



## RELIGIOUS AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PRESBYTERIANS, 2011 FINDINGS FROM THE INITIAL SURVEY OF THE 2012-2014 PRESBYTERIAN PANEL

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, ruling elders (formerly known as elders), and teaching elders (also known as ministers). For most analyses, teaching elders are split into two groups based on current call: *pastors*, serving congregations, and *specialized ministers*, serving elsewhere. New samples are drawn every three years. This report offers results from the initial survey completed in fall 2011 by the 2012-2014 Panel.

### IN THIS SUMMARY

- ✓ **Church Activities and Involvement..... p. 1**
- ✓ **Piety and Belief ..... p. 2**
- ✓ **Calls and Careers ..... p. 3**
- ✓ **Social and Demographic Characteristics..... p. 4**

## CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND INVOLVEMENT

### **Church Background**

- ✓ Two in five members (40%) and ruling elders (40%) were raised in a Presbyterian congregation. Overall, 13% of members and 16% of ruling elders grew up Methodist, and 13% and 12%, respectively, Baptist.
- ✓ The median number of years members have belonged to their current congregation is 17; the median for ruling elders is 18.

### **Church Attendance and Participation**

- ✓ Five in nine members (57%) and five in six ruling elders (84%) report that they have attended worship services *every week* or *nearly every week* over the past year.
- ✓ During the past month four in nine members (46%) and seven in ten ruling elders (70%) spent three or more hours in programs and activities of their congregation (besides worship).

### **Congregational Leadership**

- ✓ Half of members (51%) have previously been ordained as elders, deacons, or both.
- ✓ About half of ruling elders (52%) and 6% of members chair a congregational committee or task force.
- ✓ Almost all ruling elders (95%) and three in five members (58%) volunteer time in their congregation to teach, serve on a committee, or help with events.

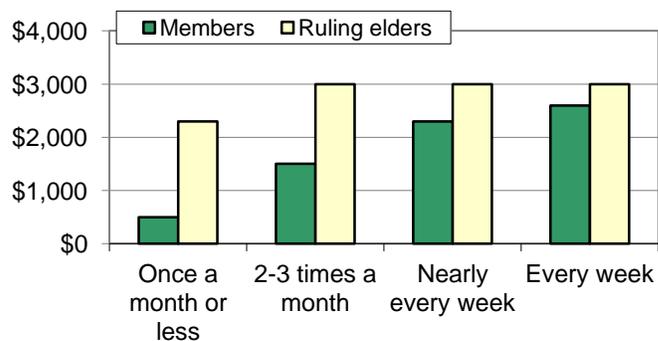
### **Congregational Outreach**

- ✓ Three-quarters of ruling elders (75%) and half of members (50%) report inviting someone to their congregation in the prior year.
- ✓ Among those issuing invitations, the median number invited is three for both members and ruling elders.

### **Financial Stewardship**

- ✓ Four in five ruling elders (78%) and seven in ten members (69%) report that they or another household member made a financial pledge to their congregation for 2011.
- ✓ Median “regular giving” to congregations in 2010 by Panel households (including those giving \$0) is: members, \$1,560; ruling elders, \$3,000; pastors, \$4,940; specialized ministers, \$2,000.

**Figure 1. Median Regular Church Giving Per Household for 2010, by Frequency of Worship Attendance**



**Prayer and Bible Reading**

- ✓ Praying privately is an activity that five in nine members (56%), three in five ruling elders (62%), four in five pastors (80%), and seven in ten specialized ministers (72%) engage in either *daily* or *almost daily*.
- ✓ Three-quarters of pastors (76%) and two-thirds of specialized ministers (66%)—but only two in five members (38%) and four in nine ruling elders (46%)—say grace before meals *daily* or *almost daily*.
- ✓ Two in five members (39%) and half of ruling elders (49%) read the Bible privately at least *weekly*. Half of pastors (50%) and a third of specialized ministers (33%) do so *daily* or *almost daily*.
- ✓ Few panelists (members, 14%; ruling elders, 15%; pastors, 6%; specialized ministers, 2%) believe that the Bible is “to be taken literally, word for word.” Most panelists believe that the Bible should be interpreted in light of either “its historical and cultural context” (50%; 49%; 62%; 60%) or “its historical context and the Church’s teachings” (35%; 35%; 30%; 36%).

**Conversion Experience**

- ✓ About half of members (47%) and ruling elders (50%) and around two-thirds of teaching elders (pastors, 70%; specialized ministers, 66%) report having had a conversion experience (“a turning point in your life when you committed yourself to Christ”).
- ✓ Three in five members (58%) and seven in ten ruling elders (69%) have encouraged “someone to believe in Jesus Christ or accept Him as a personal savior” (not asked of teaching elders).

**Dimensions of Belief**

- ✓ Majorities of panelists in each group *strongly agree* or *agree* that “there is a life beyond death” (members, 86%; ruling elders, 93%; pastors, 96%; specialized ministers, 91%) and “Jesus will return to Earth some day” (70%; 79%; 81%; 64%).
- ✓ About two in five members (42%), ruling elders (45%), and pastors (41%)—but only a fourth of specialized ministers (27%)—*strongly agree* or *agree* that “only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved.”
- ✓ Around one-third of members (37%) and ruling elders (30%)—but only one in ten pastors (11%) and one-quarter of specialized ministers (23%)—*strongly agree* or *agree* that all the world’s religions are “equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.”

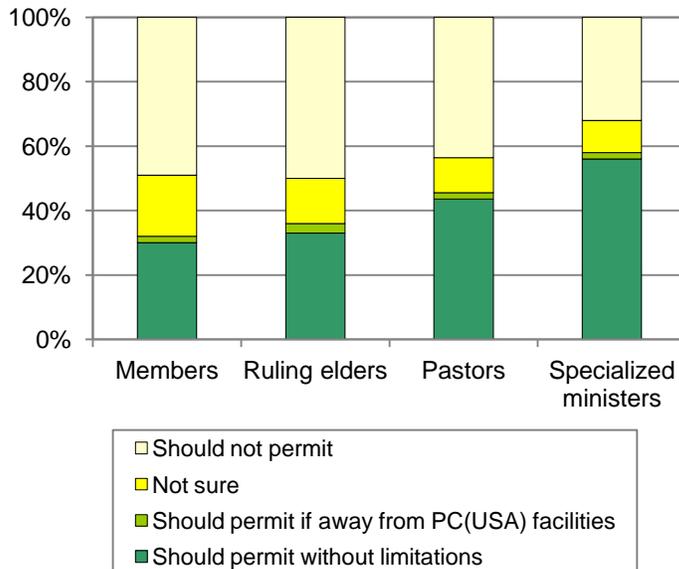
**Theological Self-Identification**

- ✓ Most members and ruling elders consider themselves theologically either *very conservative* or *conservative* (members, 39%; ruling elders, 40%) or *moderate* (39%; 38%); less than a quarter choose the labels *very liberal* or *liberal* (22%; 22%).
- ✓ Equal percentages of pastors consider themselves theologically *very conservative* or *conservative* (33%), *moderate* (33%), and *very liberal* or *liberal* (34%), while more specialized ministers regard themselves as *very liberal* or *liberal* (48%) than either *moderate* (32%) or *very conservative* or *conservative* (20%).

**Denominational Issues**

- ✓ Being part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is *very important* or *important* for four in five ruling elders (82%), pastors (79%), and specialized ministers (78%). Slightly fewer members (72%) so believe.
- ✓ A small majority of specialized ministers (56%)—but less than half of pastors (44%) and only about one-third of members (30%) and ruling elders (33%)—believe the PC(USA) should permit Presbyterian ministers to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies in states and territories of the United States where same-sex marriage is legal (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Opinions on What PC(USA) Policy Should Be Regarding Same-Sex Marriage Ceremonies Performed by Teaching Elders**



- ✓ A few panelists (members, 2%; ruling elders, 3%; pastors, 2%; specialized ministers, 2%) believe such ceremonies should be permitted but only away from PC(USA) church property and facilities.

**Current Call: Teaching Elders**

- ✓ Seven in ten teaching elders in the Panel (72%) have a primary call in a parish. Of these, 67% describe themselves as pastors; 15%, as associate pastors; and 8%, as stated or temporary supply pastors.
- ✓ Very few pastors (4%) serve more than one congregation, half of them (2%) in yoked parishes.
- ✓ One in five specialized ministers serve as chaplains (22%) or as faculty or staff at educational institutions (18%), and one in twenty as professional pastoral counselors (6%).
- ✓ Two-thirds of chaplains (65%) serve in hospitals.

**Employment Status: Members and Ruling Elders**

- ✓ About half of members (49%) and three in five ruling elders (59%) are employed. Most of the rest are retired (43%; 42%). A few are full-time homemakers (7%; 4%).

**Education: Teaching Elders**

- ✓ Two-thirds of teaching elders (66%) received their M.Div. or B.D. degree from a PC(USA)-related theological school. Of these, the largest percentages graduated from Princeton (18% of all teaching elders), Columbia (8%), Union (Virginia) (7%), Louisville (6%), Austin (5%), Pittsburgh (5%), and San Francisco (5%) theological seminaries.
- ✓ Of M.Div./B.D. graduates from non-PC(USA) schools, the largest percentages graduated from Fuller (8% of all teaching elders) and Gordon-Conwell (4%) theological seminaries.

**Education: Members and Ruling Elders**

- ✓ Among panelists age 25 or older, majorities of members (64%) and ruling elders (70%) have graduated from college, including 29% and 35%, respectively, who have graduate degrees.
- ✓ Among panelists age 25 or older, one in ten members (11%) and ruling elders (10%) have a high school education or less.

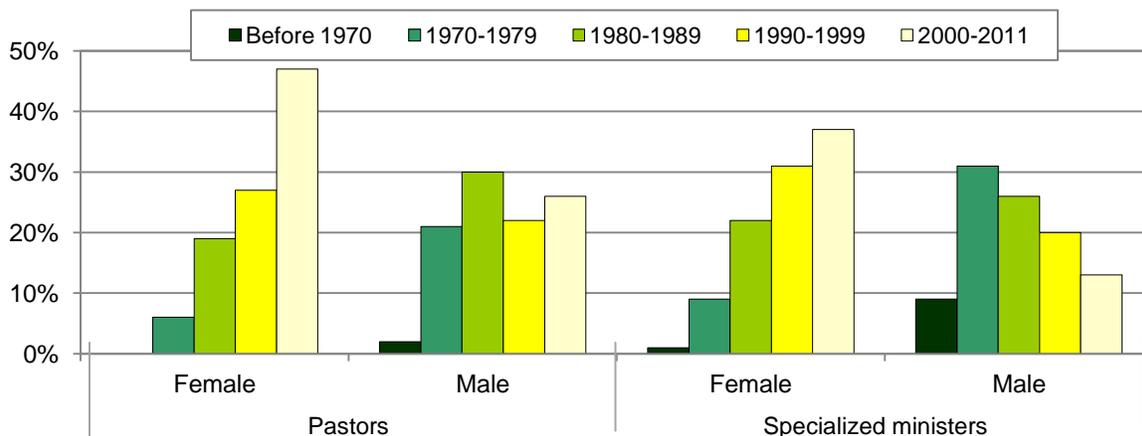
**Career Background: Teaching Elders**

- ✓ Prior to entering seminary, two in five teaching elders (42%) had a “long-term secular job or career.” The median time in that career was ten years.
- ✓ Only 9% of teaching elders report having been ordained to ministry outside the PC(USA) or one of its predecessor denominations.
- ✓ A majority of teaching elders (54%) were ordained in 1990 or thereafter.
- ✓ Three-quarters of female pastors (74%) were ordained after 1989, compared with about half of male pastors (47%) (see Figure 3).

**Income**

- ✓ Median annual family income in 2010 was \$76,302 for members, \$88,610 for ruling elders, \$79,947 for pastors, and \$88,071 for specialized ministers.
- ✓ Few panelists have annual family incomes of less than \$20,000 (members, 5%; ruling elders, 3%; pastors, 1%; specialized ministers, 3%), while many have incomes of \$100,000 or more (34%; 41%; 29%; 39%).

**Figure 3. Year of Ordination by Gender and Primary Call**



## SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Age, Gender, and Race Ethnicity

- ✓ The median age is 63 years for members, 62 for ruling elders, 55 for pastors, and 57 for specialized ministers. The age distribution of members is older than that of the comparable U.S. population (see Figure 4).
- ✓ Small majorities of members (60%) and ruling elders (51%) are female, but seven in ten pastors (71%) and five in nine specialized ministers (56%) are male.
- ✓ Most members (94%), ruling elders (94%), pastors (91%), and specialized ministers (89%) are white.

### Political Preference

- ✓ Roughly two in five members (43%) and ruling elders (42%) list their political preference as Republican, while only 20% of pastors and 14% of specialized ministers do so. Only 28% of members and 33% of ruling elders list their preference as Democrat, but 50% of pastors and 61% of specialized ministers do.
- ✓ Most others identify themselves as Independents (members, 24%; ruling elders, 22%; pastors, 26%; specialized ministers, 22%).

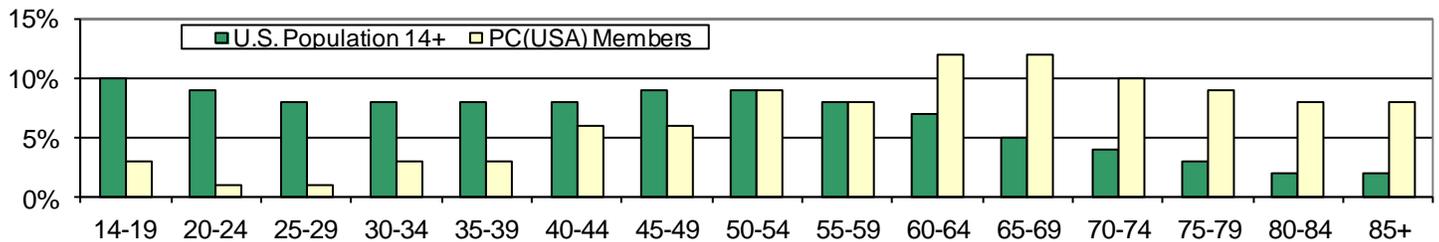
### Marriage, Households, and Children

- ✓ Among panelists 25 years old or older, more than three-quarters of members (76%), ruling elders (82%), pastors (87%), and specialized ministers (80%) are currently married, and few (4%; 4%; 6%; 9%) have never married. Among the ever-married, 17%, 21%, 21%, and 26%, respectively, have been divorced.
- ✓ Few panelists live alone (members, 18%; ruling elders, 15%; pastors, 11%; specialized ministers, 14%). Average household sizes are: members, 2.4 persons; ruling elders, 2.4; pastors, 2.6; and specialized ministers, 2.4.
- ✓ Most panelists report being parents (members, 85%; ruling elders, 89%; pastors, 82%; specialized ministers, 78%). Their average numbers of children are 2.1, 2.1, 1.9, and 1.8, respectively.

### Location

- ✓ The largest group of Presbyterians lives in the South (39%), followed by the Midwest (30%), Northeast (18%), and West (14%).

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



|  | Members | Ruling Elders | Teaching Elders |
|--|---------|---------------|-----------------|
| Number of surveys mailed .....                     | 1,913   | 1,942         | 2,368           |
| Number returned as undeliverable .....             | 40      | 31            | 50              |
| Number ineligible or incapable of responding ..... | 21      | 7             | 5               |
| Number of surveys completed .....                  | 1,036   | 1,424         | 1,512‡          |
| Response rate .....                                | 55%     | 74%           | 65%             |

‡ Of the 1,512 returned surveys, 1,088 came from pastors and 424 from specialized ministers.

The survey was mailed in September 2011, with returns accepted through February 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.

**For more numbers and interpretation** of these results, a longer report with additional charts will be available for free on the web ([www.pcusa.org/research/panel](http://www.pcusa.org/research/panel)) or for \$10 from Presbyterian Distribution Service (800-524-2612; order PDS# 2005612315). The report includes tables showing percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, ruling elders, pastors, and specialized ministers.

### LISTENING TO PRESBYTERIANS SINCE 1973

The Presbyterian Panel, A Ministry of the General Assembly Mission Council  
 Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville KY 40202-1396  
[www.pcusa.org/research/panel](http://www.pcusa.org/research/panel)