

PRESBYTERIAN PANEL SUMMARY

—Listening to Presbyterians—



THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION NOVEMBER 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 13th survey sent to panelists originally sampled in late 1993 and asked to serve from 1994 to 1996. The survey was initially mailed in November 1996, and returns were accepted until January 1997.

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Questionnaires sent:	1019	1036	1113	585
Questionnaires returned:	616	668	780	416
Percent returned:	60%	64%	70%	71%

Knowledge of Theological Schools

- About half of members (48%) and a third of elders (36%) reported that they know “almost nothing” about any of the 11 Presbyterian theological schools.
- About half of members (41%) and elders (50%) know “with certainty” the name of the theological school from which their pastor graduated.

Theological Schools’ Response to the Needs of the Church

- Given this lack of knowledge, it is not surprising that most (60% of members and 46% of elders) indicated that they “don’t know” whether Presbyterian theological schools “have responded to the needs of the church in the last ten years” or not.
- In contrast, almost three-quarters of pastors and specialized clergy believe that the denomination’s seminaries have responded “to a great extent” or “to some extent” to the needs of the church in the last ten years.
- One-quarter of pastors 50 years of age and over, compared to 18% of those under 50 years of age, believe seminaries have responded “to a great extent”

to the church’s needs. At the other end of the scale, 26% of pastors under 50 years of age think the seminaries have responded “to a little extent” or “have not responded at all,” compared to 19% of those over 50 who responded in this manner.

- Pastors who describe their theological position as liberal were more likely than were those who describe their position as conservative to indicate that seminaries *have* responded to the needs of the church in the last ten years. A similar pattern of responses was found for specialized clergy.

Theological Schools’ Performance in Educating Presbyterian Students

- Panelists believe that Presbyterian theological schools do a better job of educating Presbyterian students than do non-Presbyterian theological schools. At least one third of members and elders and slightly more than half of pastors and specialized clergy “agree” or “strongly agree” that “Presbyterian theological schools do an excellent job of educating Presbyterian students.” This compares to no more than 20% of panelists in any sample who “agree” or “strongly agree” that “*non*-Presbyterian schools do an excellent job educating Presbyterian students” (10% of members, 20% of pastors so responded).

- The percentage of panelists who responded “not sure” regarding the effectiveness of theological schools was much larger when they were asked about the performance of non-Presbyterian theological schools.
- Many panelists are “not sure” if “the quality of Presbyterians graduating from theological schools has fallen in the last ten years” or if “Presbyterian theological schools are turning out too many graduates these days.” Over 60% of members, about half of elders, and from one-sixth to one-fifth of pastors and specialized clergy responded “not sure” regarding these two issues.
- Members and elders are also somewhat hesitant to express an opinion as to whether “Presbyterian theological schools turn out pastors who are able to help members practice their faith.” One-third of members (36%) and 24% of elders responded “not sure” regarding this issue.
- Panelists were presented with a list of 21 words and phrases and asked to indicate the extent to which they believe each describes Presbyterian theological schools. These items are listed in Table 1 in rank order based on the percentage of members who think each describes Presbyterian theological schools either “very well” or “well.” (It should be noted that large percentages of members responded “not sure” to each.)
- Members who consider themselves to be liberal or very liberal on theological issues are much more likely to say that “biblical sound” describes our seminaries “very well” or “well” than are those who describe themselves as very conservative. A similar pattern was found for elders, pastors, and specialized clergy. (Note that the percentages for members and elders are influenced by the large percentages who responded “not sure.”)

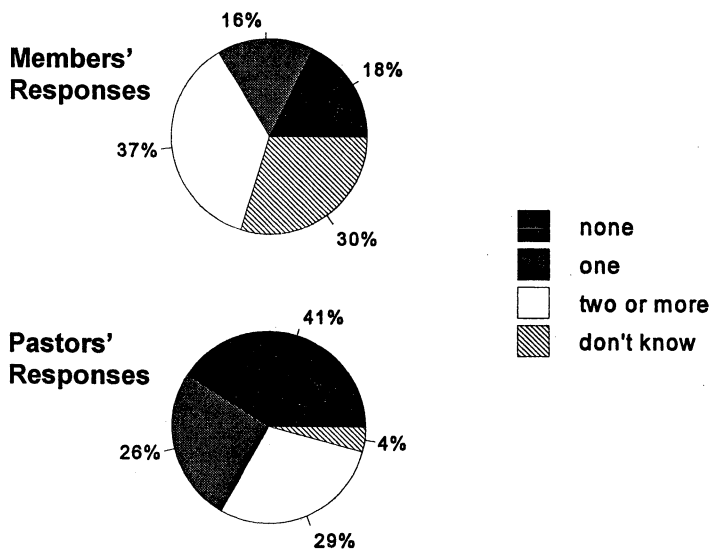
Table 1
Perceptions of Presbyterian Theological Schools
Members’ and Pastors’ Responses

	Percentage Responding	
	Members	Pastors
faithful to the church of Jesus Christ	50%	59%
Biblically sound	49%	63%
academic excellence	48%	83%
affirming the ministry of women	42%	89%
socially responsible	37%	54%
committed to ecumenism	35%	77%
committed to promoting inclusiveness and diversity	34%	80%
spiritually rich	33%	26%
committed to the Reformed tradition	32%	63%
financially sound, yet in need of ongoing support	32%	57%
traditional	30%	38%
racially inclusive	30%	59%
focused on practical skills for pastors	28%	24%
setting directions for the church	25%	17%
liberal	25%	44%
innovative	19%	29%
evangelical	18%	20%
moderate/middle of the road	17%	22%
conservative	16%	8%
on the cutting edge of theology	14%	40%
wealthy and not in need of additional funding	5%	5%

Seminaries and Congregations

- About one-fifth of panelists reported that their congregation has “a program to help identify candidates for ministry.” Larger percentages of respondents (28% of members, 41% of pastors) report that their presbytery has such a program. Nonetheless, large percentages of members and elders responded “not sure” regarding each.
- Panelists were asked to indicate how many persons from their congregation “attended seminary as candidates or inquirers for the ministry” in the last ten years. As Figure 1 shows, many members “don’t know.” The largest percentage of pastors reported that there had been no one from their congregation who attended seminary during that period. About one-quarter of pastors indicated that one person had attended seminary, and one in ten have had four or more persons attend seminary in the past ten years.

Figure 1
How Many People From Your Congregation Attended Seminary as Candidates or Inquirers for Ministry in the Last Ten Years?



- When asked if a representative from a Presbyterian theological school had preached in their congregation in the last five years, almost half of members (47%) and elders (43%), and one-third of pastors (34%), responded “yes.”

Giving to Theological Schools

- Just 17% of members and 32% of elders reported having received an appeal for funds from a

theological school in the previous two years. In contrast, almost all clergy had received such an appeal (96% of pastors; 94% of specialized clergy).

- Only 7% of members and 13% of elders, but two-thirds of clergy have “personally made one or more financial contributions to a theological school” in the last two years.

The 1% Plan

- Only 8% of members and 18% of elders reported familiarity with the Theological Education Fund (the 1% Plan). In contrast, 92% of pastors are familiar with this fund-raising program. Surprisingly, only 72% of specialized clergy are familiar with the 1% Plan.
- More than three-quarters of members and elders, but only 16% of pastors and 26% of specialized clergy, indicated that, before receiving the survey, they did *not* know that “the only denomination-wide source of funding for the theological schools of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the Theological Education Fund.”
- Almost six in ten members and almost half of elders indicated they were also not aware that “money given directly to a Presbyterian theological school supports only that particular school.” Only 6% of clergy were not aware of this.

What Should Seminaries Emphasize?

- Panelists were presented with a list of 13 potential areas of emphasis for theological schools and asked to indicate to what extent Presbyterian theological schools *should* emphasize each “in their programs of research, study and training of candidates for ministry.” The largest percentages of members and elders believe that seminaries should emphasize “personal/spiritual development,” while pastors and specialized clergy are more likely to stress “preaching.” Nonetheless, in each sample, “personal/spiritual development,” “preaching,” and “pastoral care” are the three that appear to be most important.

Sources of Information about Theological Schools

- “Pastor” and “family and friends” were the items members and elders were most likely to identify as “very significant” sources of information about

Presbyterian theological schools. The largest percentages of pastors and specialized clergy also identified "pastor" as having a "very significant" impact on their impressions of our theological schools.

Rating the Performance of Pastors and Seminaries

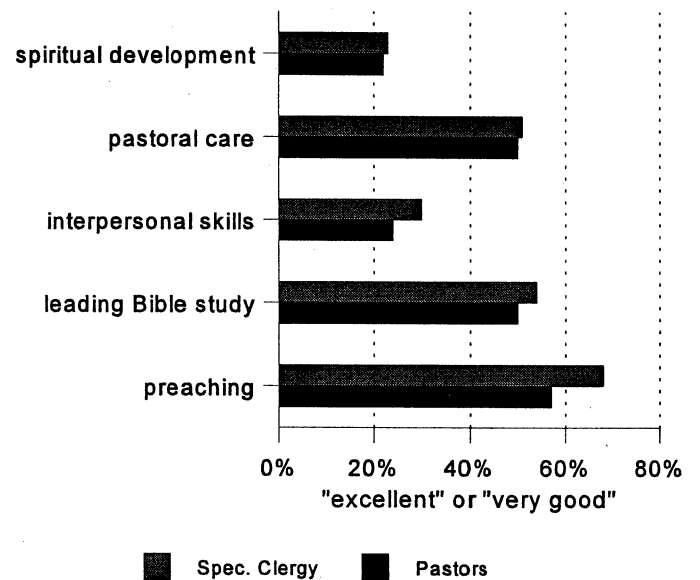
- Large majorities of members and elders report that their pastors are doing an "excellent" or "very good" job in these five areas: "preaching," "leading Bible study," "pastoral care," "leading people in spiritual development," and "general interpersonal skills" (see Figure 2). The smallest percentages rated their pastors similarly in terms of their performance in "teaching others to do evangelism" (35% of members, 32% of elders).

Figure 2
How Would You Rate Your Pastor in the Following Areas?



- Pastors and specialized clergy were asked to rate the same areas in terms of how well their seminary did in preparing them for ministry in these areas. The five areas in which members rated their pastors most favorably were the same areas in which pastors reported their seminaries did the best job (Figure 3).

Figure 3
How Would You Rate Your Seminary in Terms of How Well it Prepared you for Ministry in . . . ?



- Another way to look at these results is to examine the areas in which panelists gave the most negative responses. This shows that "teaching others to do evangelism," "financial management," and "promoting stewardship" are not seen as strengths, either in pastors' performance or in the preparation provided by seminaries.

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 November 1996 results, containing charts and graphs, is available for \$5 from PDS (call 1-800-524-2612 and order PDS# 70-360-96-211). 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 Theological Education? Contact the office of Theological Education at 502-569-5312.

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 \$1.25 each. Inquire about the cost of bulk orders to the same address.

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