

PRESBYTERIAN PANEL SUMMARY

—Listening to Presbyterians—



HIV/AIDS ISSUES MAY 1996

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Number of panelists	1,031	1,046	1,122	591
Number of questionnaires returned	712	726	851	444
Percent returned	69%	69%	76%	75%

The Presbyterian AIDS Network, or PAN, requested the May 1996 survey to gather information on individual awareness of issues related to AIDS and HIV, to find out more about ministries to persons with AIDS and other involvement in AIDS issues in PCUSA congregations, and to assess familiarity with PAN and its resources.

HIGHLIGHTS

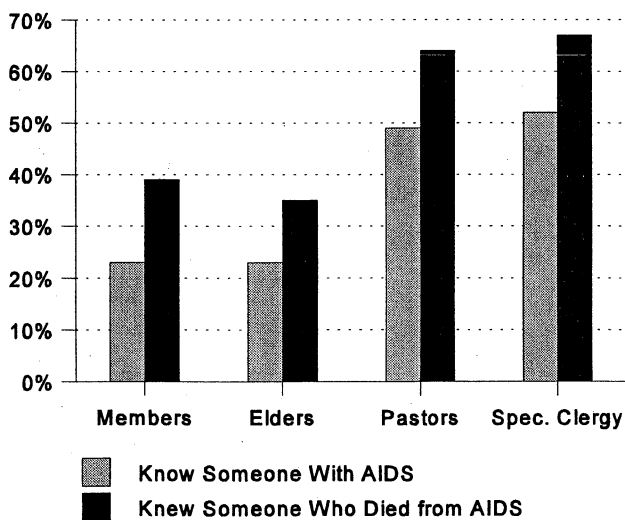
- A fourth of members and elders, but about one-half of pastors and other clergy, know someone who currently has AIDS. Even more have known someone who has died from AIDS, including 39% of members and 64% of pastors.
- Only 5% of members and 10% of pastors know (or know of) someone in their congregations who has publicly acknowledged infection with the AIDS-causing virus, HIV.
- Most panelists report some knowledge of facts and figures concerning the AIDS pandemic, but few describe themselves as “very knowledgeable.”
- A majority in every sample agrees that: “people living with AIDS deserve my respect”; “if someone I knew in my church had AIDS, I would visit them in the hospital”; and “I would support an AIDS outreach ministry in my church.”
- Relatively few congregations have ministries or programs related to AIDS issues, according to pastors. Pastors also report that formal discussions of AIDS-related matters have generally been infrequent in congregational groups.
- A slim majority of pastors, and just under one-half of members and elders, are open to the display of part of the AIDS Quilt in their congregations. However, smaller proportions believe that a majority of members in their congregations would be open to such a display.
- Few panelists—whether clergy or laity—have any idea whether or not their synod has a task force or program on AIDS. About one-fourth of pastors and other clergy report such programs in their presbyteries, but the real proportion is unclear, since almost one-half also responded “don’t know” to this question.
- About a quarter of members and elders, but large majorities of pastors and specialized clergy, report at least moderate awareness of PCUSA-produced resources on AIDS issues. Nevertheless, few of these panelists have actually read or used each of five specific resources.
- Only 10% of pastors report that their congregations celebrated “Presbyterian AIDS Awareness Sunday” in 1995, and even fewer—4%—report any observation of “World AIDS Day.”

MORE CLERGY THAN LAITY KNOW PERSONS WITH AIDS

Just under a quarter of members and elders (both 23%), and around one-half of pastors (49%) and specialized clergy (52%), indicated that they currently know someone who has acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS. An even greater proportion indicated that they had personally known someone who had died from AIDS, including over one-third of members and elders, and around two-thirds of pastors and specialized clergy.

When asked their connection to the person or persons they knew who had died from AIDS, most panelists in this subset (in every sample, at least two-thirds) identified them as acquaintances or friends from the past. Only about one in seven of these members and elders, one in six of the pastors, and one in four of the specialized clergy indicated that the person they had known had been a "close friend." Even fewer (in every sample, around 10% of this sample subset) indicated that the person was a family member or another relative. Extrapolating to the entire samples, about 3% of members and 6% of pastors overall reported having had a family member or other relative die from AIDS.

Percent Who Know Someone with AIDS or Have Known Someone Who Died from AIDS



FEW PANELISTS AWARE OF PERSONS WITH AIDS IN THEIR CONGREGATIONS

Relatively few panelists—5% of members, 10% of pastors—reported knowing (or knowing of) someone in their congregations who had "publicly acknowledged his

or her infection with the virus that causes AIDS." However, over a third of members (but only 6% of pastors) responded "don't know."

KNOWLEDGE OF AIDS ISSUES BROAD BUT NOT DEEP

Few panelists rated themselves as "very knowledgeable" on three aspects of the AIDS pandemic: its origins and spread (10% of members, 12% of pastors); the biochemistry of AIDS (9% of both members and pastors); and transmission (21% and 23%, respectively). Most other panelists, however, chose "knowledgeable" so that, together, majorities in every sample labeled themselves as either "very knowledgeable" or "knowledgeable" on each item (with one exception—only 44% of elders chose one of these two responses for the question on biochemistry).

A similar set of three items presented facts about the AIDS pandemic and asked panelists whether or not they previously knew each fact. Panelists expressed the greatest awareness of the fact that AIDS has spread to all populated continents (in every sample, at least 88% responded either "yes, definitely" or "yes, probably"), but combined "yes" responses were also at least 60% in every sample for the other two facts: that AIDS has become the number one cause of death among adults aged 25-44 in the United States and that over a half-million cases of AIDS have been identified in the United States since its discovery in the early 1980s.

PANELISTS SUPPORT MORE MINISTRY TO PERSONS WITH AIDS

Panelists were presented a series of ten statements, and asked to agree or disagree with each. In all samples, the combined "strongly agree" and "agree" responses were a majority for four of these statements: "people living with AIDS deserve my respect"; "if someone I knew in my church had AIDS, I would visit them in the hospital"; "I would support an AIDS outreach ministry in my church"; and "the risk is very low that I, personally, will get AIDS." On two other statements—"to prevent the spread of AIDS, advertisements for condoms should be permitted on prime-time television" and "names of people infected with the AIDS virus should be kept in confidence"—majorities of pastors and specialized clergy responded in agreement, but the proportions of members and elders who did so were below 50%. For example, while 52% of pastors and 61% of specialized clergy agreed with permitting condom ads on television, the proportions of members (45%) and elders (41%) in agreement were somewhat lower.

FEW WORRY ABOUT GETTING AIDS

For three other statements, large majorities in every sample (60% or greater) responded either “strongly disagree” or “disagree”: “AIDS is a gay white man’s disease”; “the federal government spends too much money on AIDS research”; and “regardless of risk, I worry a lot about getting AIDS.”

PRIVACY V. PUBLIC HEALTH: OPINION IS MIXED

Opinion was mixed in response to the remaining statement: “stopping the spread of AIDS is more important than protecting the rights of people with AIDS.” Combined, the “both agree and disagree” and “no opinion” response choices totaled 49% for specialized clergy, 47% for pastors, and 41% for both elders and members. Among members and elders who chose another response, most came down on the agree side (for example, 44% of all members responded in agreement, while only 15% responded in disagreement). Among pastors, opinion was much more evenly divided (28% responded in agreement, 26%, disagreement), and more specialized clergy actually responded in disagreement (27%) than agreement (24%).

IN CONGREGATIONS, AIDS-RELATED MINISTRIES ARE FEW . . .

Relatively few congregations have had ministries or programs related to AIDS, according to pastors. Only one in seven pastors (13%) indicated that their congregations have “provided space for an AIDS-related group or ministry to meet,” and only one in six (18%) have “recruited volunteers for one or more AIDS ministries elsewhere in the community.” Even fewer—7%—reported sponsorship of “one or more AIDS care teams (i.e., groups of volunteer caregivers who minister to one person with AIDS at a time).”

. . . AS ARE GROUP DISCUSSIONS OF AIDS ISSUES

Even the formal discussion of AIDS and related issues is a relatively infrequent event in most congregations. According to pastors, such formal discussions have occurred “frequently” among youth in only 3% of the congregations they serve, and in another 36%, “occasionally.” Just under one-fourth responded “never.” Formal discussions of AIDS issues were reported with similarly low frequencies in three other categories of congregational members: young adults (2%, frequently; 33%, never); parents of youth (1%, frequently; 34%, never); and older adults (1%, frequently; 40%, never).

Consistently, only 30% of pastors indicated that they had ever “led a discussion or presented information on HIV/AIDS to [their] congregation[s] or one or more groups within it.”

AIDS AWARENESS SUNDAY OBSERVED BY FEW CONGREGATIONS

Only 10% of pastors indicated that their congregations had observed “Presbyterian AIDS Awareness Sunday” during the previous October. Most of these pastors—84%—reported that the observation took place during a regular service of worship. Even fewer pastors (4%) reported that their congregations had observed World AIDS Day in 1995.

AIDS POLICIES FOR CHURCH NURSERIES, DAY SCHOOLS ARE RARE

Very few pastors reported that their congregations have an AIDS policy for either the church nursery or for a week-day school or child-care program using church facilities. Of the pastors who reported no current policy, 39% indicated that there would be an interest in the congregation for resources that address the issue.

MANY FAVOR DISPLAY OF AIDS QUILT . . .

A large minority of both members and elders (45% of each sample) indicated their personal openness to the display of “part . . . of the AIDS Quilt that memorializes individuals who have died from AIDS,” as did a small majority of pastors (52%) and almost two-thirds of specialized clergy (65%). If we ignore the “don’t know” and “not familiar with the AIDS Quilt” responses—in effect, looking at only the responses of those who expressed a definite opinion—then support for the quilt’s display increases to 64% among members, 67% among elders, 66% among pastors, and 78% among specialized clergy.

. . . BUT ARE LESS CERTAIN ABOUT OTHERS’ SUPPORT

We also asked panelists to indicate the receptiveness of the rest of their congregations to such a quilt display. Opinions were mixed, with a fair proportion of “not sure” responses (at least 12%) in every sample. Overall, more panelists believed that a majority of their congregations would be receptive (e.g., 32% of members, 43% of pastors) than in opposition (24% of members, 26% of pastors). Nonetheless, another sizable proportion in every sample felt that “about as many would be receptive as would be opposed” (21% of members, 20% of pastors).

In short, panelists themselves indicated greater openness to a display of the AIDS quilt than they anticipated would be the case generally in their congregations.

FEW KNOW OF MIDDLE GOVERNING BODY POLICIES

In parallel questions, panelists were asked whether or not a "task force or program on AIDS" exists in their synod or in their presbytery. When asked about their synods, eight out of ten pastors and specialized clergy, and over nine of ten members and elders, responded "don't know." Almost as many members (90%) and elders (88%) responded "don't know" to the presbytery question, as did just under one-half of pastors (45%) and specialized clergy (48%). Among the remaining pastors, about as many (27% overall) chose "yes" as chose "no" (29%). The pattern was similar among specialized clergy, with 29% responding "yes," and 23%, "no."

MANY UNAWARE OF PAN, OTHER PCUSA INVOLVEMENT IN AIDS ISSUES . . .

Few panelists (ranging from 3% of members to 21% of specialized clergy) indicated that they were "very aware" of "the involvement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in HIV/AIDS issues." While more reported that they were "somewhat aware" (including 60% of pastors and 53% of specialized clergy), overall only 22% of members and 27% of elders indicated that they were either "very aware" or "somewhat aware" of the church's involvement on this issue.

Consistently, even fewer panelists in every sample indicated awareness of the Presbyterian AIDS Network (PAN), ranging from *less than* 0.5% of members to 13% of specialized clergy. Relatively few members indicated that they were even "somewhat aware" of PAN (6%). Overall, fewer than 10% of members and elders, 46% of

pastors, and 43% of specialized clergy indicated that they were either "very aware" or "somewhat aware" of PAN.

. . . AND ONLY A MINORITY OF THESE HAVE USED PCUSA-PRODUCED RESOURCES

The subset of panelists who indicated any familiarity at all with resources on AIDS issues produced by PAN or other entities of the PCUSA were asked to further specify their familiarity with particular resources. Majorities of members and elders—often large majorities—responded "not at all familiar" to each of five resources: *Talking with Your Family about HIV/AIDS*; *HIV/AIDS: Stories of Mutual Ministry* (video and use guide); *AIDS and the Church's Ministry* (January/February 1989 issue of *Church and Society* magazine); *PANdemic*, the newsletter of PAN; and worship resources produced for the annual "Presbyterian AIDS Awareness Sunday." Most of the remainder responded "aware, but never used or read it." Among elders, the most widely read resource was *AIDS and the Church's Ministry*, so reported by 14%; among members, it was the "AIDS Awareness Sunday" resources (7%).

Clergy panelists indicated greater rates of use for all resources, although nowhere near a majority of pastors or specialized clergy indicated that they had used or read any particular item. The highest "used or read" responses were also for the issue of *Church and Society* on AIDS (23% of pastors and 24% of specialized clergy so reported), but two other resources were reported as "used or read" by similar proportions of both samples: *Talking with Your Family about HIV/AIDS* (pastors, 22%; specialized clergy, 20%) and worship resources for "AIDS Awareness Sunday" (22% and 20%, respectively).

aids.sum

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. A copy of the *Report* of the May 1996 *Presbyterian Panel* can be ordered from PDS (Call 1-800-524-2612 and order PDS #70-360-96-209). Or, send a check for \$5 payable to the Presbyterian Panel (no cash, please) to this address:

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