



The Presbyterian Panel

Listening to Presbyterians



SUMMARY

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH FINDINGS FROM THE NOVEMBER 2007 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 eighth survey completed by the 2006-2008 Panel, sampled in the fall of 2005.

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Note: Except where indicated, percentages as presented are those calculated after excluding “don’t know” and “not applicable” responses.

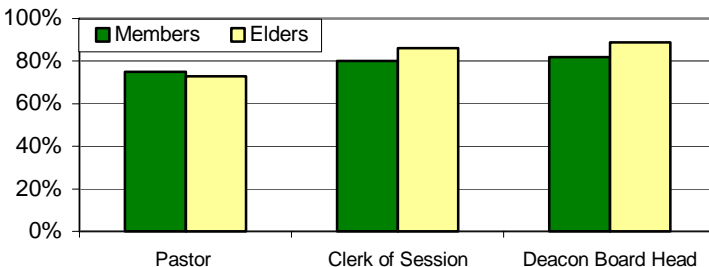
CONGREGATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Women in Leadership

- ✓ Large majorities report that they have been part of a congregation where a woman served as:
 - Pastor (including associate pastors) (members, 75%; elders, 73%; pastors, 72%; specialized clergy, 87%)
 - Clerk of session (80%; 86%; 95%; 89%)
 - Head of the deacon board (82%; 89%; 95%; 91%)

Figure 1. Percent of Laity Who Have Been in a Congregation with a Female Pastor, Clerk, or Head of Deacons

Note: “Don’t know” and “not applicable” responses omitted



- ✓ Large majorities also report that their congregation “has made deliberate efforts to have both men and women as”:
 - Elders (members, 94%; elders, 93%; pastors, 95%; specialized clergy, 96%)
 - Deacons (92%; 89%; 91%; 95%)
 - Liturgists (94%; 89%; 93%; 93%)
 - Other church leaders (93%; 92%; 94%; 95%)
- ✓ Majorities report having heard a “woman of color preach in a Presbyterian church or other Presbyterian event” (members, 54%; elders, 63%; pastors, 97%; specialized clergy, 97%) at some time in their lives, but many fewer report having done so “in the last two years” (33%; 41%; 74%; 72%).

Pastor Search

- ✓ Almost one in three elders (31%) report being involved in the search process the last time their congregation looked for a pastor (solo or head of staff, not associate).
- ✓ Of these elders, three in four (73%) respond “yes” when asked, “Were deliberate efforts made to attract both men and women among the applicants?”
- ✓ Somewhat fewer—58%—report that there was at least one woman among the “four or five applicants most seriously considered,” and many fewer (13%) that a woman of color was among the same top applicants.

What I Heard

- ✓ Asked about comments heard in the last three years regarding the relative suitability of men and women as church leaders, only minorities recall hearing each of these kinds of remarks:
 - *Women* are better church leaders than men (percent hearing at least one comment of this type in the last three years: members, 20%; elders, 23%; pastors, 36%; specialized clergy, 41%)
 - *Men* are better church leaders than women (21%; 25%; 30%; 32%)
 - Gender has *no effect* on whether one is a good church leader (27%; 31%; 46%; 41%)
- ✓ Among those who heard a particular type of comment, most heard it only “once or twice” or “a few times.” For example, 36% of pastors report hearing someone remark that “women are better church leaders than men,” a figure that breaks down as: once or twice, 14%; a few times, 13%; several times, 6%; many times, 3%.

PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES

Women in Church Roles: Perceived Comfort Levels

- ✓ Large majorities believe that “most people” in their congregation are “very comfortable” with women occupying each of these congregational roles:
 - Elder (members, 82%; elders, 84%; pastors, 85%; specialized clergy, 84%)
 - Deacon (88%; 89%; 93%; 91%)
 - Liturgist (83%; 84%; 88%; 85%)
 - Sunday school teacher (93%; 93%; 95%; 95%)
 - Clerk of session (80%; 85%; 91%; 85%)
 - Committee chair (84%; 87%; 91%; 85%)
 - Christian educator (88%; 90%; 94%; 92%)Most of the rest report only slightly lower comfort levels; the number responding less than “somewhat comfortable” is no more than 4% for any of these roles.
- ✓ Fewer report that “most people” in their congregation are “very comfortable” with women in these two roles:
 - Pastor, in general (members, 58%; elders, 54%; pastors, 60%; specialized clergy, 65%)
 - Pastor serving as head of staff in multi-pastor congregation (48%; 52%; 45%; 52%)Here, too, the share indicating that “most people” are less than “somewhat comfortable” is small:
 - Pastor, in general (members, 11%; elders, 7%; pastors, 5%; specialized clergy, 5%)
 - Pastor serving as head of staff in multi-pastor congregation (12%; 12%; 14%; 14%)

Perceived Comfort Levels and Women of Color

- ✓ Majorities (though smaller than above) report that “most people” in their congregation would be “very comfortable” with “women of color” in each of the same non-pastoral roles:
 - Elder (members, 66%; elders, 64%; pastors, 73%; specialized clergy, 73%)
 - Deacon (70%; 67%; 80%; 81%)
 - Liturgist (69%; 64%; 77%; 76%)
 - Sunday school teacher (71%; 70%; 81%; 81%)
 - Clerk of session (67%; 65%; 79%; 75%)
 - Committee chair (68%; 69%; 77%; 74%)
 - Christian educator (67%; 69%; 78%; 79%)Again, few—no more than 12%—are less than “somewhat comfortable” with a woman in each role.
- ✓ Similarly, fewer report that “most people” in their congregation are “very comfortable” with “women of color” in these pastoral roles:
 - Pastor, in general (members, 58%; elders, 46%; pastors, 51%; specialized clergy, 54%)
 - Pastor serving as head of staff in multi-pastor congregation (40%; 42%; 38%; 46%)As many as 25% are less than “somewhat comfortable” with a woman of color in each role.

Preferences: Congregations

- ✓ Large majorities (87% or more) respond “no preference” or “no opinion” when asked whether they’d prefer a man or a woman for most congregational roles, for example, clerk of session (members, 87%; elders, 87%; pastors, 90%; specialized clergy, 92%) and Sunday school teacher (92%; 94%; 95%; 96%). Somewhat smaller majorities have “no preference” or “no opinion” regarding their pastor’s gender (members, 63%; elders, 66%; pastors, 80%; specialized clergy, 79%).
- ✓ Among members who express gender preferences for particular roles, there is a tendency to respond in stereotypical ways, especially regarding a pastor:
 - Pastor: prefer a man, 36%; prefer a woman, 1%
 - Christian educator: 2%; 7%
 - Clerk of session: 9%; 4%
 - Sunday school teacher: 1%; 7%
 - Liturgist: 4%; 1%
- ✓ Other things being equal, majorities of panelists would “strongly support” or “support” calling a woman the next time there is a vacancy in their congregation (members, 64%; elders, 68%; pastors, 79%; specialized clergy, 86%). Of the rest, most respond “tend to support” (19%; 16%; 13%; 8%). Relatively few would oppose (combined “strongly oppose,” “oppose,” and “tend to oppose”: 16%; 16%; 8%; 5%).

Preferences: Presbyteries, National Church

- ✓ In all groups, large majorities (85% or greater) respond “no preference” or “no opinion” regarding the gender of their presbytery’s moderator, stated clerk, executive/general presbyter, or other staff.
- ✓ Of the few with a gender preference for these roles, more prefer a man (e.g., for executive presbyter, 12% of members and 8% of pastors prefer a man, compared to 1% in both groups who prefer a woman).
- ✓ Responses are similar with regard to roles in the national church. Majorities of 88% or more respond “no preference” or “no opinion” regarding the gender of the stated clerk or the moderator of the General Assembly, or that of the executive director of the General Assembly Council.
- ✓ Laity and pastors with a preference prefer men over women for each of these roles (e.g., 8% of elders prefer a man and 1% a woman for General Assembly moderator), but specialized clergy are evenly split (3% prefer a man and 3% a woman for moderator).

Language about the People of God

- ✓ When referring to the people of God, majorities of panelists report their congregation either “always” or “most of the time” uses “gender-inclusive language” in:
 - Worship (members, 74%; elders, 68%; pastors, 84%; specialized clergy, 79%)
 - Their newsletter and bulletin (74%; 70%; 85%; 80%)
- ✓ Based on a seven-point scale from 1 (“not at all comfortable”) to 7 (“very comfortable”), responses to the question “how comfortable are you with the use of gender-inclusive language when referring to the people of God?” average 5.7 (members), 5.5 (elders), 6.5 (pastors), and 6.5 (specialized clergy).

Language about God: Practices

- ✓ When referring to God, less than half in most groups report that their congregations use “expansive language”* either “always” or “most of the time” in:
 - Worship (members, 44%; elders, 39%; pastors, 41%; specialized clergy, 53%)
 - Their newsletter and bulletin (41%; 35%; 38%; 50%)
- ✓ Regarding worship, similar percentages also report that gender-specific terms for God are used “very often” or “often” (members, 48%; elders, 49%; pastors, 49%; specialized clergy, 53%), and even more report that, when gender-specific terms are used, they are “entirely male” or “almost all male” (63%; 67%; 63%; 46%).
- ✓ Most panelists’ congregations sing the doxology “every week/nearly every week” (members, 82%; elders, 88%; pastors, 86%; specialized clergy, 77%). When doing so, most (93%; 95%; 89%; 79%) use the traditional language of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

*“Expansive language” was defined as “using the wide variety of terms for God found in the Bible and church tradition—e.g., creator, shepherd, potter, mother hen, wisdom—rather than relying on the same few terms over and over”

Language about God: Opinions

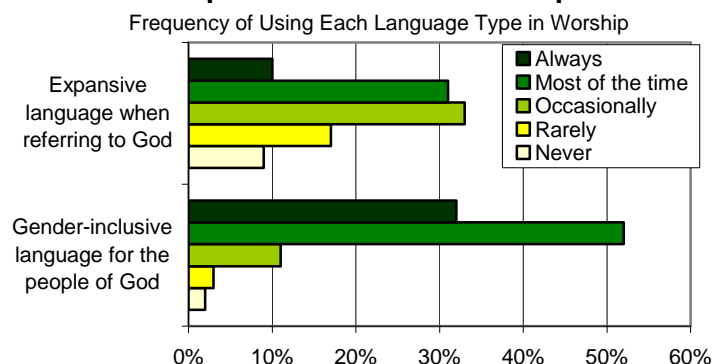
- ✓ Based on a seven-point scale from 1 (“not at all comfortable”) to 7 (“very comfortable”), responses to the question “how comfortable are you with the use of expansive language when referring to God?” average 5.0 (members), 4.9 (elders), 5.2 (pastors), and 6.0 (specialized clergy).
- ✓ Consistently, most “strongly agree” or “agree” that “language about God should be varied and diverse, reflecting the wide range of terms to describe God that are found in the Bible and the Reformed tradition” (members, 59%; elders, 59%; pastors, 81%; specialized clergy, 90%).

- ✓ Large majorities “strongly agree” or “agree” that “as a child, I pictured God as male” (members, 93%; elders, 91%; pastors, 75%; specialized clergy, 80%), but fewer (especially ministers) so respond to the statements “using male terms for God seems natural to me” (83%; 79%; 53%; 41%) and “God is best understood in masculine terms” (47%; 48%; 11%; 11%).
- ✓ Few laity (members, 19%; elders, 18%) but most ministers (pastors, 66%; specialized clergy, 78%) “strongly agree” or “agree” that “the Bible contains many female images of God.”
- ✓ Majorities “strongly agree” or “agree” that “God is the creator of gender, and not subject to it” (members, 55%; elders, 54%; pastors, 77%; specialized clergy, 72%). Most of the rest respond “neither agree nor disagree” (34%; 38%; 19%; 22%).

Hymnals and Language

- ✓ Most panelists report that *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990) is used in their congregations (members, 84%; elders, 77%; pastors, 64%; specialized clergy, 76%).
- ✓ Relatively few panelists indicate that its use of “expansive language about God and gender-inclusive language about the people of God” affected their congregation’s decision on “whether or not to use the *Presbyterian Hymnal*” (members, 10%; elders, 11%; pastors, 25%; specialized clergy, 24%). While many responded “no” (26%; 38%; 37%; 29%), even more responded “don’t know” (64%; 50%; 38%; 48%).
- ✓ Language issues affected the choice of the *Presbyterian Hymnal* more among those whose congregations do not use it (e.g., pastors, 33%) than those who do (22%).
- ✓ Few report one or more worship services “conducted entirely or primarily in a language other than English” in their congregation (members, 6%; elders, 2%; pastors, 7%; specialized clergy, 12%). Most such services are in Spanish (listed by 54% of elders) or Korean (27%).

Figure 2. Gender and Language about God and the People of God: Pastors’ Responses



PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

Women's Groups in Congregations

- ✓ Most panelists report one or more Presbyterian Women groups or circles in their congregation (members, 80%; elders, 68%; pastors, 68%; specialized clergy, 55%). An overlapping 12% to 14% report at least one women's group unaffiliated with PW.
- ✓ In congregations with an active Presbyterian Women organization, half or more of pastors report that PW has, in recent years, been doing each of these ten activities (from a list of 16 possibilities):
 - Providing cooks/servers for church events (94%)
 - Providing opportunities for mission (90%)
 - Receiving national PW offerings (87%)
 - Contributing funds to other church needs (82%)
 - Offering one or more Bible studies (75%)
 - Providing an entry point for new members (60%)
 - Planning fellowship events for the church (60%)
 - Doing ministry with the homebound (59%)
 - Offering prayer ministries (57%)
 - Developing congregational leaders (55%)
- ✓ The percents of pastors who report that PW is doing the other six activities, in descending order, are:
 - Providing fundraisers for the congregation (47%)
 - Engaging in advocacy on social issues (41%)
 - Decorating the sanctuary (36%)
 - Contributing to the church's annual budget (28%)
 - Cleaning church facilities (22%)
 - Coordinating new-member programs (9%)
- ✓ Many pastors in these congregations would like PW to do activities that it is not currently doing, in particular:
 - Engaging in advocacy on social issues (37%)
 - Providing an entry point for new members (35%)
 - Developing congregational leaders (29%)
 - Offering prayer ministries (27%)
 - Coordinating new-member programs (25%)

How Gender Affects Responses

Among laity, on almost all questions, men and women respond similarly. Where there are differences, though, more men than women favor traditional sex roles or hold traditional opinions. In both groups, more men prefer a man (members, 41%; elders, 39%) than women prefer a man (34%; 27%) as pastor. Among elders, more men than women prefer a man in various other congregational and presbytery roles (e.g., 12% of male elders and 3% of female elders prefer a male moderator of General Assembly). Among members, more women than men agree that "our language about God should be varied and diverse" (64%; 52%) and "the Bible contains many female images of God" (24%; 11%).

While there are many similarities as well between male and female ministers, more differences emerge. More female pastors, for example, report hearing that "women are better church leaders than men" (50%; 31%). More male than female pastors: prefer a man as pastor (21%, compared to 1%) and as a guest preacher (8%; 1%); are "very comfortable" with gender-inclusive language for the people of God (92%; 71%) and expansive language for God (63%; 37%); recall less usage of gender-specific language in congregational worship (very often or often, 37%, compared to 53%); agree that "language about God should be varied and diverse" (90%; 77%), "the Bible contains many female images of God" (82%; 60%), "as a child, I pictured God to be male" (80%; 73%) and "use of gender-inclusive language is consistent with the overall message of the Bible" (84%; 60%); disagree that "God is best understood in masculine terms" (83%; 62%) and that "it offends me when someone uses terms other than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to refer to the persons of the Trinity" (70%; 54%).

	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed.....	735	922	1,279
Number returned.....	388	519	748‡
Response rate	53%	56%	58%

‡Of the 748 returned surveys, 496 came from pastors and 252 from specialized clergy; 12 were not classifiable

The survey was mailed on November 2, 2007, with returns accepted through mid-December 2007. 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) or for \$15 from PDS (1-800-524-2612; order PDS# 02056-07297). It includes tables showing percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

For more information on women and women's ministries in the PC(USA), go to www.pcusa.org/womensadvocacy or www.pcusa.org/pw.

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