The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally-representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders (lay leaders), and ordained ministers (for analysis, split into two groups based on current call: pastors, serving in a congregation, and specialized clergy, serving elsewhere). New samples are drawn every three years. These pages summarize major findings from the third survey completed by the 1997-1999 Panel.

**ENCOUNTERING NATURE**

**God and Nature**

✓ A majority of panelists believe in the sacredness of nature, with most attributing that sacredness to God’s role as Creator:

![Pie charts showing percentages of Members and Pastors regarding nature's sacredness]

- 58% of Members believe nature is sacred because it is created by God
- 72% of Pastors believe nature is sacred because it is created by God
- 22% of Members believe nature is spiritual or sacred in itself
- 6% of Pastors believe nature is spiritual or sacred in itself
- 20% of Members believe nature is important, but not spiritual or sacred
- 22% of Pastors believe nature is important, but not spiritual or sacred

✓ Most panelists—89% or more in each sample—agree that they “often feel the presence of God when . . . out in nature.”

✓ Around nine in every ten panelists in each sample agree that one thing they “enjoy most in life is going someplace like the woods, the mountains, or the ocean to be surrounded by nature.”

✓ More than two-thirds of members (72%) and elders (69%), as well as majorities of pastors (56%) and specialized clergy (51%), agree that “nature is far more beautiful than things made by humankind.”

**Outdoor Activities**

✓ Four in every five Presbyterians take part fairly regularly in two types of outdoor activity: “gardening/yard work” and “walking/running/jogging.”

✓ Other outdoor pursuits that at least a third in every Panel sample have done five or more times in the last year include “visiting a local park” (members, 45%; pastors, 60%); “water sports” (36% and 42%, respectively); and “bird watching” (34%, 32%).

✓ At least one-half of members and elders report that in the past year they have never participated in these outdoor activities: “skiing/ice skating” (77% of members and 79% of elders so respond); “camping” (68%, 67%); “fishing” (65%, 61%); “hiking/backpacking” (58%, 57%); and “bicycling” (both 50%).

✓ Large majorities of pastors report never when asked about participation over the previous year in “skiing/ice skating” (69%) and “fishing” (61%), but only a minority report never participating in “hiking/backpacking,” “camping,” and “bicycling.” Still, the percentage of pastors who report participating five or more times in the past year in “camping” is only 11%; in “hiking/backpacking,” 24%; and in “bicycling,” 30%.
ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

Ranking the Seriousness of Various Problems

✓ From a list of 26 “environmental problems,” a majority in each sample rate the following ones as among the most serious:

- destruction of ozone layer
- destruction of natural areas
- destruction of rain forests
- air pollution

[Bar chart showing percentages of members and pastors]

✓ Other problems that are one of the most serious according to a majority in at least one sample are:

- “agricultural runoff”
- “consumer demand for more material goods”
- “consumption of oil, gas, and other nonrenewable resources”
- “destruction of swamps and wetlands”
- “environmental contamination from chemical waste disposal”
- “environmental contamination from nuclear waste disposal”
- “oil spillage from tankers and pipelines in lakes, rivers, oceans”
- “rapid population growth in poor countries”
- “water pollution from disposal of waste products by manufacturing plants”

✓ Few panelists (members, 10%; pastors, 7%) oppose the use of “animals for medical testing if it might save human lives.”

Evolution

✓ Did human beings evolve from other biological species? Presbyterians hold differing views. Around one-third of members (31%) and elders (32%) agree that “human beings developed from earlier species of animals.” However, even more members (47%) and elders (49%) disagree.

✓ On another Darwinian theme, two-thirds of members and elders, and around one-half of clergy, agree to some extent that “nature is really a fierce struggle for survival of the fittest.” But relatively few hold this opinion with intensity: the percentage of strongly agree responses range from 7% among both clergy samples, to 15% among members.

Faith & Science

✓ For most panelists, the pendulum has swung too far toward science and away from “feelings and faith.” That is, one-half or more in every sample (60% of members, 55% of elders, 56% of pastors, and 50% of specialized clergy) indicate that, to the detriment of faith, “we believe too often in science and technology . . .”

✓ Consistently, anywhere from 43% (elders) to 62% (specialized clergy) disagree with the statement, “New technologies will surely come along to solve environmental problems before they get out of hand.”

✓ The sense that faith has been pushed too far into the shadow of science does not mean that most panelists dismiss science out of hand: majorities (elders, 57%; pastors, 58%, and specialized clergy, 55%) or a large minority (members, 49%) in every sample disagree that “any change humans cause in nature—no matter how scientific—is likely to make things worse.”

Animal Rights

✓ Large majorities—ranging from 80% of elders to 87% of specialized clergy—agree that “animals . . . as creatures made by God . . . have inherent value in God’s sight.”

✓ When asked whether or not “Animals should have the same moral rights as human beings do,” 48% of members, 57% of elders, 63% of pastors, and 58% of specialized clergy disagree.
Recycling & Retrenching

✓ Most panelists “recycle household items such as newspapers, cans, and bottles”; at least 84% in every sample do so on a regular basis, and most of the rest do so from time to time.

✓ In every sample, about one-half of the panelists (48% of pastors, 49% of members and elders, and 51% of specialized clergy) report that they, on a regular basis, “take steps to reduce the amount of items their household puts into the waste system.” Of the remainder, most—ranging from 37% of pastors to 39% of specialized clergy—do so from time to time.

✓ “Cutting down on the use of automobiles by using public transportation, car pooling, bicycling, etc.” is not a widespread practice among Presbyterians. Many never forsake their cars for more energy-friendly alternatives. And among those who do leave the automobile at home, most do so from time to time (e.g., 27% of members, 31% of pastors) rather than on a regular basis (8% of members, 12% of pastors).

Voting “Green”

✓ One-half of members (52%) and elders (50%) have “voted for or against a candidate for public office because of that candidate’s stand on environmental issues,” although relatively few (18% and 15%, respectively) have done so on a regular basis. Even more pastors (61%) and, especially, specialized clergy (75%) report political votes that were influenced by environmental issues, including 22% and 34%, respectively, who have on a regular basis cast environmentally-influenced votes.

✓ Anywhere from one-sixth (elders, 16%) to almost one-third (specialized clergy, 29%) of panelists report writing “letters to politicians expressing opinions on environmental issues.” For most, such correspondence has been occasional; only 2% of members, elders, and pastors, and 5% of specialized clergy, have written letters of this type on a regular basis.

Organizational Memberships

✓ Around one in five or six members (17%), elders (18%), and pastors (20%) are dues-paying members of an environmentally-related organization, such as the National Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, or Ducks Unlimited. The rate is a bit higher among specialized clergy, at 29%. The proportions who report that they ever volunteer time to an organization or program primarily concerned with environmental issues is similar, including 18% of both members and elders, 20% of pastors, and 23% of specialized clergy.

Wearing the Environmental Mantle

✓ One-half or more in every sample label themselves as “stewards of God’s creation,” “conservationists,” “preservationists,” and “environmentalists”.

Willingness to Pay

✓ Compared to members and elders, more pastors and other clergy are willing to make personal financial and consumptive sacrifices to protect the environment. A fifth of pastors (21%) and a quarter of specialized clergy (26%), but only 11% of members and 12% of elders, report they are very willing to “pay much higher prices.”
The Greening of the Church

Churches and the Environment: A Good Fit?

✓ Majorities in every sample (68% of members and elders, 91% of pastors, and 96% of specialized clergy) agree that “environmental issues are appropriate social concerns for the church.” In fact, a majority of both pastors (58%) and specialized clergy (74%) agree completely.

✓ More panelists agree than disagree with the statement, “My congregation should become more involved in environmental issues.” Agree responses for each sample are: members, 52%; elders, 51%; pastors, 74%; and specialized clergy, 91%.

Knowledge of PCUSA Programs & Resources

✓ Few lay panelists (10% or less) express awareness of any PCUSA environmental programs or initiatives. Only 5% of members indicate that they know of the church’s “office of Environmental Justice,” and only 6% indicate knowledge of the General-Assembly-approved policy statement on the environment (“Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice”). Around one-half of pastors (54%) and specialized clergy (49%) have heard of the Environmental Justice office, and 70% and 59%, respectively, know of the “Restoring Creation” policy.

Congregations and the Environment

✓ More than two-thirds of pastors report that during the last year all or part of their congregations “participated in a community recycling program” (72%) and “took steps to reduce the energy consumption in church buildings” (78%).

✓ According to pastors, 29% of PCUSA congregations held a Sunday worship service with an environmental theme in the last year, most “on or around Earth Day (April 22).”

✓ More pastors than laity report at least one sermon “emphasizing environmental issues” in worship in the last year:

In Last Year: A Sermon Emphasizing Environmental Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Pastors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49% Yes</td>
<td>42% Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16% No</td>
<td>7% No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36% Not Sure</td>
<td>7% Not Sure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This survey was initially mailed in May 1997, and returns were accepted until August 1997. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. As a general rule, differences of less than 6% between samples are not statistically meaningful.

For more numbers and interpretation of the May 1997 Presbyterian Panel results, a longer report with additional charts and graphs is available for $5. Contact PDS (call 1-800-524-2612) and order PDS # 70360-97252. Included is a data appendix that presents the percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

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