



# The Presbyterian Panel

*Listening to Presbyterians*



**SUMMARY**

## THE BIBLE

### FINDINGS FROM THE NOVEMBER 2011 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 thirteenth and final survey completed by the 2009-2011 Panel, sampled in fall 2008.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY

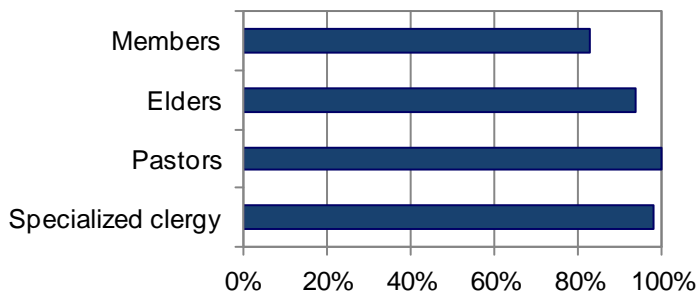
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## BIBLE READING AND STUDY

### ***Bible Reading***

- ✓ Five in six members (83%) and more than nine in ten elders (94%), pastors (100%), and specialized clergy (98%) read the Bible outside of worship during the past year (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Reading the Bible Outside of Worship During the Past Year**



- ✓ Among these panelists, seven in eight members (88%) and elders (88%) and three-quarters of pastors (75%) and specialized clergy (76%) most recently read a printed version when reading the Bible outside of worship. A few members (6%), elders (7%), pastors (14%), and specialized clergy (13%) read the Bible most recently on a desktop or laptop computer.
- ✓ More than one-quarter of panelists who read the Bible outside of worship in the past year read most recently from one of the Gospels (members, 27%; elders, 35%; pastors, 29%; specialized clergy, 34%). Between one in ten and one in six (11%; 12%; 17%; 15%) read from Psalms.

### ***Learning Bible Content***

- ✓ At least two-thirds of panelists in every group report that each of the following activities has been *very important* or *important* in helping them learn Bible content:
  - Listening to sermons (members, 89%; elders, 90%; pastors, 73%; specialized clergy, 82%).
  - Listening to the Bible read in worship (86%; 89%; 70%; 75%).
  - Reading the Bible (71%; 83%; 98%; 89%).
  - Participating in a church school class or Bible study group (70%; 77%; 75%; 68%).
- ✓ College or seminary classes and sermon preparation have been *very important* or *important* for helping more than three-quarters of ministers but few members and elders learn Bible content:
  - Taking a college or seminary class (members, 10%; elders, 16%; pastors, 81%; specialized clergy, 78%).
  - Preparing sermons (9%; 11%; 99%; 92%).
- ✓ More than seven in ten ministers and about half of members and elders cite using a Bible study aid or leading a Sunday school class or Bible study as *very important* or *important* for helping them learn Bible content:
  - Using a Bible study aid (members, 55%; elders, 54%; pastors, 76%; specialized clergy, 72%).
  - Teaching a Sunday school class or leading a Bible study group (45%; 53%; 96%; 88%).

### **Knowledge of the Pentateuch**

- ✓ In response to an open-ended question, all members (100%), pastors (100%), and specialized clergy (100%) and almost all elders (99%) name Genesis as the first book of the Bible.
- ✓ More than nine in ten members and elders and all ministers correctly link:
  - Moses with “leading the exodus from Egypt” (members, 96%; elders, 99%; pastors, 100%; specialized clergy, 100%).
  - Abraham with “willingness to sacrifice his son for God” (91%; 96%; 100%; 100%).
- ✓ About seven in eight members, nine in ten elders, and all or almost all ministers correctly choose:
  - “Do unto others as you have would have them do unto you” as the phrase (of four listed) that is *not* one of the Ten Commandments (members, 88%; elders, 94%; pastors, 100%; specialized clergy, 98%).
  - Abraham as the person to whom it was said, “Look toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them . . . so shall your descendants be” (86%; 90%; 98%; 98%).
  - “There would never be another flood to destroy the earth” as what God promised in a covenant with Noah (85%; 90%; 100%; 100%).
- ✓ “The pillars of cloud and of fire” is what seven in ten members (72%), four in five elders (81%), and almost all ministers (pastors, 99%; specialized clergy, 98%) correctly recognize as what guided the Israelites through the wilderness after they left Egypt.
- ✓ Five in nine members (56%), two-thirds of elders (65%), seven in eight pastors (87%), and nine in ten specialized clergy (91%) know that Leviticus is the book that contains the following statement: “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.”

### **Knowledge of the Historical Books**

- ✓ Naomi is correctly identified as Ruth’s mother-in-law by about four in five members (79%) and elders (83%) and almost all ministers (pastors, 97%; specialized clergy, 97%).
- ✓ Seven in ten members (69%), three-quarters of elders (75%), and more than nine in ten ministers (pastors, 98%; specialized clergy, 93%) correctly choose “hid Israelite spies” as what Rahab did, according to the book of Joshua.

### **Knowledge of Psalms and the Wisdom Literature**

- ✓ Job is correctly picked by five in six members (84%), nine in ten elders (89%), and all ministers (pastors, 100%; specialized clergy, 100%) as the biblical figure associated with “remaining obedient to God despite suffering.”
- ✓ Seven in ten members (70%) and elders (70%) and more than nine in ten ministers (pastors, 95%; specialized clergy, 92%) correctly choose Wisdom about whom it was written: “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”
- ✓ “Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways” is a statement that four in nine members (45%), one-third of elders (35%), three in five pastors (60%), and five in nine specialized clergy (54%) correctly identify as found in Psalms.

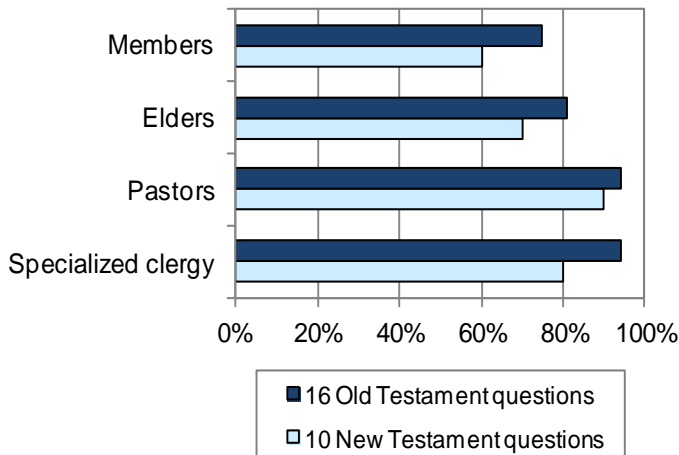
### **Knowledge of the Prophets**

- ✓ “To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” is correctly selected by four in five members (81%), five in six elders (83%), and almost all ministers (pastors, 98%; specialized clergy, 98%) as how the prophet Micah answered the question, “What does the Lord require of you?”
- ✓ Five in six members (84%), three-quarters of elders (76%), and nine in ten ministers (pastors, 91%; specialized clergy, 90%) identify the destruction of Jerusalem as the event to which the book of Lamentations responded.
- ✓ Five in nine members (56%) and elders (54%) and five in six ministers (pastors, 84%; specialized clergy, 83%) correctly select Jerusalem as the location with which Isaiah is associated.

### **Summary of Old Testament Knowledge**

- ✓ Sixteen of the questions panelists were asked about the Old Testament were the same for all four groups. The median number of these questions to which ministers responded correctly was 15 in both groups. The median number of questions to which members and elders responded correctly was somewhat smaller (see Figure 2 on the next page):
  - Members: median of 12 correct responses (75%).
  - Elders: 13 (81%).
  - Pastors: 15 (94%).
  - Specialized clergy: 15 (94%).

**Figure 2. Median Percentage of Correct Responses to Old Testament and New Testament Knowledge Questions Asked of All Panelists**



Note: Responses to questions panelists did not attempt to answer were counted as incorrect.

**Knowledge of the Gospels**

- ✓ Thomas is correctly identified by more than nine in ten members (92%) and elders (96%) and all ministers (pastors, 100%; specialized clergy, 100%) as the person who said, “Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands . . . I will not believe.”
- ✓ Nine in ten members (89%) and elders (90%), all pastors (100%), and almost all specialized clergy (98%) indicate correctly that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.
- ✓ Five in six members (84%) and elders (85%) and almost all pastors (98%) and specialized clergy (96%) respond correctly that Peter is the person to whom it was said, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”
- ✓ Simon is correctly chosen by more than seven in ten members (72%) and elders (72%) and about nine in ten ministers (pastors, 93%; specialized clergy, 90%) as the disciple commonly known as “The Zealot.”
- ✓ John is identified correctly by seven in ten pastors (72%) and five in nine specialized clergy (53%)—but only about one in five members (21%) and elders (22%)—as the Gospel that places the story of Jesus driving the money changers from the temple near the start of his ministry.

**Knowledge of Acts**

- ✓ Three-quarters of members (75%), four in five elders (79%), and almost all ministers (pastors, 99%; specialized clergy, 97%) correctly select “baptized him” as what Philip did after his conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch.

**Knowledge of Pauline Letters**

- ✓ About seven in ten pastors (72%) and two-thirds of specialized clergy (64%)—but only three in ten members (31%) and elders (30%)—correctly cite Galatians as the book from which the following statement comes: “There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for all of you are now one in Christ Jesus.”

**Knowledge of the Rest of the New Testament**

- ✓ “The tongue” is correctly identified by three-quarters of members (76%), four in five elders (80%), and more than nine in ten ministers (pastors, 98%; specialized clergy, 94%) as what the letter of James describes as “the one thing that no man can tame.”
- ✓ Five in nine members (55%) and elders (52%), nine in ten pastors (90%), and five in six specialized clergy (83%) correctly select “Jesus returns to take Christians to heaven before a climactic battle” as the idea or theme (from a list of four themes) *not* found in the book of Revelation.

**Summary of New Testament Knowledge**

- ✓ Ten of the questions that panelists were asked about the New Testament were the same for all four groups. The median number answered correctly ranged from six among members to nine among pastors (see Figure 2):
  - Members: median of 6 correct responses (60%).
  - Elders: 7 (70%).
  - Pastors: 9 (90%).
  - Specialized clergy: 8 (80%).
- ✓ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are correctly named (in response to an open-ended question) as the first four books of the New Testament by at least nine in ten panelists in each group (members, 90%; elders, 94%; pastors, 96%; specialized clergy, 90%).
- ✓ Apparently misreading the question, a few panelists (members, 9%; elders, 5%; pastors, 4%; specialized clergy, 10%) incorrectly name Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (the first four books of the Old Testament) as the first four New Testament books.

## OTHER TOPICS

### From the Bible?

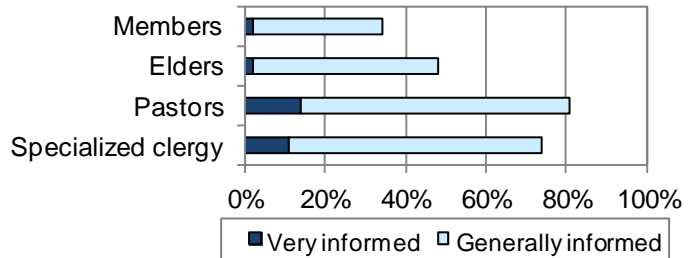
- ✓ Panelists were given five statements and asked to indicate whether each is found in the Bible. The median number of these statements that ministers classify correctly is five. The median number of statements that members and elders classify correctly is four.
- ✓ “For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God” is the one statement among the five that the largest percentage of panelists—more than nine in ten panelists from each group (members, 92%; elders, 96%; pastors, 100%; specialized clergy, 100%)—know is from the Bible.
- ✓ About seven in eight members and elders and almost all ministers know that two of the other four statements are *not* from the Bible:
  - “Blessed are the strong, for they shall be the sword of God” (members, 85%; elders, 86%; pastors, 97%; specialized clergy, 96%).
  - “God helps those who help themselves” (83%; 86%; 98%; 95%).
- ✓ Another statement, “For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,” is correctly categorized as from the Bible by three-quarters of members (73%), four in five elders (79%), and almost all ministers (pastors, 96%; specialized clergy, 96%).

- ✓ About nine in ten ministers (pastors, 90%; specialized clergy, 88%)—but only about four in nine members (42%) and elders (48%)—know that the final statement, “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak,” is from the Bible.

### PC(USA) Mission

- ✓ One-third of members (34%), almost half of elders (48%), four in five pastors (81%), and three-quarters of specialized clergy (74%) are *very informed* or *generally informed* about the range and scope of PC(USA) mission (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. How Informed Are Panelists About PC(USA) Mission?**



- ✓ Five in nine members (54%), three in five elders (60%) and pastors (59%), and two-thirds of specialized clergy (68%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that they are comfortable letting the General Assembly or the General Assembly Mission Council make decisions about where to allocate mission dollars that the agency receives.

	Members	Elders	Ministers
Number of surveys sent .....	591	851	1,208
Number of undeliverable surveys and ineligible respondents .....	5	4	24
Number of surveys completed .....	215	300	618‡
Response rate .....	36%	35%	52%

‡Of the 618 returned surveys, 407 came from pastors and 203 from specialized clergy; 8 could not be classified.

**The survey was mailed on November 23, 2011**, with returns accepted through April 25, 2012. 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.

**All Bible verses are** from the New Revised Standard Version.

**For more numbers and interpretation** of these results, a report will be available on the web or for \$15 from Presbyterian Distribution Service (800-524-2612; order PDS# 2005611314). It will include tables with percentage responses to each survey question.

### LISTENING TO PRESBYTERIANS SINCE 1973

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