



The Presbyterian Panel

Listening to Presbyterians



SUMMARY

SABBATH KEEPING—THE MAY 1999 SURVEY

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 eleventh survey completed by the 1997-1999 Panel.

IMAGES OF SUNDAY AND SABBATH

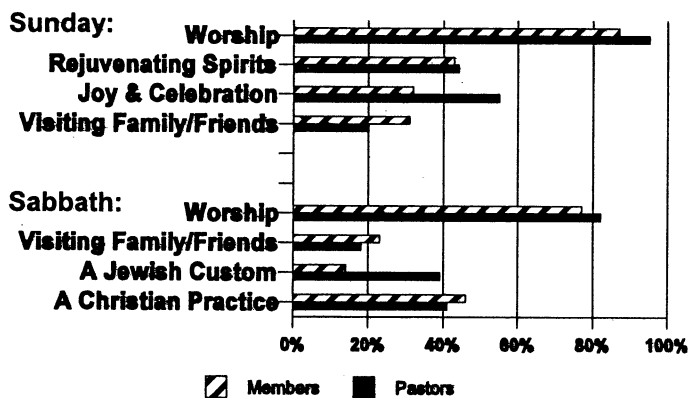
Views of Sunday

- ✓ Almost all panelists associate the words “going to church” and “worship” with the word “Sunday.” (See Figure 1.)
- ✓ Other frequent associations with “Sunday” are the phrases “honoring the Sabbath,” “rejuvenating your spirits,” and “joy and celebration.”
- ✓ Few panelists associate “Sunday” with “rules and restrictions”; no more than 3% in any sample are *very likely* to view Sunday as a day of “rules and restrictions.”

Views of Sabbath

- ✓ Majorities of panelists in every sample associate the term “Sabbath” with “a particular day of the week” and with “worship.” No other word or phrase is *very likely* linked to the term “Sabbath” by more than half of any sample.
- ✓ Other relatively common associations with Sabbath include “a Christian practice,” and “rest and restoration.” In all samples more panelists think of “Sabbath” as “a Christian practice” than think of it as “a Jewish custom” (although many think of it as both).

Figure 1
Images of Sunday and Sabbath



Percent *very likely* to associate each word with “Sunday” (top) or “Sabbath” (bottom)

What is Sabbath Keeping?

- ✓ Majorities of pastors (62%) and large minorities of the other three samples (47%—49%) rate as *excellent* a definition of Sabbath keeping as “resting from our work so God can do God’s work in us” through such practices as “corporate worship, private devotions, and deep enjoyment of other persons and the world around us.” Almost all other panelists rate this definition as *good*.
- ✓ Most pastors (63%) and specialized clergy (59%) are either *very comfortable* or *generally comfortable* with the idea of separating “Sabbath keeping” from Sunday (or any other specific day of the week). Members and elders are more divided.

SUNDAY ACTIVITIES

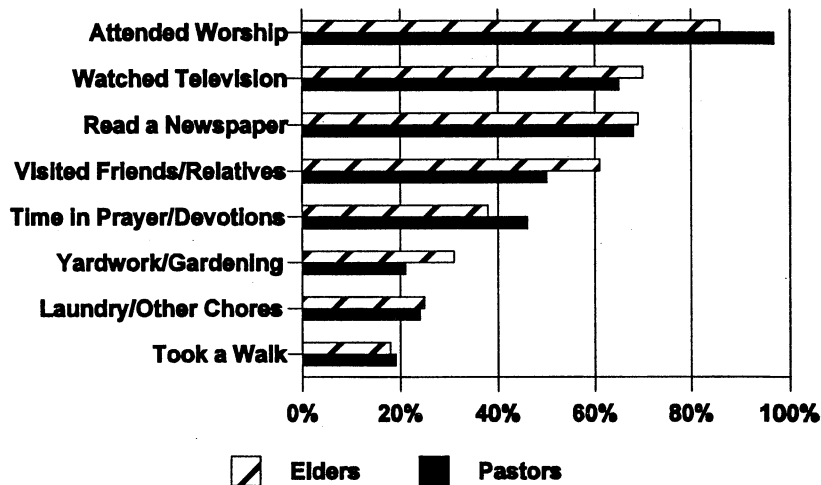
Last Sunday

- ✓ On the Sunday prior to completing the survey, majorities (or large minorities) in every sample: attended a morning worship service; read a newspaper; watched television; visited with friends or relatives; participated in church activities; relaxed/took a nap; read a book or magazine. (See Figure 2.)
- ✓ Infrequent activities on the previous Sunday (less than 10% in any sample report them) include: traveling on business; traveling on vacation; being ill at home; washing a car; mowing the lawn; doing volunteer work in the community; participating in sports; attending a sporting event; attending a movie, play, concert, or exhibit.
- ✓ A quarter of members and elders, almost all pastors, and eight in ten specialized clergy report “working for pay in a job or call” on Sunday in the past year. A large majority of pastors (95%) worked at least 40 Sundays over the year. Only 5% of members and 7% of elders worked for pay on that many Sundays. About half of members (48%) and elders (57%) who had worked on one or more Sundays during the year had worked on fewer than 10 Sundays.

Sundays in the Past

- ✓ Generally permissible Sunday activities when panelists were growing up include:
 - cooking meals (*never avoided* by 89% of elders and 90% of pastors)
 - listening to the radio (*never avoided* by 82% of elders and 84% of pastors)
 - playing games (*never avoided* by 78% and 85%, respectively)
 - playing recorded music (*never avoided* by 74% and 85%)
 - doing schoolwork (*never avoided* by 74% and 81%)
 - traveling (*never avoided* by 72% and 79%)
 - performing/practicing a musical instrument (*never avoided* by 70% and 80%)
 - watching television (*never avoided* by 60% and 69%)

Figure 2
How Sundays are Spent



Percent who took part in each activity “last Sunday”

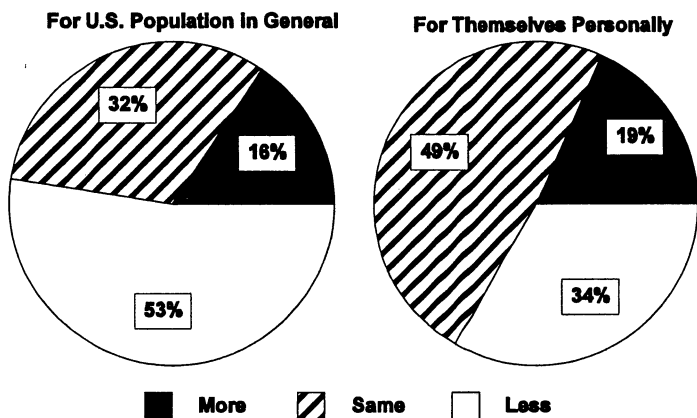
- ✓ Nine in ten panelists in every sample remember a time when “most stores were closed on Sunday.” and theaters; for example, 95% of pastors over age 60 remember living where stores were closed on Sundays, compared to 78% of pastors less than 40 years of age.
- ✓ When growing up, activities *always avoided* or *usually avoided* on Sunday by a majority in at least one Panel sample include:
 - shopping for clothes (*always or usually avoided* by 74% of elders and 70% of pastors)
 - grocery shopping (*always or usually avoided* by 70% of elders and 66% of pastors)
 - other household shopping (73% and 68%, respectively)
 - mowing the lawn/other yard work (47% and 46%)
- ✓ Majorities of members (58%) and elders (58%) and seven in ten pastors (71%) and specialized clergy (69%) report that, when they were children, their families attended “worship at church on Sunday morning” *every week*. Only a few panelists, ranging from 4% of elders to 2% of both clergy groups, report that they *never* attended church as children.

Leisure

- ✓ Most panelists believe that the amount of free time each of them individually has available for discretionary purposes has not changed appreciably over the last year.
- ✓ Majorities in every sample (elders, 53%; specialized clergy, 60%) report that they do *not* “wish there were more than 24 hours in the day.” Nevertheless, large minorities (elders 36%; specialized clergy, 31%) report that they are “frequently so busy I don’t have time to stop and think” and that they “don’t usually get enough sleep” (elders, 36%; specialized clergy, 33%).

Figure 3

Pastors’ Perceptions of Available Free Time Compared with Five Years Ago



- ✓ When asked what they might do with the additional time were days lengthened to 25 hours, member preferences included (percentage *very likely* to “use a significant portion of that additional time to”):
 - read for pleasure (23%)
 - spend quiet time alone (17%)
 - visit with family/friends (14%)
 - participate in church (14%)
 - sleep/nap/rest (13%)
 - listen to music (12%)
 - read the Bible (9%)
 - volunteer in the community (9%)
 - take up a hobby (8%)
 - exercise (8%)
 - spend time with people in need (5%)
 - work for pay (2%)
 - watch television (2%)

Understanding Changes in Sunday

- ✓ More than eight in ten panelists in every sample *agree* that “Presbyterians a generation or two back took observance of the Sabbath more seriously than we do today.”
- ✓ Panelists believe that a variety of factors are responsible for shifts in recent decades in the way time is spent on Sundays in the United States. Among the most important ones are (parentheses show percentage of members who rated each factor as responsible to a *very great extent* or a *great extent*):
 - people themselves, seeking more individual freedom (77%)
 - culture of materialism and consumption (71%)
 - increased participation of women and mothers in the labor force (70%)
 - declines in church participation (69%)
 - growth of television and other telecommunication (66%)
 - changing economic conditions that make it difficult for one wage earner to support an entire family (65%)
 - cultural overemphasis on achievement, productivity (63%)
 - government, through repeal of Sunday closing laws (60%)
- ✓ More pastors (57%) than members (35%) assign *very great* or *great* responsibility for changing Sunday practices to “the failure of the church to articulate the need for (and meaning of) a day of rest.”

Preferences for Society

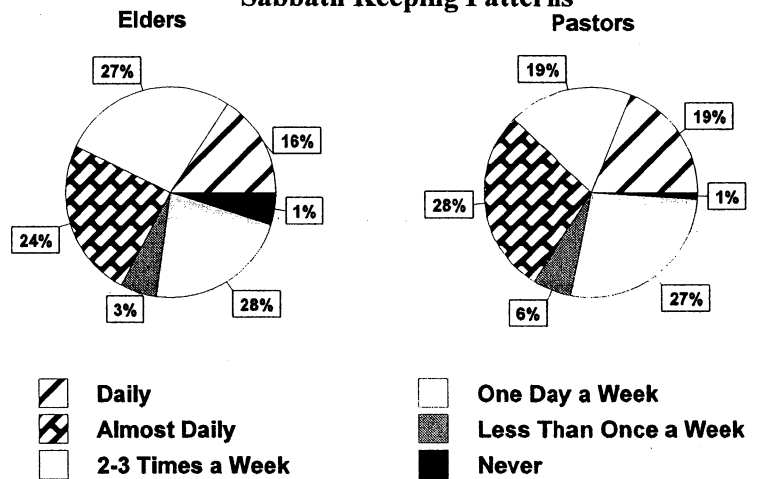
- ✓ Majorities of pastors (63%) and four in ten members and elders would favor laws to “require employers to allow people to take a particular day off each week for religious reasons.” Fewer panelists (members, 23%; pastors, 27%) favor laws to “require every retail business to be closed one day each week.
- ✓ A third of elders, four in ten members, 56% of pastors, and 62% of specialized clergy favor an “increase in the minimum wage so that fewer people would need to work over 40 hours a week solely out of economic necessity.”

SABBATH KEEPING PRACTICES

- ✓ Majorities in all samples, ranging from 89% of pastors to 67% of members, *disagree* that “the idea of keeping or practicing Sabbath is out of date.” Even more (members, 86%; pastors, 94%) *disagree* with the statement, “I don’t feel a need for Sabbath keeping in my life.”
- ✓ Majorities report setting aside time for Sabbath keeping a least a couple of days per week, including 38% of members, 40% of elders, 47% of pastors, and 51% of specialized clergy who do so *every day* or *almost every day*. (See Figure 4.)
- ✓ Sabbath keeping time *always* or *usually* includes “prayer” for 85% of members and elders, 84% of pastors, and 81% of specialized clergy. The relative frequency of other activities that panelists include in their Sabbath keeping time include:
 - meditation (members, 58% *always* or *usually*; pastors, 65%)
 - being quiet; listening for God (members, 49% *always* or *usually*; pastors, 62%)
 - reading the Bible (members, 39% *always* or *usually*; pastors, 62%)
 - being alone (members, 32% *always* or *usually*; pastors, 49%)

- ✓ Majorities of panelists are *interested* in increasing the amount of time they set aside for Sabbath keeping, including 20% of members, 21% of elders, 38% of pastors, and 23% of specialized clergy who are *very interested*.
- ✓ 71% of pastors, 52% of specialized clergy, and 45% of elders *strongly favor* “the church’s encouraging people of faith to spend more time in the practice of Sabbath keeping.”

**Figure 4
Sabbath Keeping Patterns**



	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers*
Number of surveys mailed	913	1,042	1,584
Number returned	565	664	1,132
Response rate	62%	64%	71%

*Of the 1,134 returned surveys, 764 came from pastors and 359 from specialized clergy.

This survey was initially mailed in May 1999, and returns were accepted through early July 1999. 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 1999 Presbyterian Panel results, a longer report with additional charts and graphs is available for \$5. Contact PDS (1-800-524-2612) and order PDS# 65100-99260. Included is a data appendix that presents the percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

For more information on Sabbath keeping and spiritual formation in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) contact Brad Kent of the office of Christian Faith and Life at 502-569-5384.

LISTENING TO PRESBYTERIANS SINCE 1973

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A Ministry of the General Assembly Council

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