



### SUMMARY

## CONFESSIONS AND OTHER TOPICS FINDINGS FROM THE AUGUST 2009 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 2009-2011 Panel, sampled in the fall of 2008.

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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY MISSION COUNCIL PRIORITIES

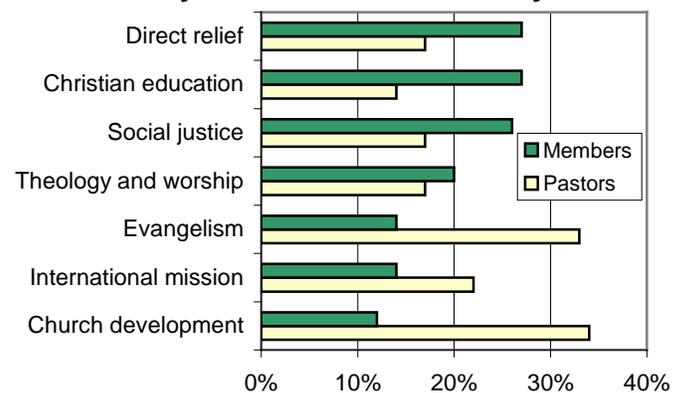
### Importance of Council Activities

- ✓ Majorities of ministers (pastors, 63%; specialized clergy, 51%)—but only about one-third of laypeople (members, 32%; elders, 37%)—identify congregational development as a *very important* activity for the General Assembly Mission Council, the PC(USA)’s mission agency, to carry out.
- ✓ A majority of pastors (54%)—but fewer other panelists (members, 24%; elders, 38%; specialized clergy, 33%)—see evangelism as a *very important* activity.
- ✓ At least three in ten panelists in each group also see as *very important*: direct relief (members, 46%; elders, 52%; pastors, 49%; specialized clergy, 54%), theology and worship (43%; 41%; 41%; 47%), Christian education and curriculum (41%; 43%; 34%; 39%), social justice (41%; 32%; 37%; 52%), and discipleship (programs to educate and strengthen church leaders) (39%; 37%; 47%; 33%).
- ✓ At least three in ten pastors or specialized clergy but fewer laypeople see as *very important*: cross-cultural ministries/growth in diversity (members, 29%; elders, 28%; pastors, 23%; specialized clergy, 40%), international mission support (28%; 26%; 48%; 38%), vocation (preparing and supporting ordained and commissioned leaders through the preparation and call processes) (28%; 26%; 36%; 42%), and communications (18%; 18%; 30%; 32%).
- ✓ Fewer panelists see as *very important*: stewardship (members, 26%; elders, 29%; pastors, 28%; specialized clergy, 25%), ecumenical relations and interactions (18%; 16%; 13%; 24%), and gender justice (14%; 9%; 9%; 22%).

### Most and Least Important Activities

- ✓ Asked to choose from a list of 14 activities the two that are *most important* for the Council to carry out, at least one in five panelists in at least one group select: direct relief (members, 27%; elders, 27%; pastors, 17%; specialized clergy, 14%), Christian education (27%; 25%; 14%; 15%), social justice (26%; 19%; 17%; 31%), theology and worship (20%; 20%; 17%; 22%), evangelism (14%; 24%; 33%; 18%), international mission support (14%; 11%; 22%; 14%), or congregational development (12%; 15%; 34%; 21%).

**Figure 1. Most Important Activities for the General Assembly Mission Council to Carry Out**



Note: Panelists could select as many as two activities.

- ✓ Asked to choose from the same list of mission activities the two that are *least important*, at least one-quarter of panelists in at least one group choose: gender justice (members, 43%; elders, 47%; pastors, 52%; specialized clergy, 31%), ecumenical relations and interactions (26%; 28%; 34%; 29%), or communications (26%; 22%; 14%; 21%).

## THE CONFESSIONS

### Access to the Confessions

- ✓ Almost all ministers (pastors, 99%; specialized clergy, 94%) and seven in ten elders (72%)—but only two in five members (42%)—currently have a copy of *The Book of Confessions*.
- ✓ During the past 12 months more than one-quarter of ministers (pastors, 41%; specialized clergy, 28%)—but fewer laypeople (members, 7%; elders, 11%)—have accessed *The Book of Confessions* on the Web.

### Consulting the Confessions

- ✓ During the past 12 months majorities of pastors and specialized clergy have consulted the Apostles' Creed (pastors, 72%; specialized clergy, 52%) and A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (70%; 54%) outside of worship.
- ✓ Majorities of pastors have also consulted the Westminster Confession of Faith (62%), Nicene Creed (61%), Theological Defense of Barmen (61%), Confession of 1967 (61%), Heidelberg Catechism (56%), and Shorter Catechism (56%). About two in five pastors have consulted the Scots Confession (45%), Larger Catechism (43%), and Second Helvetic Confession (38%).
- ✓ Two in five specialized clergy have also consulted the Confession of 1967 (44%) and Nicene Creed (40%). Fewer have consulted other confessions.
- ✓ At least one in six laypeople have consulted the Apostles' Creed (members, 31%; elders, 38%), Nicene Creed (20%; 26%), and Brief Statement of Faith (18%; 28%). Fewer have consulted other confessions.
- ✓ One in six pastors (18%)—but fewer other panelists (members, 3%; elders, 6%; specialized clergy, 7%)—personally used a PC(USA) *We Believe* Christian education resource in the past 12 months. Of these panelists who were also aware of the references to the confessions in *We Believe* resources, majorities find these references to be *very helpful* or *helpful*.

### Congregational Use of the Confessions

- ✓ At least three-quarters of pastors report their congregations have used the Apostle's Creed (94%), Nicene Creed (81%), or Brief Statement of Faith (78%) in some setting besides worship during the past 12 months.
- ✓ About two-thirds of pastors' congregations have used the Westminster Confession of Faith (69%), Confession of 1967 (67%), Shorter Catechism (66%), or Theological Declaration of Barmen (64%) in a non-worship setting.

- ✓ Somewhat fewer pastors' congregations have used the other confessions outside of worship: Heidelberg Catechism (60%), Scots Confession (54%), Larger Catechism (53%), and Second Helvetic Confession (49%).
- ✓ The setting outside of worship where congregations have used the confessions most, according to pastors, is in elder or deacon training (e.g., Apostles' Creed, 50%; Shorter Catechism, 36%) and confirmation class (51%; 30%). (The survey did not ask about use of the confessions in worship.)

### Importance of the Confessions

- ✓ Five confessions have been *very important* or *important* to the faith development of majorities of ministers: the Apostles' Creed (pastors, 90%; specialized clergy, 85%), Nicene Creed (70%; 68%), A Brief Statement of Faith (66%; 73%), Theological Defense of Barmen (61%; 60%), and Confession of 1967 (60%; 68%).
- ✓ The Shorter Catechism (pastors, 56%; specialized clergy, 48%) and Westminster Confession of Faith (53%; 48%) have also been important to about half of ministers. The other confessions have been important to fewer ministers.
- ✓ Only one confession, the Apostles' Creed, has been important to majorities of both members (74%) and elders (83%).
- ✓ A majority of elders (57%) but fewer members (46%) have found the Nicene Creed to be important. The other confessions have been important to fewer laity.

### Importance of Various Faith Elements

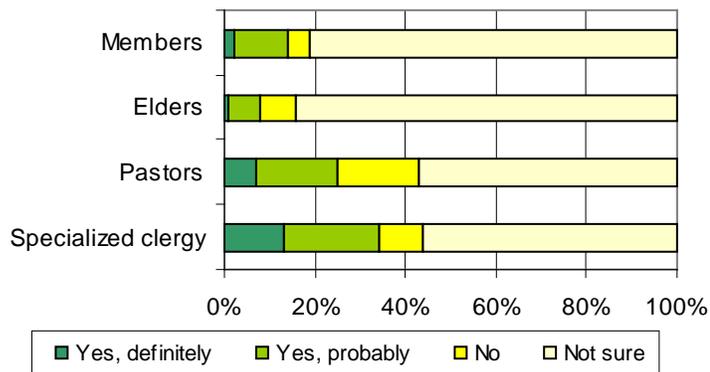
- ✓ God, scripture, and the work of the Holy Spirit are *very important* to at least three in five panelists:
  - God (members, 88%; elders, 93%; pastors, 96%; specialized clergy, 96%).
  - Scripture (65%; 72%; 92%; 83%).
  - The work of the Holy Spirit (63%; 77%; 91%; 81%).
- ✓ Other elements of Christian faith—including PC(USA) creeds and confessions—are *very important* to fewer panelists:
  - Current friend or family member and his or her advice or example (members, 47%; elders, 46%; pastors, 51%; specialized clergy, 53%).
  - Current pastor or spiritual advisor and his or her teaching or example (48%; 53%; 36%; 36%).
  - PC(USA) creeds and confessions (6%; 11%; 14%; 12%).
  - PC(USA) *Book of Order* (6%; 8%; 8%; 7%).

## TWO TOPICS: BELHAR CONFSSION AND THE MIDDLE EAST

### The Belhar Confession

- ✓ One in six ministers (pastors, 17%; specialized clergy, 18%) are *very familiar* or *familiar* with the Belhar Confession, a 1986 theological statement about church unity that Reformed churches in South Africa developed during the debate over that country's policies of racial hierarchy and segregation.
- ✓ About a quarter of ministers (pastors, 30%; specialized clergy, 23%) are familiar with the proposal to incorporate the Belhar Confession into *The Book of Confessions*.
- ✓ Almost no laypeople are *very familiar* or *familiar* with the Belhar Confession (members, 1%; elders, 2%) or the proposal to incorporate it into *The Book of Confessions* (2%; 1%).
- ✓ During the past 12 months only a few panelists in each group (members, 2%; elders, 0.4%; pastors, 8%; specialized clergy, 5%) have consulted a study guide about the Belhar Confession that the PC(USA) Theology and Worship staff published and posted on the Web. Most of those who have consulted the study guide found it to be *very helpful* or *helpful*.
- ✓ Majorities of panelists in each group are not sure if they would support incorporating the Belhar Confession into *The Book of Confessions*. More members (14%), pastors (25%), and specialized clergy (34%) would *definitely* or *probably* support than oppose (5%; 18%; 10%) incorporation. Elders are evenly split (8% each).

**Figure 2. Support for Incorporation of the Belhar Confession into *The Book of Confessions***



### Two-State Solution in the Middle East?

- ✓ About four in five ministers (pastors, 78%; specialized clergy, 86%) and about two-thirds of laypeople (members, 65%; elders, 68%) support a two-state solution in the Middle East with both a state of Israel and a state of Palestine.

### Improving the Situation in the Middle East

- ✓ Majorities of panelists in each group believe opposing violence and promoting freedom of worship are *very important* for improving the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East:
  - Addressing extremism and the threat of violence (members, 72%; elders, 74%; pastors, 71%; specialized clergy, 70%).
  - Freedom of worship at all major religious sites (65%; 62%; 51%; 62%).
- ✓ Fewer panelists believe that these other objectives are *very important* for improving the Middle East situation:
  - Compliance with United Nations resolutions and human rights treaties (members, 41%; elders, 40%; pastors, 37%; specialized clergy, 46%).
  - Maintaining positive relations between Presbyterians and members of the U.S. Jewish community (40%; 37%; 32%; 27%).
  - Maintaining the close diplomatic and military relationship between the U.S. and Israeli governments (38%; 38%; 23%; 22%).
  - Promoting democracy throughout the Middle East (27%; 28%; 23%; 19%).
  - Refugee resettlement (26%; 25%; 40%; 47%).

### Possible Peacemaking Strategies

- ✓ Majorities of panelists in each group *strongly support* or *moderately support* the use of United Nations peacekeepers in Israel-Palestine, freedom of movement for Gaza residents, aid delivery, and limiting Iran:
  - The presence of United Nations peacekeepers to help supervise the border between Israel and Palestine (members, 73%; elders, 70%; pastors, 77%; specialized clergy, 85%).
  - Delivery by international organizations of humanitarian aid to residents of Palestinian land controlled by Israel (70%; 68%; 85%; 90%).
  - Permitting Gaza residents to enter the West Bank and Israel for trade or other legitimate purposes (69%; 72%; 84%; 87%).
  - Limiting the influence and military capacity of the Iranian government (64%; 66%; 66%; 60%).
- ✓ Many fewer panelists support some other strategies:
  - Permanently disabling the military capacity of any Palestinian government (members, 24%; elders, 20%; pastors, 16%; specialized clergy, 14%).
  - Construction of a separation barrier between territories that the Israeli government administers and the Palestinian authorities administer (18%; 24%; 18%; 17%).
  - Expansion of Israeli settlements further into the West Bank and East Jerusalem on Palestinian land (10%; 10%; 6%; 5%).

# ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND THE PC(USA)

## Presbyterian Involvement?

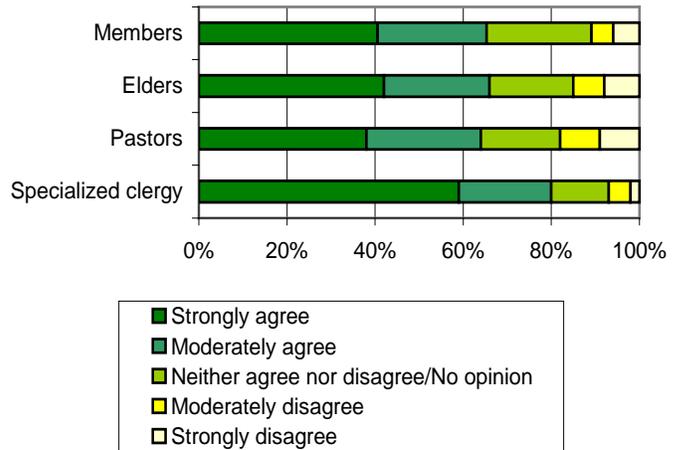
- ✓ At least three in five panelists in each group (members, 61%; elders, 66%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 76%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that Presbyterians *can* contribute to building peace in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East.
- ✓ Majorities of panelists in each group (members, 55%; elders, 59%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 76%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that Presbyterians *should* try to improve the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East. About three in ten laypeople (members, 32%; elders, 27%)—but only one in six ministers (pastors, 14%; specialized clergy, 15%)—*neither agree nor disagree* or *have no opinion*.

- ✓ At least three in five panelists in each group (members, 66%; elders, 66%; pastors, 64%; specialized clergy, 80%) agree that the PC(USA) should shift its investment funds away from such corporations if it is unable to dissuade them from doing things that directly or indirectly support violence against Israeli or Palestinian civilians (as it already does from corporations involved in tobacco, military-related production, and human rights violations).
- ✓ About one in five members (24%), elders (19%), and pastors (18%)—but fewer specialized clergy (13%)—*neither agree nor disagree* that the PC(USA) should shift investment funds away from such corporations or *have no opinion*.

## PC(USA) Investments and Israel/Palestine

- ✓ At least two-thirds of panelists in each group (members, 68%; elders, 71%; pastors, 70%; specialized clergy, 84%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the PC(USA) should avoid making investment profits from unjust situations and should use its investments in corporations to promote justice and other Christian values.
- ✓ Similar proportions of panelists in each group (members, 67%; elders, 68%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 84%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the PC(USA) should try to dissuade corporations from doing things that directly or indirectly support violence against Israeli or Palestinian civilians.

**Figure 3. Opinions about Shifting Funds Away from Companies that Directly or Indirectly Support Violence Against Israeli or Palestinian Civilians**



	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed.....	888	1,083	1,454
Number of undeliverable surveys and ineligible respondents.....	9	7	11
Number of surveys completed.....	354	533	785‡
Response rate.....	40%	49%	54%

‡Of the 785 returned surveys, 525 came from pastors and 251 from specialized clergy; 9 ministers not classifiable

**The survey was mailed on August 11, 2009**, with returns accepted through late October 2009. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. In general, 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 will be 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# 02056-09304). It will include tables showing percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

**For more information about PC(USA) confessions**, go to <http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/confession.htm>.

**LISTENING TO PRESBYTERIANS SINCE 1973**  
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