



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH EXPERIENCES AND CHURCH RETREATS FINDINGS FROM THE MAY 2012 SURVEY

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, ruling elders serving on session (“lay” leaders), and teaching elders (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. These pages summarize major findings from the third survey completed by the 2012-2014 Panel, sampled in fall 2011.

### IN THIS SUMMARY

- ✓ **Most Significant Learning or Spiritual Growth Experience.....p. 1**
- ✓ **Faith Development Past and Future ...p. 2**
- ✓ **Preferences for Church Resources and Retreats .....p. 3**
- ✓ **Retreat and Camp Participation .....p. 4**

## MOST SIGNIFICANT LEARNING OR SPIRITUAL GROWTH EXPERIENCE

### A Particular Experience

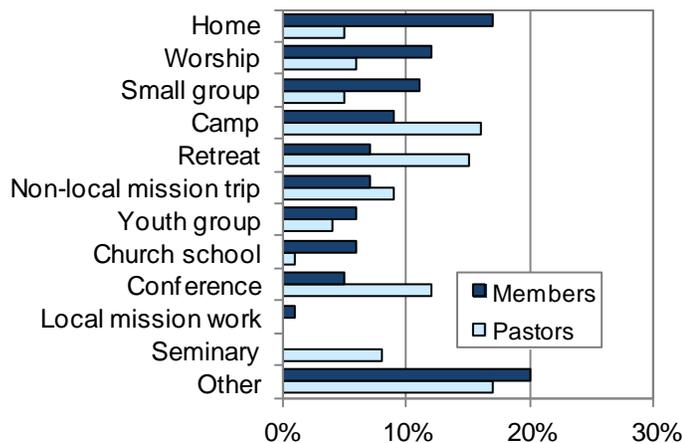
- ✓ Small majorities of members (51%) and ruling elders (55%) and four in five teaching elders (pastors, 78%; specialized ministers, 78%) report they have had a particular learning or spiritual growth experience that had great significance in shaping their Christian life.

### Setting

- ✓ Panelists who report such a learning or spiritual growth experience were asked in what setting the experience took place. None of the 11 listed settings are selected by more than one in six panelists who have had such an experience (see Figure 1).

- ✓ A little more than one in ten ruling elders, pastors, and specialized ministers who have had such a learning or growth experience say it took place at a retreat or camp:
  - Retreat (ruling elders, 13%; pastors, 15%; specialized ministers, 14%).
  - Camp (12%; 16%; 11%).
- ✓ Slightly fewer members who report such an experience identify a retreat (7%) or camp (9%) as the setting.
- ✓ Between one in ten and two in ten members and ruling elders and somewhat fewer teaching elders (5% to 7%) who have had such a learning or growth experience indicate that it occurred at home or in worship:
  - Home (members, 17%; ruling elders, 12%; pastors, 5%; specialized ministers, 7%).
  - Worship (12%; 12%; 6%; 7%).

**Figure 1. Setting for One Particular Learning or Spiritual Growth Experience That Had Great Significance in Shaping Panelists’ Christian Life\***



\*Among panelists who had such an experience

### Instrumental Person

- ✓ Asked to identify which of four types of individuals was instrumental for making the experience significant, between 28% and 35% of panelists in each group who have had such an experience say that the person was a:
  - Pastor or minister (members, 35%; ruling elders, 34%; pastors, 31%; specialized ministers, 29%).
  - Teacher or group leader (29%; 28%; 34%; 31%).

### Age

- ✓ Panelists who report such an experience were asked how old they were when it happened. The median age they report varies between 20 and 30 years: members, 25 years; ruling elders, 30; pastors, 20; specialized ministers, 20.

## FAITH DEVELOPMENT PAST AND FUTURE

### **Experiences That Contributed to Panelists' Understanding of Faith and Life**

- ✓ Worship services and sermons are rated by at least five in six panelists in each group (members, 92%; ruling elders, 95%; pastors, 87%; specialized ministers, 85%) as having made a *very important* or *important* contribution to their own understanding of Christian faith and the relationship of faith to life.
- ✓ Smaller majorities of panelists in each group indicate that two other types of congregational learning experiences have made a *very important* or *important* contribution to their understanding of faith and life:
  - Church school classes (members, 75%; ruling elders, 73%; pastors, 59%; specialized ministers, 58%).
  - Group learning experiences provided by their current or past congregation, besides worship services, church school classes, and retreats (58%; 61%; 63%; 58%).
- ✓ Majorities of teaching elders and large minorities of members and ruling elders report that two other types of experiences have played a *very important* or *important* role in teaching them the Christian faith and the connection between faith and life:
  - Retreats (members, 38%; ruling elders, 44%; pastors, 71%; specialized ministers, 71%).
  - Group learning experiences provided by an organization besides their current or past congregation (38%; 37%; 53%; 66%).
- ✓ Camps have facilitated in a *very important* or *important* way education about the Christian faith and the association between faith and life for between one-third and one-half of panelists in each group (members, 33%; ruling elders, 34%; pastors, 48%; specialized ministers, 45%).

### **Experiences That Panelists Believe Contribute to Young Adults' Development as Christian Leaders**

- ✓ The survey asked panelists how important the contribution made by each of six types of experiences is to the development of young adults as Christian leaders.
- ✓ About five in six members (84%) and ruling elders (89%) and two-thirds of teaching elders (pastors, 65%; specialized ministers, 66%) say that church school classes make a *very important* or *important* contribution to Christian young adult leadership development.

- ✓ Retreats are rated by two-thirds of members (65%), seven in ten ruling elders (71%), seven in eight pastors (86%), and eight in ten specialized ministers (79%) as *very important* or *important* for Christian young adult leadership development.
- ✓ Between seven in ten and eight in ten panelists in each group indicate that two other types of experiences are *very important* or *important* for Christian young adult leadership development:
  - Group learning experiences provided by a congregation other than worship services and sermons, church school classes, or retreats (members, 70%; ruling elders, 74%; pastors, 77%; specialized ministers, 75%).
  - Camps (70%; 70%; 77%; 71%).

### **Learning More About Christian Faith and Life**

- ✓ Asked to select three (of 15) areas in which they feel the greatest need to learn more about Christian faith and its relationship to life, two-thirds of members (66%) and ruling elders (68%) pick *biblical interpretation and Bible study*. Only four in ten pastors (39%) and one-third of specialized ministers (33%), however, select *biblical interpretation and Bible study*, and no other area is selected by a majority of panelists in any group. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1. Areas That Panelists Identify as One of Three in Which They Feel the Greatest Need to Learn More About Christian Faith and Its Relationship to Life**

	M	RE	P	SM
Biblical interpretation and Bible study	66%	68%	39%	33%
Prayer or meditation	42%	37%	39%	41%
The church's role in society	39%	44%	34%	38%
Worship and sacraments	19%	18%	15%	12%
Service to persons in the community with special needs	18%	16%	18%	15%
Peacemaking	17%	15%	10%	21%
Parenting and family life	16%	14%	12%	13%
Church history (including Presbyterian history)	15%	14%	7%	8%
Evangelism	14%	18%	31%	10%
Theology	14%	16%	16%	20%
Caring for the environment	10%	8%	10%	18%
Marriage enrichment	8%	8%	8%	6%
Racial-ethnic or multicultural ministries	5%	6%	15%	15%
Connecting with immigrants	2%	2%	14%	15%

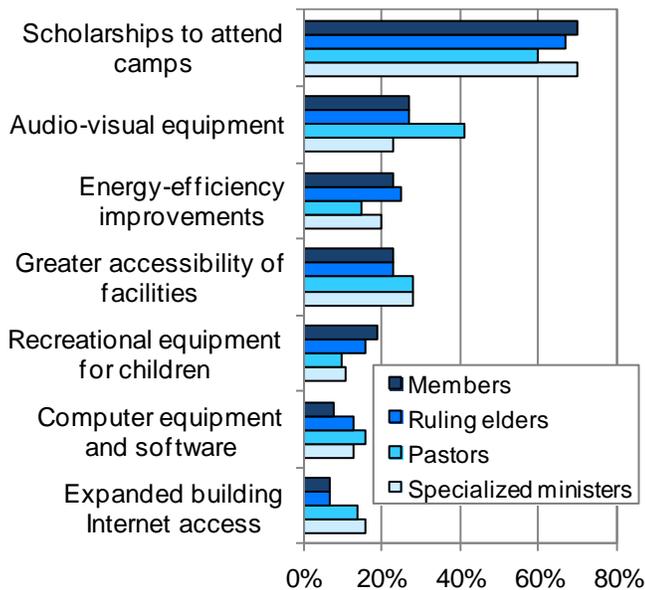
M=members; RE=ruling elders; P=pastors; SM=specialized ministers

## PREFERENCES FOR CHURCH RESOURCES AND RETREATS

### Priority Items to Provide for Staff and Members

- ✓ From a list of ten items that panelists' congregations might provide for members and staff, *scholarships to attend camps, conferences, or other denominational events* is selected by the most panelists in each group (members, 70%; ruling elders, 67%; pastors, 60%; specialized ministers, 70%) as one of two items they would make the highest priority (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Items That the Most Panelists Would Make One of the Two Highest-Priority Items for Their Congregation to Offer Members and Staff**



- ✓ Between 15% and 41% of panelists in each group choose three other items as high priority for their congregations to provide for members and staff:
  - *New audio-visual equipment* (members, 27%; ruling elders, 27%; pastors, 41%; specialized ministers, 23%).
  - *Improvement to the building to make it more energy-efficient* (23%; 25%; 15%; 20%).
  - *Greater accessibility of church facilities (for example, adding ramps and elevators)* (23%; 23%; 28%; 28%).

### Retreat Subjects

- ✓ Panelists were asked how likely they would be to attend an overnight retreat planned by their congregation if the subject of the retreat was one of 14 listed subjects.
- ✓ More panelists in each group—at least 59%—report that they would be *very likely* or *likely* to attend a retreat on leading a deeper spiritual life (members, 59%; ruling elders, 68%; pastors, 81%; specialized ministers, 77%) than they would be on any other subject.

- ✓ Somewhat smaller majorities in each group (members, 54%; ruling elders, 61%; pastors, 57%; specialized ministers, 52%) say they would be *very likely* or *likely* to attend an overnight retreat on developing competency in interpreting the Bible.
- ✓ Ministering to one another within the congregation is picked by half of members (49%), six in ten ruling elders (59%) and specialized ministers (59%), and two-thirds of pastors (66%) as a subject of a retreat that they would be *very likely* or *likely* to attend.
- ✓ Solid majorities of elders (58%) and pastors (70%) would be *very likely* or *likely* to attend a retreat on connecting with youth and young adults in their congregation or their community. Slightly fewer than half of members (44%) and specialized ministers (49%) would be *very likely* or *likely* to attend such a retreat.

### Retreat Site Facilities or Features

- ✓ The survey asked panelists, if they were to attend an overnight church retreat, how important 27 listed facilities or features would be for the site of the retreat.
- ✓ More than three-quarters of panelists in each group indicate that three facilities or features would be *essential* or *important* for the site of an overnight church retreat:
  - Indoor sleeping facility (versus camping) (members, 81%; ruling elders, 83%; pastors, 86%; specialized ministers, 87%).
  - Central heating (81%; 82%; 81%; 78%).
  - Meals provided by the host facility (78%; 76%; 85%; 80%).
- ✓ A large assembly hall or meeting space is seen by seven in ten members (70%) and about eight in ten ruling elders (77%), pastors (84%), and specialized ministers (82%) as *essential* or *important* at a retreat site.
- ✓ Three other features or facilities are identified as *essential* or *important* for a retreat site by between six in ten and three-quarters of panelists in each group:
  - Private baths (members, 68%; ruling elders, 68%; pastors, 65%; specialized ministers, 63%).
  - Air conditioning (66%; 70%; 70%; 68%).
  - Located within 100 miles of their church (65%; 72%; 73%; 64%).
- ✓ About half of members (48%), a small majority of ruling elders (51%), six in ten pastors (61%), and two-thirds of specialized ministers (65%) state that a motel-like sleeping facility (versus dorm-style) would be *essential* or *important* at a retreat site.

## RETREAT AND CAMP PARTICIPATION

### Prevalence of Retreats and Camp Activities

- ✓ More panelists in each group—at least two-thirds—report that their congregation set up or publicized a retreat or activity at a camp for *some* of the congregation than report their congregation did so for *all* of the congregation during the past two years:
  - For a *specific group or category of people* in their congregation (members, 68%; ruling elders, 77%; pastors, 82%; specialized ministers, 85%).
  - For *everyone in the congregation* (52%; 44%; 56%; 63%).

### Personal Involvement

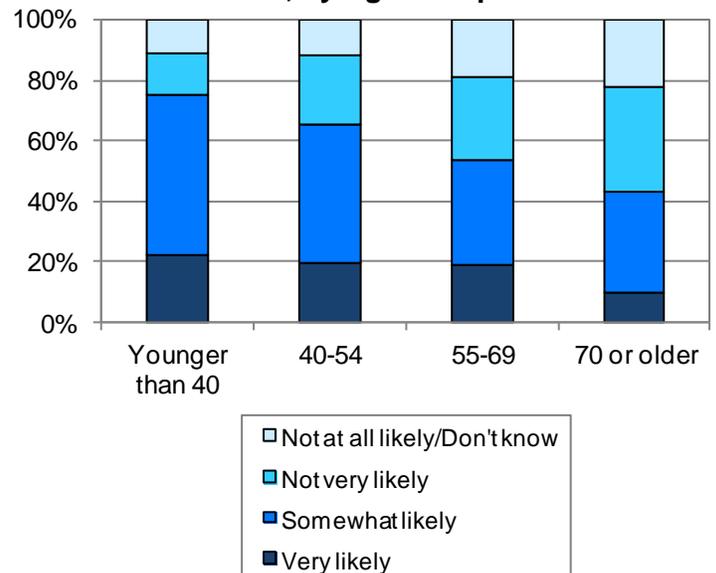
- ✓ About one in five members (18%), two in five ruling elders (36%) and specialized ministers (41%), and three in five pastors (57%) indicate that they personally participated with other people from their congregation in a retreat or camp activity during the past two years.
- ✓ Helping plan a retreat or camp activity for their congregation or a group in it is something that half of pastors (49%) and three in ten specialized ministers (29%) say they have done in the past two years. Only 8% of members and 17% of ruling elders have been involved in such planning during this same time period.

### Likelihood of Participating

- ✓ About seven in ten members (72%), ruling elders (70%), and pastors (71%) and eight in ten specialized ministers (80%) say their church or a group in it is *very likely* or *somewhat likely* to set up or promote a retreat or activity at a camp in the next two years.

- ✓ Attending a retreat or camp activity that their congregation organized or publicized is something that half of members (54%), seven in ten ruling elders (72%) and specialized ministers (71%), and nine in ten pastors (90%) report they would be *very likely* or *somewhat likely* to do in the next two years.
- ✓ The reported likelihood of attending a retreat or camp activity in the next two years is greater among younger members, ruling elders, and pastors than among their older peers, a pattern not found for specialized ministers (see Figure 3 about members).

**Figure 3. Members' Reported Likelihood of Attending a Retreat or Camp Activity Organized or Promoted by Their Congregation in the Next Two Years, by Age Group**



	Members	Ruling Elders	Teaching Elders
Number of surveys sent .....	1,016	1,397	1,497
Number of undeliverable surveys and ineligible respondents.....	2	1	8
Number of surveys completed.....	472	796	922‡
Response rate .....	46%	57%	61%

‡Of the 922 returned surveys, 664 came from pastors and 258 from specialized ministers.

**The survey was mailed on May 17, 2012**, with returns accepted through August 8, 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 report will be available on the web or (for \$15) from Presbyterian Distribution Service (800-524-2612; order PDS# 2005612317). It will include tables with percentage responses to each survey question.

**For more information about PC(USA) Camp and Conference Ministries**, go to [www.pcusa.org/campandconference](http://www.pcusa.org/campandconference).

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