



The Presbyterian Panel

Listening to Presbyterians



SUMMARY

RELIGIOUS AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PRESBYTERIANS, 2008 FINDINGS FROM THE INITIAL SURVEY OF THE 2009-2011 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 2009-2011 Panel, sampled in the fall of 2008.

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CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND INVOLVEMENT

Church Background

- ✓ A minority of members (40%) and elders (41%) were raised in a Presbyterian congregation. Overall, 16% of members and 15% of elders grew up Methodist, and 10% and 11%, respectively, grew up Baptist.
- ✓ The median number of years both members and elders have belonged to their current congregation is 18.

Church Attendance and Participation

- ✓ More than two in five members (45%) and elders (50%) live three miles or less from their congregation.
- ✓ More than three in five members (65%) and four in five elders (87%) report that they usually attend worship services “every week” or “nearly every week.”
- ✓ More than two in five members (44%) and two-thirds of elders (69%) take part three or more hours per month in programs and activities of their congregation.

Congregational Leadership

- ✓ More than half of members (57%) have previously been ordained as elders, deacons, or both.
- ✓ About a quarter of elders (23%) and 4% of members currently chair a congregational committee.
- ✓ Most members (62%) and elders (93%) volunteer time each month in their congregation to teach, serve on a committee, lead activities, or help with an event.

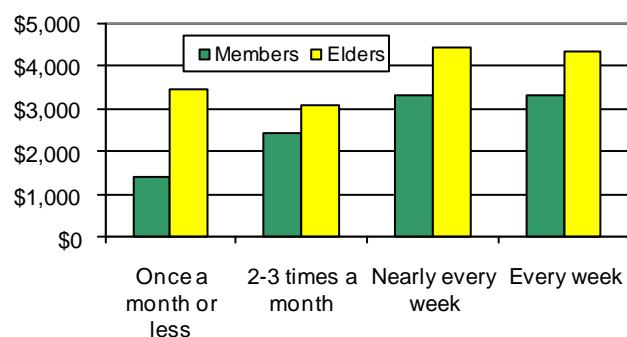
Congregational Outreach

- ✓ Most members (60%) and elders (77%) report inviting someone to their congregation in the prior year.
- ✓ Among those issuing invitations, the median number invited is three for both members and elders.

Financial Stewardship

- ✓ At least seven in ten members (73%) and elders (83%) report that they or another household member made a financial pledge to their congregation for 2008.
- ✓ Median “regular giving” to congregations in 2007 by Panel households is: members, \$2,000; elders, \$2,955; pastors, \$4,800; specialized clergy, \$2,800.
- ✓ Many members (45%) and elders (55%) also report contributing to a capital campaign for their congregation. The median amount given in 2007 was \$500 and \$600, respectively.

Figure 1. Average Regular Church Giving Per Household for 2007, by Frequency of Worship Attendance



Prayer and Bible Reading

- ✓ At least three in five panelists “pray privately” either “daily” or “almost daily” (members, 59%; elders, 67%; pastors, 82%; and specialized clergy, 75%).
- ✓ Almost half of members (42%) and elders (49%) “say grace before meals” “daily” or “almost daily.” At least two-thirds of pastors (77%) and specialized clergy (65%) do so.
- ✓ Less than half of members (37%) and elders (49%) “read the Bible privately” at least “weekly.” Half of pastors (52%) and a third of specialized clergy (33%) do so “daily” or “almost daily.”
- ✓ Few panelists (members, 16%; elders, 16%; pastors, 5%; specialized clergy, 3%) believe that “the Bible is . . . to be taken literally, word for word.” Instead, most panelists believe that the Bible should be interpreted in light of either “its historical and cultural context” (46%; 51%; 61%; 63%) or “its historical context and the church’s teachings” (34%; 32%; 34%; 33%).

Conversion Experience

- ✓ Less than half of laity (members, 44%; 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, 17 years; elders, 18 years.
- ✓ Majorities of members (60%) and elders (71%) have “tried to encourage someone to believe in Jesus Christ or accept Him as personal savior.”

Dimensions of Belief

- ✓ At least two in five panelists “strongly agree” or “agree” that “the only absolute truth for humankind is in Jesus Christ” (members, 60%; elders, 68%; pastors, 66%; specialized clergy, 45%).
- ✓ Less than half “strongly agree” or “agree” that “all the world’s religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth” (37%; 29%; 12%; 27%).
- ✓ Less than half “strongly agree” or “agree” that “only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved” (39%; 45%; 35%; 22%).
- ✓ Large majorities “strongly agree” or “agree” that “Jesus will return to earth some day” (68%; 77%; 82%; 63%) and “there is life beyond death” (86%; 91%; 97%; 92%).

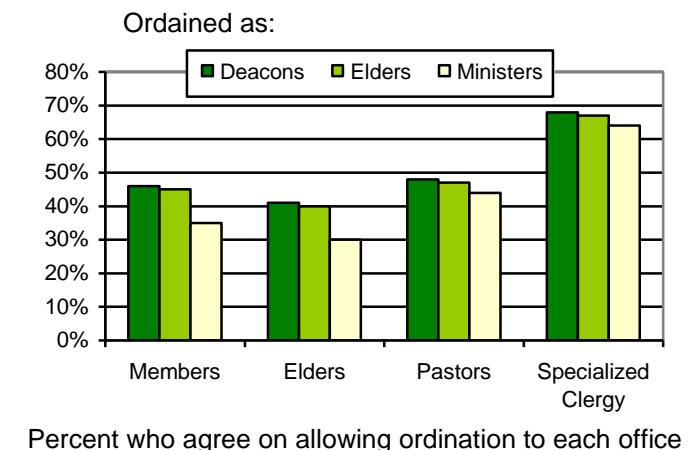
Theological Labels

- ✓ Most laity consider themselves theologically “very conservative” or “conservative” (members, 34%; elders, 42%) or “moderate” (41%; 36%); only about a quarter choose the labels “very liberal” or “liberal” (24%; 22%).
- ✓ More pastors consider themselves theologically “moderate” (37%) than “very conservative” or “conservative” (31%) or “very liberal” or “liberal” (31%), while among specialized clergy, the corresponding numbers are 28%, 18%, and 53%.

Ordination Issues

- ✓ Majorities of members (60%) and elders (76%) are familiar with the vote by the 218th General Assembly (June 2008) in favor of replacing the requirement that church officers (elders, deacons, and ministers) “live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness” with a requirement that church officers declare “their fidelity to the standards of the church.” (A majority of presbyteries later rejected this change.)
- ✓ Only three in ten members (29%) and elders (29%) would have personally liked the presbyteries to have approved the amendment. More pastors (42%) and specialized clergy (60%) favored approval.
- ✓ Around two in five members (45%), elders (40%), and pastors (47%) but more specialized clergy (67%) 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 (35%; 30%; 44%; 64%). (See Figure 2.)

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



CALLS AND CAREERS

Current Call: Ministers

- ✓ Two-thirds of ministers in the Panel serve as pastors (68%). Of these, 49% describe themselves as solo pastors; 22%, as head of staff; 18%, as associate pastors; and 5%, as interim pastors.
- ✓ Very few pastors (4%) serve more than one congregation, half of them (2%) in yoked parishes.
- ✓ Among specialized clergy, three in ten serve as faculty or staff persons at educational institutions (31%); one in three as chaplains (32%); and one in twelve as professional pastoral counselors (8%).
- ✓ Half of chaplains (50%) serve in hospitals.
- ✓ About a third of specialized clergy are employed by an organization affiliated with the PC(USA) (35%), including 13% who work as national staff or for a synod or presbytery.

Education: Ministers

- ✓ Two-thirds of ministers (67%) received their M.Div. or B.D. degree from a PC(USA)-affiliated theological school. Of these, the highest percentages graduated from Princeton (20% of all ministers), Columbia (9%), Louisville (7%), Union-PSCE (7%), Pittsburgh (6%), and San Francisco (6%) theological seminaries.
- ✓ Of B.D./M.Div. graduates from non-PC(USA) schools, the largest percentages graduated from Fuller (8%) and Gordon-Conwell (4%) theological seminaries.
- ✓ More than three in five ministers (63%) have one or more other graduate degrees, including 21% with a D.Min.; 17% with an M.A.; 8% with a Ph.D., Th.D., or S.T.D.; and 6% with a Th.M. or S.T.M.
- ✓ A few ministers (8%) are currently enrolled as students, many of them (4%) in D.Min. programs.

Education: Laity

- ✓ Majorities of members (64%) and elders (66%) have graduated from college, including 29% and 32%, respectively, who have graduate degrees.
- ✓ Around one in seven members (14%) and one in eight elders (13%) have a high school education or less.

Career Backgrounds: Ministers

- ✓ Prior to ordination, two in five ministers (40%) 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 (2%).
- ✓ About half of ministers were ordained prior to 1990 (53%).
- ✓ Three in four female pastors were ordained after 1989, compared to 41% of male pastors. (See Figure 3.)

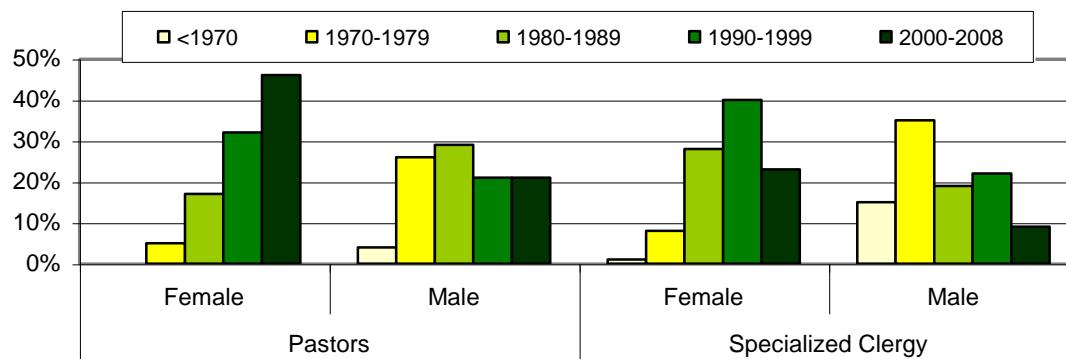
Employment Status: Laity

- ✓ Half of members (51%) and elders (49%) are employed. Most of the rest are retired (38%; 35%). Another 9% and 7% are full-time homemakers.

Income

- ✓ Median annual family income in 2007 was \$81,904 for members, \$84,856 for elders, \$76,869 for pastors, and \$88,510 for specialized clergy.
- ✓ Few panelists have annual family incomes of less than \$20,000 (members, 6%; elders, 3%; pastors, 1%; specialized clergy, 2%), while many have incomes of \$100,000 or more (38%; 40%; 26%; 39%).

Figure 3. Year of Ordination by Gender and Ministerial Status



SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

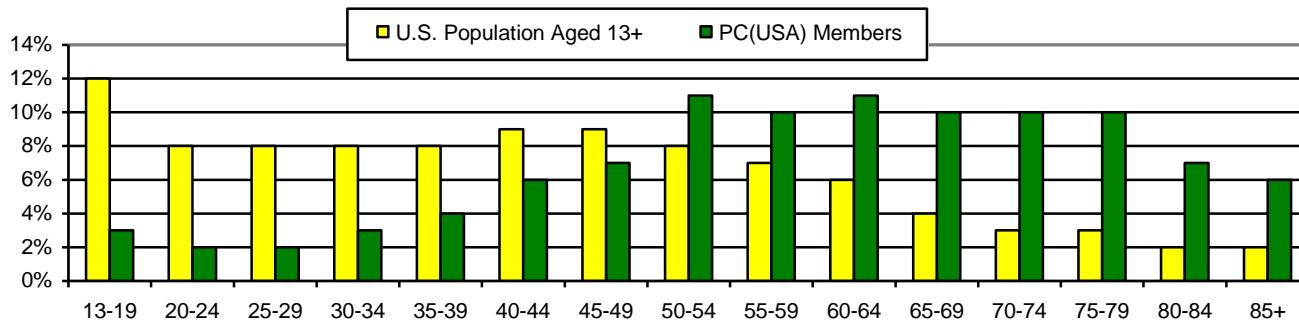
Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity

- ✓ The median age is 60 years for members and elders, 53 for pastors, and 56 for specialized clergy. The age distribution of members is much older than that of the comparable U.S. population. (See Figure 4).
- ✓ Most members (64%) and elders (52%) are female, but most pastors (73%) and specialized clergy (55%) are male.
- ✓ Almost all members (96%), elders (95%), pastors (92%), and specialized clergy (89%) are white.

Political Preference

- ✓ Nearly half of members (46%) and elders (49%) list their political preference as Republican, while only 23% of pastors and 13% of specialized clergy do so. While only 31% of members and 29% of elders list their preference as Democrat, 50% of pastors and 65% of specialized clergy do so.
- ✓ Of the rest, only 1-3% list another political party preference, with the remainder identifying themselves as Independents (members, 20%; elders, 20%; pastors, 25%; specialized clergy, 20%).

Figure 4. Age Distribution: U.S. Population (Ages 13+) and PC(USA) Members



	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed	1,594	1,394	2,200
Number returned as undeliverable.....	33	16	120
Number ineligible or incapable of responding.....	22	6	17
Number returned.....	909	1,088	1,453†
Response rate.....	59%	79%	70%

† Of the 1,453 returned surveys, 982 came from pastors and 471 from specialized clergy.

The survey was mailed in October 2008, with returns accepted through mid-May 2009. 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) or for \$15 from Presbyterian Distribution Service (1-800-524-2612; order PDS# 02056-09301). The report 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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