

## OLDER ADULT MINISTRIES—THE NOVEMBER 1997 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 fifth survey completed by the 1997-1999 Panel.

### VIEWS OF AGING AND OLDER ADULTS

#### Ages and Stages

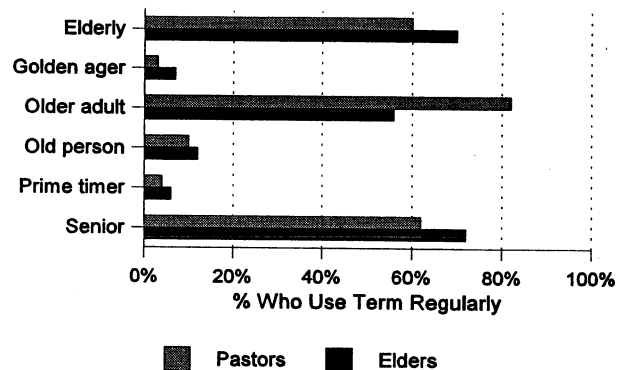
- ✓ On average, members view *young adulthood* as beginning at age 19 and ending at age 34; *middle age* as beginning at age 39 and ending at age 59; and *older adulthood* as beginning at age 62.
- ✓ Panelists' own ages are related to their conceptions of when life stages start and stop. On average, members under age 40 see *young adulthood* beginning at age 18, and ending at age 32; those aged 70 and older see *young adulthood* beginning at age 19 and ending at age 36. On average, members under age 40 see *older adulthood* beginning at age 60; those aged 70 and older see *older adulthood* beginning at age 63.

#### Positive Stereotypes

- ✓ The phrases (from a list of 12) most descriptive of older adults, according to members and pastors, are:
  - *Living independently* (66% of members and 71% of pastors respond either "descriptive of most" or "descriptive of many")
  - *Active in church* (66% and 76%, respectively)
  - *Wise in the ways of the world* (62% and 56%)
  - *Set in their ways* (62% and 38%)
- ✓ The least descriptive phrases are:
  - *Poorly educated* (3%, members, and 2%, pastors)
  - *Economically deprived* (7%; 5%)
  - *Disabled* (8%; 4%)

#### Proper Names

- ✓ Majorities in all samples regularly use the terms *elderly*, *older adult*, and *senior* when they refer to persons of older years, but few panelists regularly use terms such as *golden ager*, *old person*, or *prime timer*:



**Figure 1**  
Presbyterians' Use Some Terms More Than Others When Referring to Older Persons

- ✓ In all samples, majorities of more than 80% find the terms *elderly*, *older adult*, and *senior* to be "respectful" when referring to persons of older years. Majorities of members (66%) and elders (66%), but not clergy, also find the term *golden ager* to be respectful.
- ✓ Majorities see the term *old person* as "not respectful."
- ✓ Majorities view the terms *old person* and *golden ager* as "outdated."

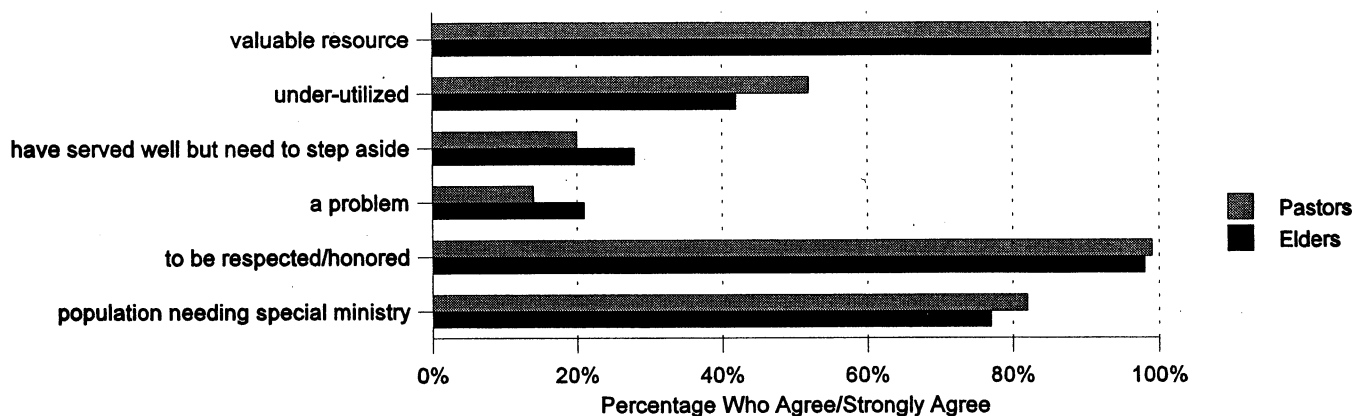
## OPINIONS ON OLDER ADULT MINISTRY

### Support for Older Adult Ministry

- ✓ Both clergy and laity view older adults in general as respected contributors to congregational life who could be called on for even greater service (see Figure 2).
- ✓ At least one third of either members or pastors believe that it is “very important” for congregations to:
  - *provide support groups for older adults in transition* (52% of members and 51% of pastors respond “very important”)
  - *encourage older adults to be involved in every aspect of congregational life* (43%; 71%)
  - *encourage older adults to be involved in every aspect of community life* (34% and 55%, respectively)
  - *visit older adults who are moving to the community* (34%; 37%)
  - *encourage older adults to design and conduct programs for their own age group* (24%; 34%)
- ✓ At least one half of elders and pastors “strongly agree” with these statements:
  - *opportunities for spiritual growth are as important in the later years as in the younger years* (54% of elders and 67% of pastors “strongly agree”)
  - *older adults need the opportunity to give of their skills to the church as much as they need to receive guidance and opportunities for growth* (50% and 67%, respectively)

### Denominational Resources

- ✓ Majorities of members (52%), elders (59%), pastors (62%), and specialized clergy (56%) believe it would be either “helpful” or “very helpful” for their congregation for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to produce a curriculum designed specifically for older adults.
- ✓ Majorities of pastors see as “very helpful” or “helpful” each of these various services or resources contemplated for development by the Office on Older Adult Ministry:
  - *resources to help members plan for, and redirect their lives in, retirement* (36% respond “very helpful” and 45% “helpful”)
  - *a Bible study series written especially for older adults* (25% and 41%, respectively)
  - *more resources appropriate for use with older adults* (24%; 46%)
  - *resources to assist seminaries in providing older-adult ministry courses* (21%; 43%)
  - *opportunities for developing leaders to serve congregations in older-adult ministry* (20%; 44%)
- ✓ Around four in ten pastors indicate that it would either be “helpful” (28%) or “very helpful” (11%) to have resources to use in planning for Older Adult Week. Other pastors think such resources would either be “a little helpful” (34%) or “not at all helpful” (27%).



**Figure 2**  
**Presbyterians View Older Adults in their Churches Positively**

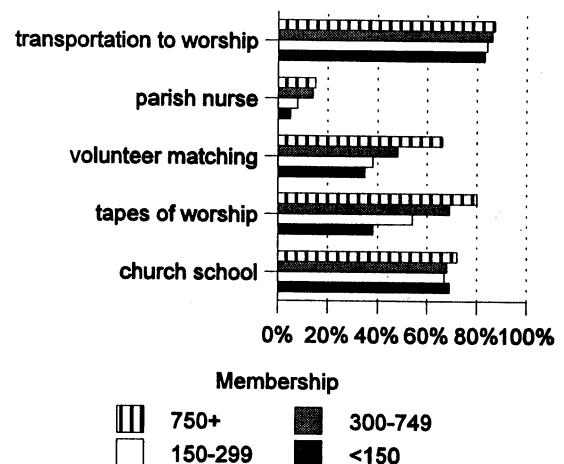
## CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES BY AND FOR OLDER ADULTS

### Staff and Programs

- ✓ Three in every ten pastors (30%) report that their congregations *have a paid staff person whose responsibilities specifically include ministry to older adult members.*
- ✓ Few congregations in the PCUSA observed Older Adult Week in 1997, according to pastors; only 11% report that their congregations commemorated this event, which takes place annually during the first week in May.
- ✓ A majority of pastors report that their congregations provide these activities, services, and programs *for older adult members and those in the community:*
  - *home visitation* (96% so report)
  - *transportation to and from church services* (85%)
  - *transportation to and from other church programs* (82%)
  - *phone calls to check on the homebound* (74%)
  - *church school class* (69%)
  - *transportation to medical facilities* (67%)
  - *temporary assistance during periods of illness* (66%)
  - *gifts at special seasons of the year* (63%)
  - *distributing taped copies of worship services* (61%)
- ✓ According to pastors, few congregations provide these activities, services, and programs for older adults:
  - *adult day care* (6% of pastors so report)
  - *Shepherd's Center* (6%)
  - *help finding opportunities for paid employment* (9%)
  - *parish nurse program* (11%)
  - *housekeeping services* (12)
  - *legal aid* (14%)
  - *personal letter writing and reading* (18%)
- ✓ Many older adult programs—but not all—are more available in larger-membership congregations, according to pastors (see Figure 3).

### Older Adults as Volunteers

- ✓ Older-adult members are often the volunteers who provide services or lead programs directed toward (other) older adults. In around a third or more of the congregations with each particular program listed below, pastors report that older adults provide “most” or “all” of the volunteer leadership:
  - *church school class* (51% so report)
  - *hot meals in the home* (34%)
  - *phone calls to check on the homebound* (33%)
  - *transportation to and from church services* (33%)
  - *distributing taped copies of worship services* (32%)
  - *personal letter writing and reading* (32%)
- ✓ Older-adult members (as *volunteers*) provide at least “some” of the leadership for the following programs and activities in at least one-half of the congregations represented by Panel pastors:
  - *making phone calls on behalf of the congregation* (87% of pastors so report)
  - *teaching church school* (84%)
  - *mentoring children* (58%)
  - *writing “thank-you” notes on behalf of the congregation* (51%)

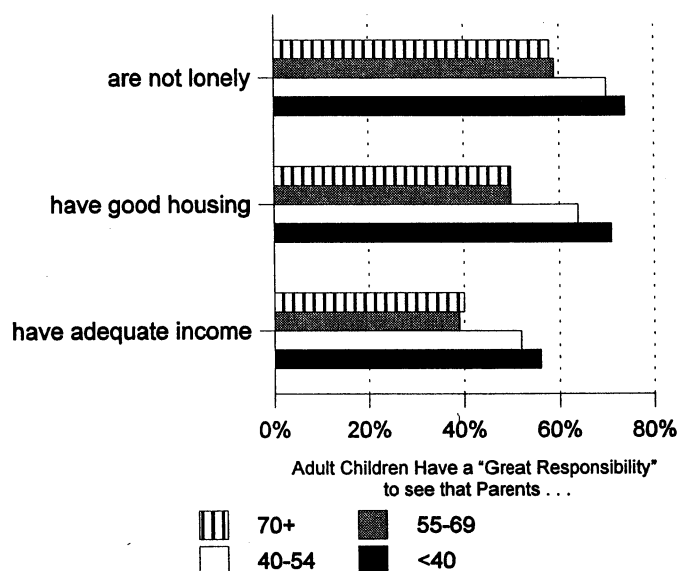


**Figure 3**  
Some Ministries for Older Adults are More Common in Larger Congregations

## INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

### Events for All Ages

- ✓ A majority of Panel pastors (59%) report that their congregations had one or more *intergenerational programs or activities* in the year prior to the survey.
- ✓ In congregations with intergenerational programs and activities, the most common examples, according to pastors, are:
  - *family night meals* (73% of pastors in these congregations so report)
  - *special worship services* (48%)
  - *church school classes* (44%)
  - *recreational activities* (41%)
- ✓ 68% of large-membership congregations (750 or more members) report one or more intergenerational events, compared to 48% of small-membership congregations (fewer than 150 members).



**Figure 4**  
**More Young than Older Members See a "Great" Responsibility of Adults Toward Their Older Parents**

### Intergenerational Responsibility

- ✓ 64% of members believe that adult children bear a "great responsibility" to see that their elderly parents *have good health care* and that they *are not lonely*. 57% believe that adult children bear a "great responsibility" to see that their elderly parents *have good housing*. 44% believe that adult children bear a "great responsibility" to see that their elderly parents have adequate income (see Figure 4).

- ✓ Only minorities of members believe that parents have a "great responsibility" to provide the following for their *grown* children, although larger percentages see "some responsibility" for parents to assist with each:
  - *pay for their children's college education* (33% respond "great," 47% "some" responsibility)
  - *provide their children with a place to live if they are unable to provide their own* (21%, "great," 58%, "some")
  - *leave some money to their children when they die* (12%; 47%).

	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers*
Number of surveys mailed	1,326	1,302	1,866
Number returned	764	835	1,199
Response rate	58%	64%	64%

\* Of the 1,199 returned surveys, 803 were from pastors and 396 were from specialized clergy.

This survey was initially mailed in November 1997, and returns were accepted until March 1998. 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 November 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 # 70360-97254. 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 Older Adult Ministries** contact Miriam Dunson at 502-569-5487.

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