currently chair a congregational committee.
- ✓ Most members (62%) and elders (95%) volunteer time each month in their congregation to teach, serve on a committee, lead activities, or help with an event.

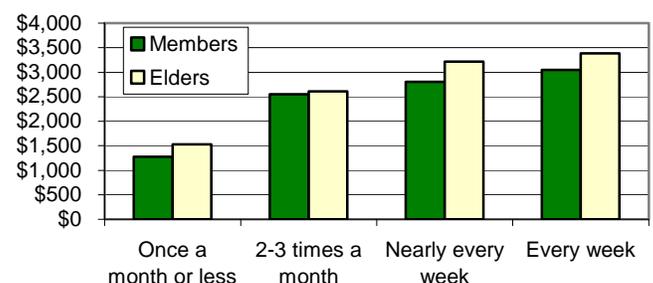
### **Congregational Outreach and Outlook**

- ✓ Most members (61%) and elders (77%) report inviting someone to their congregation in the prior year.
- ✓ Among those issuing invitations, the median number invited is three for members and four for elders.
- ✓ Most laity “have a sense of excitement” about their congregation’s future (members, 65%; elders, 68%).

### **Financial Stewardship**

- ✓ Around eight in ten members (78%) and elders (80%) report that they or another household member made a financial pledge to their congregation for 2005.
- ✓ Median “regular giving” to congregations for Panel households is: members, \$1,800; elders, \$2,500; pastors, \$4,500; specialized ministers, \$3,000.
- ✓ Many members (49%) and elders (55%) also report contributing to a capital campaign for their congregation. The median amount given is \$850 and \$500, respectively.

**Figure 1. Regular Church Giving Per Household for 2004, By Frequency of Worship Attendance**



**Prayer and Bible Reading**

- ✓ Two-thirds or more “pray privately” either “daily” or “almost daily” (members, 67%; elders, 70%; pastors, 87%; and specialized clergy, 83%).
- ✓ Fewer than half of members (43%) and elders (49%) “read the Bible privately” at least “weekly.” More than half of pastors (54%) and a third of specialized clergy (33%) do so “daily” or “almost daily.”
- ✓ Few panelists (members, 18%; elders, 17%; pastors, 5%; specialized clergy, 2%) believe that “the Bible is . . . to be taken literally, word for word.” Instead, most believe that the Bible should be interpreted in light of either “its historical and cultural context” (38%; 43%; 56%; 53%) or “its historical context and the church’s teachings” (33%; 32%; 32%; 36%).

**Conversion Experience**

- ✓ Fewer than half of laity (members, 47%; elders, 48%) report having had a conversion experience (“a turning point in your life when you committed yourself to Christ”). For those who have, the median age at the time was: members, 16 years; elders, 18 years.
- ✓ Majorities of members (61%) and elders (70%) have “tried to encourage someone to believe in Jesus Christ or accept Him as personal savior.”

**Dimensions of Belief**

- ✓ Majorities “strongly agree” or “agree” that “the only absolute Truth for humankind is in Jesus Christ” (members, 63%; elders, 71%; pastors, 68%; specialized clergy, 51%).
- ✓ Fewer than half “strongly agree” or “agree” that “only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved” (41%; 46%; 36%; 22%).
- ✓ Majorities of two-thirds or more “strongly agree” or “agree” that “Jesus will return to earth some day” (68%; 77%; 80%; 67%) and “there is life beyond death” (86%; 92%; 97%; 92%).
- ✓ Most laity consider themselves theologically “very conservative” or “conservative” (members, 41%; elders, 43%) or “moderate” (40%; 39%); only 18% choose the labels “very liberal” or “liberal.”
- ✓ More pastors consider themselves theologically “moderate” (38%) than “very conservative” or “conservative” (34%) or “very liberal” or “liberal” (28%), while among specialized clergy, the corresponding numbers are 35%, 21%, and 44%.

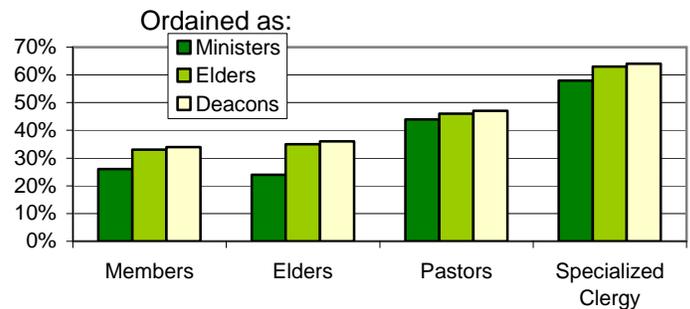
**Opinions About the PC(USA)**

- ✓ Large majorities (members, 67%; elders, 76%; pastors, 84%; specialized clergy, 84%) “strongly agree” or “agree” that “being part of the PC(USA) is an important part of my identity as a Christian.” Smaller numbers “strongly agree” or “agree” that “there are several other denominations where I could belong and be just as satisfied” (58%; 57%; 50%; 50%).
- ✓ Few panelists “strongly agree” or “agree” that the PC(USA) “has a clearer understanding of the church’s mission than do most other denominations” (members, 19%; elders, 24%; pastors, 26%; specialized clergy, 27%).
- ✓ Only a minority “strongly agree” or “agree” with the statement, “I have a sense of excitement about the future of the PC(USA)” (members, 39%; elders, 42%; pastors, 32%; specialized clergy, 29%).

**Same-Sex Issues**

- ✓ Around a third of members (33%) and elders (35%) but more pastors (46%) and specialized clergy (63%) would either “definitely” or “probably” like for the PC(USA) to “permit sexually active gay and lesbian persons to be ordained” to the office of elder. Slightly fewer, however, would “definitely” or “probably” like to see ordination of such persons to the ministry (26%; 24%; 44%; 58%). (See Figure 2.)

**Figure 2. Opinions on Ordination of Gays and Lesbians as Deacons, Elders, and Ministers**



Percent who agree on allowing ordination to each office

- ✓ Fewer than one in four members (23%) and elders (22%) but a third of pastors (35%) and half of specialized clergy (51%) “strongly agree” or “agree” that “same-sex couples should be allowed to marry.”
- ✓ Around half of members (49%), elders (53%), and pastors (47%) but fewer specialized clergy (32%) “strongly agree” or “agree” that “PC(USA) ministers should be prohibited from performing ceremonies that bless the union between two people of the same sex.”

**Current Call: Ministers**

- ✓ Two in three ministers in the Panel serve as pastors (66%). Of these, 51% describe themselves as a solo pastor; 18%, as an associate pastor; and 6%, as an interim pastor.
- ✓ Very few pastors (3%) serve more than one congregation, most (2%) in a yoked parish.
- ✓ Among specialized clergy, one in four serve as a faculty or staff person at an educational institution (28%); one in five as a chaplain (21%); and one in ten as a professional pastoral counselor (10%).
- ✓ Most chaplains (57%) serve in hospitals.
- ✓ Fewer than one in four specialized clergy are employed by an organization affiliated with the PC(USA) (23%), including 6% who work as national staff or for a middle governing body.

**Education: Ministers**

- ✓ Seven in ten ministers (70%) received their M.Div. or B.D. degree from a PC(USA)-affiliated theological school. Of these, the highest percentages graduated from Princeton (19% of all ministers), Columbia (8%), Louisville (8%), Union-PSCE (8%), Pittsburgh (7%), and San Francisco (7%) Theological Seminaries.
- ✓ Of B.D./M.Div. graduates from non-PC(USA) schools, the largest percentages graduated from Fuller (9%) and Gordon-Conwell (3%) Theological Seminaries.
- ✓ More than one-third of ministers (36%) have one or more other degrees in theology, including 21% with a D.Min., 6% with an M.A., 6% with a Th.M or S.T.M., and 6% with a Ph.D., Th.D., or S.T.D.
- ✓ A few ministers (8%) are currently enrolled as students, most (6%) in D.Min. programs.

**Education: Laity**

- ✓ Majorities of members (63%) and elders (64%) have graduated from college, including 27% and 31%, respectively, who have graduate degrees.
- ✓ Around one in seven members (14%) and one in eight elders (12%) have a high school education or less.

**Career Backgrounds: Ministers**

- ✓ Prior to ordination, more than four in ten ministers (42%) had a “long-term secular job or career.” The median time in that career was nine years.
- ✓ Only 6% of ministers report having been ordained to ministry outside the PC(USA) or one of its predecessor denominations, most by a Baptist church (1%) or by another Presbyterian body (1%).
- ✓ A third of pastors were ordained prior to 1980 (31%), during the 1980s (31%), and from 1990 to 2005 (38%).
- ✓ Two in three female pastors were ordained after 1989, compared to one in three male pastors. (See Figure 3.)

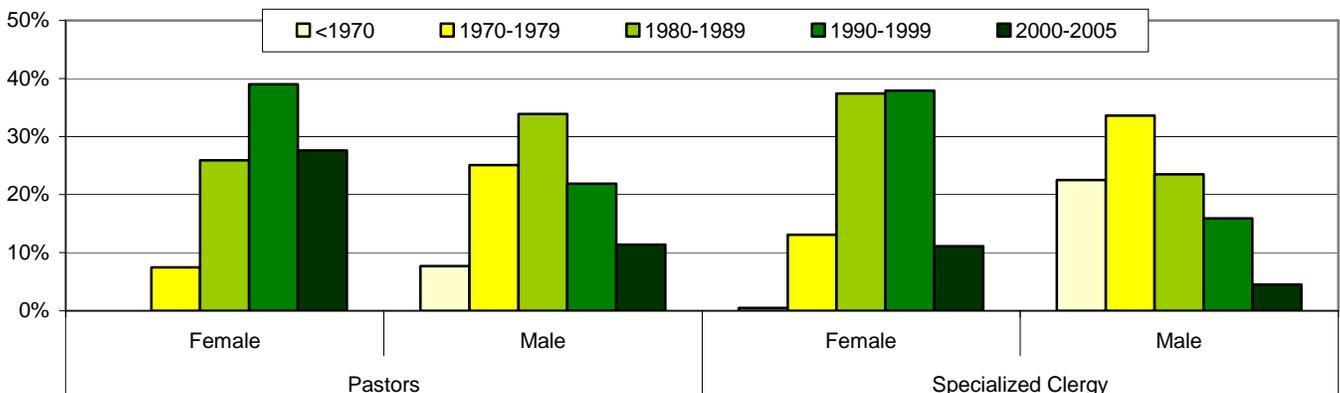
**Employment Status: Laity**

- ✓ Majorities of members (51%) and elders (65%) are employed. Most of the rest are retired (39%; 35%). Another 11% and 6% are full-time homemakers.

**Income**

- ✓ Median annual family income is \$73,200 for members, \$72,100 for elders, \$72,900 for pastors, and \$76,900 for specialized clergy.
- ✓ Few panelists have annual family incomes of less than \$20,000 (members, 7%; elders, 4%; pastors, 1%; specialized clergy, 3%), while many have incomes of \$100,000 or more (32%; 31%; 21%; 32%).

**Figure 3. Year of Ordination by Gender and Ministerial Status**



## SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Age, Gender, and Race Ethnicity

- ✓ The median age is 58 years for members and elders, 52 for pastors, and 55 for specialized clergy. Most members (62%) and elders (51%) are female, but most pastors (76%) and specialized clergy (60%) are male.
- ✓ Almost all members (97%), elders (96%), pastors (93%), and specialized clergy (90%) are white.

### Political Preference

- ✓ Most members (53%) and elders (51%) list their political preference as Republican, while only 26% of pastors and 17% of specialized clergy do so. At the same time, while only 27% of members and 30% of elders list their preference as Democrat, 49% of pastors and 64% of specialized clergy do so.
- ✓ Of the rest, only 2%-3% list another political party preference, with the remainder identifying themselves as Independents (members, 17%; elders, 17%; pastors, 22%; specialized clergy, 17%).

### Marriage, Households, and Children

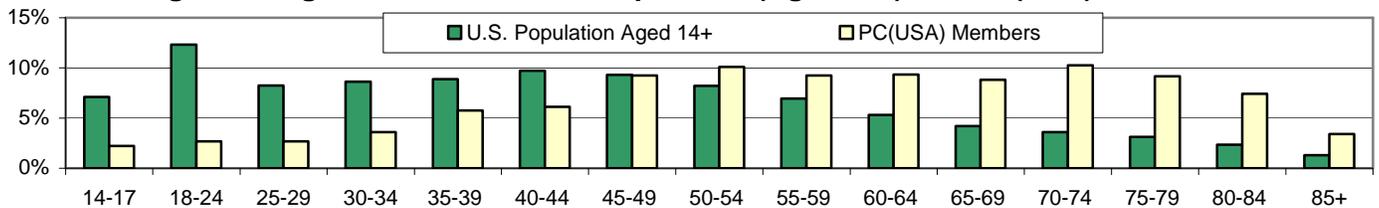
- ✓ Among those aged 25 or older, most members (80%), elders (81%), pastors (86%), and specialized clergy (81%) are currently married, and 6%, 5%, 6%, and 8% have never married. Among the ever-married, 21%, 24%, 20%, and 30% have been divorced.

- ✓ Among married ministers, 12% of pastors and 22% of specialized clergy have spouses who are also ministers.
- ✓ One in five pastors (20%) live in a manse or other housing provided by their congregation.
- ✓ Few panelists live alone (members, 17%; elders, 15%; pastors, 10%; specialized clergy, 13%). Average household sizes are: members, 2.4 persons; elders, 2.4; pastors, 2.8; and specialized clergy, 2.6.
- ✓ Most panelists report being parents (members, 84%; elders, 87%; pastors, 86%; specialized clergy, 82%). Their average numbers of children are 2.6, 2.4, 2.4, and 2.3, respectively.

### Location

- ✓ One in seven members (14%) live in “open country,” including 3% who live “on a farm,” less than half as many (31%) who live in a “small city or town (under 50,000 population).” A fourth (26%) live in “a large city (over 250,000 population)” (10%) or in “a suburb near a large city” (16%), and the remainder, 28%, live in “a medium-size city (50,000-250,000 population)” (18%) or “a suburb near a medium-size city” (10%).
- ✓ Of the four major census regions, the largest group of Presbyterian members lives in the South (42%), followed by the Midwest (26%), the Northeast (17%), and the West (15%).

**Figure 4. Age Distribution: U.S. Population (Ages 14+) and PC(USA) Members**



	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed .....	1,892	1,471	2,203
Number returned .....	1,098	1,163	1,471‡
Response rate .....	58%	79%	66%

‡ Of the 1,471 returned surveys, 966 came from pastors and 505 from specialized clergy.

The survey was mailed in October 2005, with returns accepted through January 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 additional 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# 65100-05290). 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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