

PRESBYTERIAN PANEL SUMMARY

—Listening to Presbyterians—



EVANGELISM AUGUST 1996

The Presbyterian Panel consists of four nationally-representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders (lay leaders), pastors (ordained ministers serving a congregation), and specialized clergy (ordained ministers serving elsewhere). New samples are drawn every three years. These pages summarize major findings from the twelfth survey sent to panelists originally sampled in late 1993 and asked to serve from 1994 to 1996. The survey was initially mailed in August 1996, and returns were accepted until October 1997.

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Number of panelists	1,086	1,081	1,136	609
Number of questionnaires returned	671	707	791	432
Percent returned	62%	65%	70%	71%

Defining Evangelism

- When asked to select the best single definition of evangelism from four choices, majorities of pastors (57%) and specialized clergy (55%) choose this option: *evangelism is the joyful sharing of the sovereign love of God, calling people to repentance, to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to active membership in the church, and obedient service to the world.*
- Three (of nine) listed factors are selected by a majority of panelists in every sample as being, “to a great extent,” part of their own understanding of what is meant by the term *evangelism*:
 - *introducing people to the Realm of God* (chosen by 55% of members, 59% of pastors);
 - *providing opportunities for people to increase their understanding of what it means to accept Christ as their savior* (members, 55%; pastors, 64%); and
 - *providing opportunities to support people in their efforts to grow in faith* (members, 52%; pastors, 73%).
- *Pointing out the errors in beliefs of non-Presbyterians* is viewed by two-thirds of every sample as *not at all* part of their understanding of evangelism.

Doing Evangelism

- Two-thirds of members (65%) and three-fourths of elders (72%) report inviting at least one person to church during the year prior to the survey. Around three in ten members (29%) and four in ten elders (39%) report that, during the prior year, they had invited as many as four people to attend worship services at their congregation.
- 15% of members and 8% of elders report that either they have *never* invited anyone to visit their church, or they do not remember having done so.
- The person most-recently invited to church is described as a *friend* by 48% of members, as a *family member* by 27%, and as a *neighbor* by 20%.
- Fewer than 10% of pastors respond *to a great extent* when asked about their members’ participation in each of these activities:
 - *making telephone calls inviting people in the neighborhood;*
 - *door-to-door evangelism;*
 - *talking to associates and acquaintances about the meaning of the Christian faith;*
 - *studying and training to witness to others about their faith;* and
 - *making team visits to inactive members.*

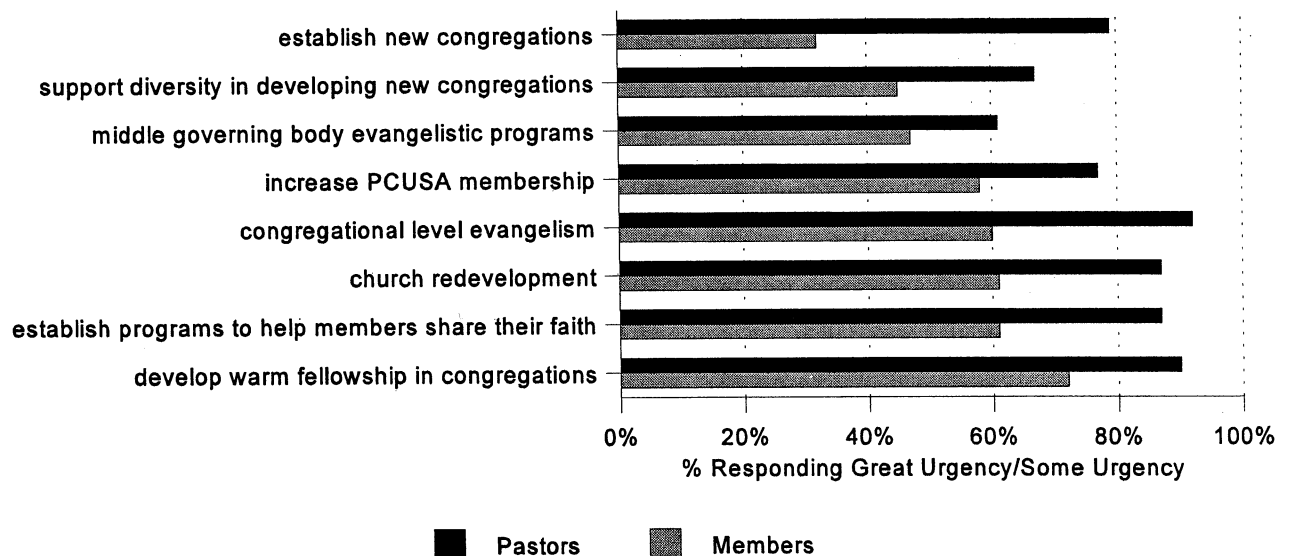
- According to pastors, six in ten members in their congregations are active either to a *great extent* or to *some extent* in *contacting people they already know [and] urging them to come to church*.
- Over eight in ten pastors report spending less than eight hours per month in reaching out to the unchurched. About one-half of pastors report spending two hours or less per month on such outreach.
- According to pastors, in the previous two years training on *faith-sharing or evangelism* in their congregation was much more likely to occur in a session committee (50% so report) than in the entire session (34%), and in a selected group of members (56%) than in the congregation at large (26%).

Prospects for Increased Outreach

- Few members (5%) and elders (8%) respond *very likely* when asked if they are *willing and able to allocate more time and effort* to reach out to the unchurched in their community. Another 28% of members and 36% of elders respond *likely*. Viewed differently, a majority of members (57%) and a large plurality of elders (46%) indicate they are either *not very likely* or *not at all likely* to find more time for evangelistic outreach.

- Among the subset of members and elders who report it *very likely* or *likely* that they could devote more time to evangelism, most estimate the additional time available at *four hours or less* per month.
- Overall, about one in seven members and one in five elders indicate *both* some likelihood of devoting more time to evangelism *and* a willingness to give five or more hours to that cause.
- When asked about the need for action by Presbyterians on several outreach matters:
 - in every sample, a majority, or large plurality (40%-49%), respond *great urgency* or *some urgency* to all listed activities (with the exception of new church development) (see Figure 1);
 - there is broad agreement across the samples as to the relative urgency of taking various actions, with *to develop a warm and open fellowship within congregations* receiving the most combined *great urgency* and *some urgency* responses from members and specialized clergy;
 - in general, more clergy than laity see an urgent need for each action, particularly in new church development.

Figure 1
Opinions of the Need for Action in Specific Areas of Outreach



Assigning Responsibility

- In every sample, a majority of panelists report that responsibility for membership growth or decline in congregations is shared among clergy, members, and session. However, more members than pastors see pastors as having *great* responsibility, and more pastors than members see members as having *great* responsibility.
- Majorities of 75% or more in every sample view *the demography of the surrounding neighborhood* as responsible either to a *great extent* or to *some extent* for a congregation's growth or decline.

Resources For Evangelism

- Few members and elders are familiar to any degree with most evangelism resources. Those that the most laity recognize are:
 - *Good News* newsletter (published by the PCUSA office of Evangelism and Church Development), with 35% of members and 41% of elders either *very familiar* or *somewhat familiar*;
 - the "Invite-A-Friend" program of the PCUSA, about which 20% of members and 22% of elders express some familiarity; and
 - the PCUSA's "Commitment to Evangelism" program, about which 13% of members and 28% of elders express some familiarity.

- A majority of pastors indicate familiarity with these resources:

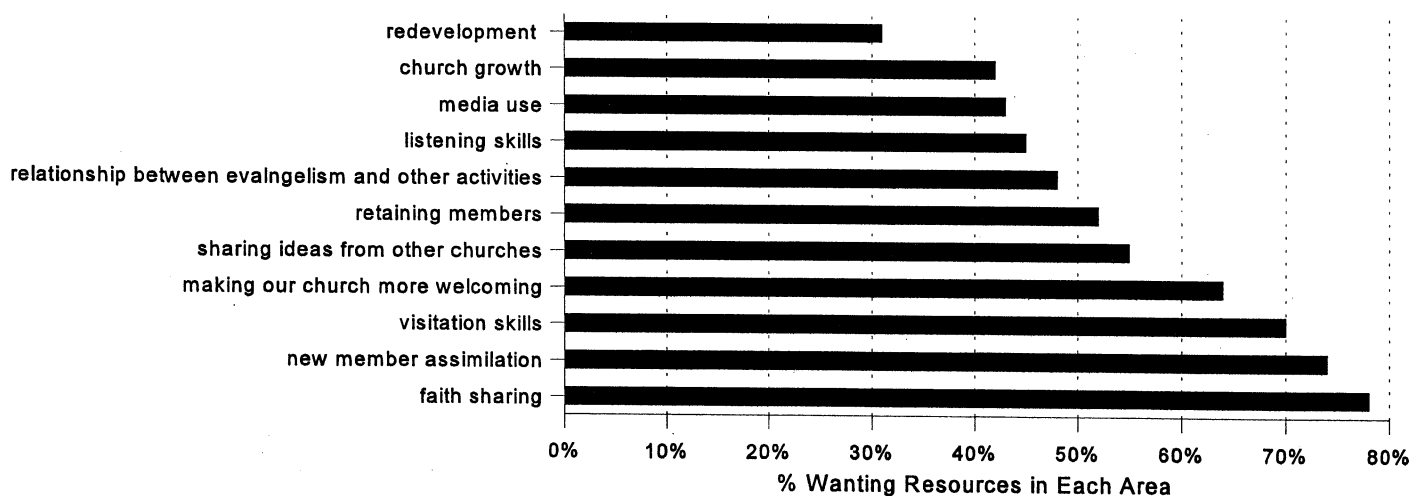
- *Good News* newsletter (52%);
- "Invite-A-Friend" program (67%);
- "Commitment to Evangelism" program (86%);
- the PCUSA's "Evangelism Resource Catalog and Bibliography" (52%);
- worship resources for PCUSA "Evangelism Sunday" (83%);
- regional "Celebrations of Evangelism" sponsored by the PCUSA (60%); and
- *Net Results* (an ecumenical periodical that focuses on evangelism) (62%).

- Majorities of pastors report that they are *not familiar* with each of these resources:

- "Lifestory Conversations" (a study booklet) (64%);
- "Covenant for Caring" (a faith-sharing training program using videos) (80%);
- PCUSA's "Institutes for Congregational Evangelism" (70%);
- *Faithful Witness* (a study book) (73%);
- *Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism is Jesus Christ's Way* (a PCUSA General Assembly resolution and study book) (65%).

- At least seven in ten pastors would like to have resources on the topics of *faith sharing*, *new member assimilation*, and *visitation skills* (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Interest in Resources for Evangelism Ministry: Pastors' Responses



- In response to a list of eight possible evangelism emphases, majorities in every sample indicate that they are either *moderately interested* or *extremely interested* in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *putting resources and efforts into: preparing Presbyterians to be better able to communicate their faith to others* (83% of members and 97% of pastor so responded).
- Relatively few panelists indicate that they are either *extremely interested* or *moderately interested* in the denomination putting resources and efforts into *holding local/regional evangelism rallies* (32% of members and 39% of pastors so responded) or *encouraging large-scale evangelism campaigns* (31% of members and 35% of pastors).

Continuing Education in Evangelism

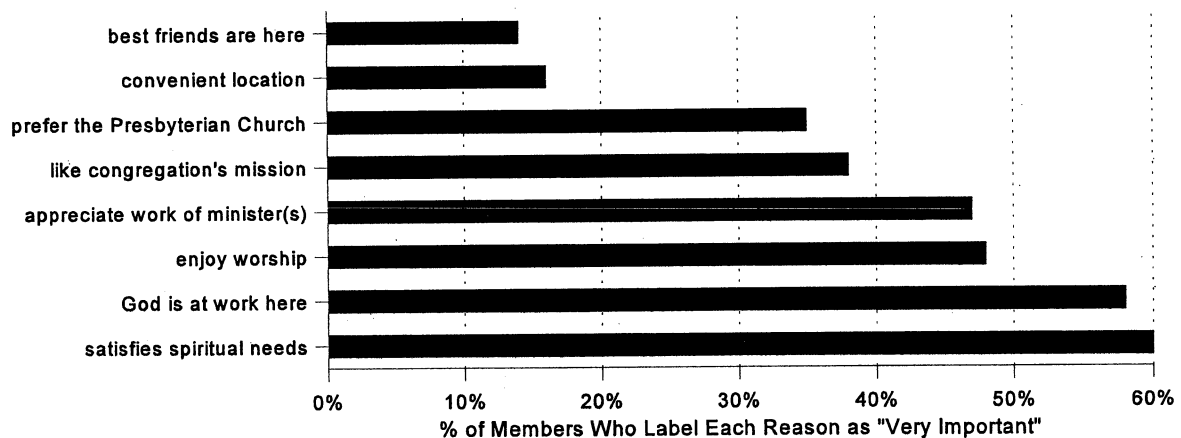
- A majority of pastors (54%) and a quarter of specialized clergy (27%) report that they received *continuing education* or *other training* in evangelism at least once in the prior five years.

- Half of the pastors (55%) and specialized clergy (53%) who had taken some continuing education or training in evangelism in the last five years rate that experience as *adequate*. Another quarter of each group (28% of pastors, 24% of other clergy) rate it as *more than adequate*.

Keeping The Faithful

- When asked to indicate the importance of each of 15 factors in their *decision to continue to attend their congregation*, majorities of members and elders rate two as *very important: it satisfies my spiritual needs* (60% of members and 67% of elders so respond), and *I believe God is at work in this place* (58% and 65%, respectively). (See Figure 3.)
- Few members and elders (20% or fewer in each sample) view *adequate parking, social programs, presence of friends or family, convenience of location, or the accessibility of the facilities* as *very important* factors in why they continue to attend their current congregation.

Figure 3
Why Members Continue to Attend Their Current Congregation



These results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. As a rule of thumb, differences of less than 6% between samples are not statistically meaningful.

Want more numbers or interpretation? A more detailed *Report* of the August 1996 results, containing charts and graphs, is available for \$5 from PDS (call 1-800-524-2612 and order PDS# 70-360-96-210). Included is a data appendix that displays the percentage responses to each survey question for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

Want more information on evangelism? Contact the office of Presbyterian Evangelism, 502-569-5252 or 502-569-5229.

The *Panel* is administered by the office of Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Additional copies of this *Summary* may be purchased directly from the Presbyterian Panel for \$0.75 each. Inquire about the cost of bulk orders to the same address.

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