

COMMUNICATIONS ACROSS THE CHURCH—THE MAY 1998 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 seventh survey completed by the 1997-1999 Panel.

WHAT PRESBYTERIANS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE CHURCH

The National Church

- ✓ A majority of panelists want to obtain “information about the General Assembly,” including 22% of members, 29% of elders, 69% of pastors, and 67% of specialized clergy who *definitely* want such information.
- ✓ Around one-third of clergy and one in ten members and elders *definitely* want to obtain “information about the General Assembly Council.” Even fewer panelists (members, 4%; pastors, 19%) *definitely* want “information about divisions, boards, and committees of the national church.”
- ✓ Most panelists want to obtain information about “resources available from the national church,” including 19% of elders and 48% of pastors who *definitely* want such information.

Individuals and Congregations

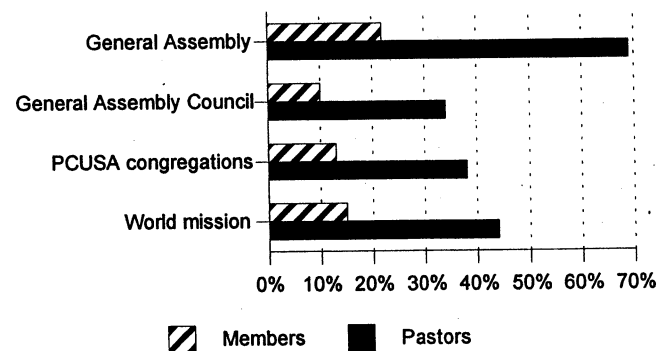
- ✓ Three-fourths of clergy, but only one in five members and elders, *definitely* or *probably* want information on “deaths, retirements, and new positions of ministers of the Word and Sacrament.”
- ✓ Majorities of panelists (71% of members; 84% of pastors) *definitely* or *probably* want information on “Presbyterians who are in the news.”
- ✓ About as many members and elders want as do not want “opinions from church members.” Pastors are a bit more interested—17% *definitely* and 45% *probably* want members’ opinions. Among all samples there is more interest in “opinion pieces, . . . columns and editorials, from church leaders.”

- ✓ Most panelists are interested in obtaining news about Presbyterian congregations, including 16% of elders and 38% of pastors who *definitely* want such information. A similar level of interest is expressed for “news about Presbyterian and other Christian mission around the world.”

Faith and Theology

- ✓ Interest is relatively high in “information about Presbyterian beliefs.” From 29% (members) to 40% (pastors) *definitely* want to obtain such information; most of the rest (50% of members, 44% of pastors) *probably* want to obtain it.
- ✓ Interest is high in obtaining “articles on spirituality/growth in faith.” 30% of members and 60% of pastors *definitely* want to obtain this type of information, and almost all others *probably* want to obtain it (e.g., 50% of members, 33% of pastors).

Figure 1
Percent Who Definitely Want to Obtain Information About Each



PREFERRED COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

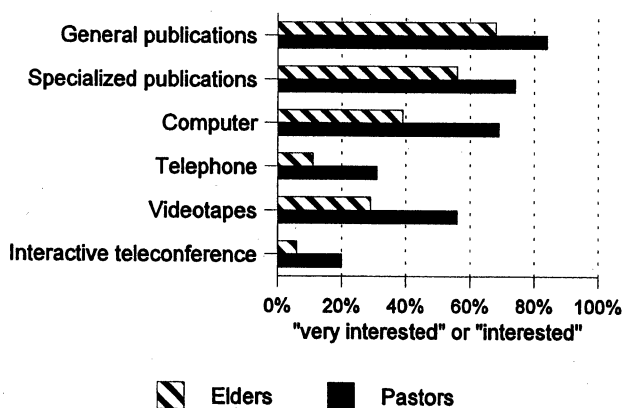
Print Publications

- ✓ To obtain information about the church, panelists in every sample express the most support for print media. Large majorities in every sample, ranging from 68% of members to 84% of pastors, are either *very interested* or *interested* in obtaining church information “through general-interest publications.”
- ✓ Majorities ranging from 53% (members) to 74% (pastors) are *interested/very interested* in obtaining church information via “one or more special-interest publications.”

Audio and Video

- ✓ Around one in five (members, elders, specialized clergy) and one in four (pastors) have some interest in obtaining church information “through audiotapes.” Interest is higher for videotapes—29% of members and 56% of pastors express some interest in obtaining church information through this medium.
- ✓ Few pastors (20%) and specialized clergy (17%) and even fewer members (7%) and elders (6%) have an interest in obtaining church information “via interactive teleconference.”
- ✓ Around one in ten members and elders, one in six specialized clergy, and one in three pastors are *interested/very interested* in obtaining church news “by telephone from a general information source, such as PresbyTel.”

Figure 2
How Presbyterians Want to Receive Information about the PCUSA



- ✓ Members and elders would be most likely “to listen to or watch” the following types of PCUSA-produced programming (combined *very likely* and *likely* responses in parentheses):
 - “entertainment program emphasizing faith and family values” (members, 68%; elders, 65%)
 - “documentaries about social issues and concerns” (members, 65%; elders, 67%)
 - “family-focused programs” (both 59%)
 - “programs on spirituality” (members, 57%; elders, 56%)
 - “news programs of Christians around the world” (members, 52%; elders, 51%).

Computers and the Internet

- ✓ Majorities of all panelists believe it to be *very important* or *important* for the PCUSA to provide an Internet web site. Similar percentages also believe the denomination should support a “computer-based . . . conferencing system,” such as PresbyNet.
- ✓ A third of members, four in ten elders, six in ten specialized clergy, and seven in ten pastors are *very interested* or *interested* in obtaining church information via the Internet. These percentages are particularly impressive when we note that only 17% of members, 25% of elders, 56% of specialized clergy, and 64% of pastors currently use a computer “to access information . . . from PresbyNet or the Internet.”
- ✓ Among the subset of panelists who currently use PresbyNet or access the Internet:
 - 22% of members, 30% of elders, 42% of specialized clergy, and 48% of pastors are *very interested* or *generally interested* in “regularly-scheduled live ‘chat rooms’” involving PCUSA leaders.
 - 40% of members, 49% of elders, 69% of pastors, and 70% of specialized clergy are *very interested* or *generally interested* in receiving denominational periodicals (e.g., *Monday Morning*, *Presbyterians Today*) via on-line distribution.

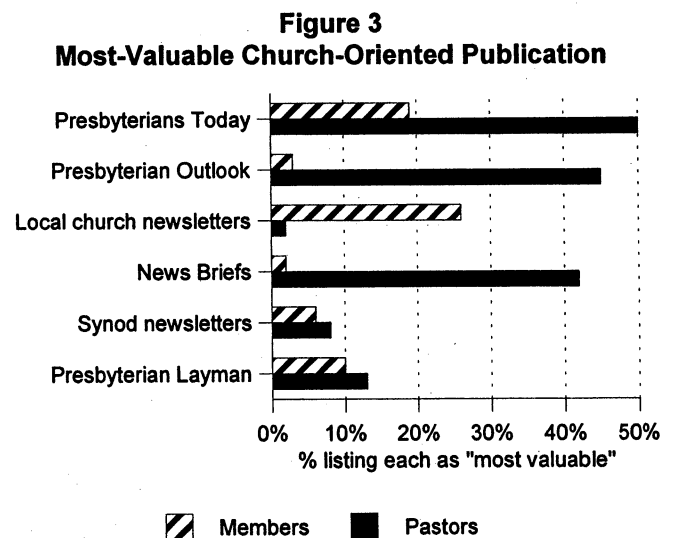
USING AND EVALUATING PRESBYTERIAN MEDIA

Use of Official PCUSA Media

- ✓ Of official PCUSA media, only *Presbyterians Today* is familiar to a majority of members. Two-thirds of members express some familiarity with this magazine, including 11% who read it *often* and 22% who read it *occasionally*. Nine in ten elders report some familiarity with *Presbyterians Today*, including 25% who read it often, and 32% who read it *occasionally*.
- ✓ Almost all pastors are familiar with the various official PCUSA media listed on the survey. The greatest familiarity is reported for *New Briefs*, which 68% of pastors (and 38% of specialized clergy) read *often*. A majority of pastors, 57%, also *often* read *Presbyterians Today*.
- ✓ The new occasional periodical, *Presbyterians—Being Faithful to Jesus Christ*, is one of the less familiar official print publications. Majorities of members (64%) and elders (53%) are *not familiar* with it. About one-half of pastors report reading it either *often* (27%) or *occasionally* (26%), but 17% of pastors are *not familiar* with it.
- ✓ Majorities of members (64%) and elders (55%) are *not familiar* with PresbyTel, the PCUSA's "1-800" toll-free information phone line. Only 4% of members and 7% of elders report contacting PresbyTel in the last year. By contrast, only 5% of pastors are *not familiar* with PresbyTel, and a majority (54%) have used the service in the last year, including 4% who have used it *often* and 17% who have used it *occasionally*.
- ✓ Around a quarter of pastors and specialized clergy use PresbyNet with some regularity, including 15% and 14%, respectively, who report using it *often*. Majorities of members and elders are *not familiar* with PresbyNet.
- ✓ Around one in ten members and elders and four in ten pastors and specialized clergy report accessing the PCUSA's World Wide Web site at least occasionally in the last year. Overall, a majority of pastors, and 48% of specialized clergy, report accessing the site at least once. A majority of members (59%) and 49% of elders are not aware that the denomination has a web site.

Use of Presbyterian-Oriented Media

- ✓ Around a quarter of members and four in ten elders read *The Layman* at least *occasionally*, although 44% and 27%, respectively, are *not familiar* with this periodical. Around a half of pastors read *The Layman* either *often* (27%) or *occasionally* (26%), and less than 0.5% are *not familiar* with it.
- ✓ Most members (52%) and many elders (36%) are *not familiar* with *Presbyterian Outlook*, although 4% and 8%, respectively, read it *often*, and 9% and 18%, *occasionally*. Only 1% of pastors are *not familiar* with *Outlook*; 54% read it *often* and 21%, *occasionally*. A majority of specialized clergy read it either *often* (38%) or *occasionally* (24%).
- ✓ Majorities of members and elders are *not familiar* with these broadcast endeavors: "The Protestant Hour" radio program, "Passages" radio series, and the "Odyssey" religion cable network. Most pastors and specialized clergy are familiar with these communications tools, but only around one in ten (or less) listen to or watch them either *often* or *occasionally*.
- ✓ Panelists were asked to list the "three most valuable sources of information about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." Among pastors, 50% rated *Presbyterians Today* as one of the most valuable, 45% rated *Presbyterian Outlook* as one of the most valuable, 42% rated *Presbyterians Today* as one of the most valuable, and 21% rated *Monday Morning* as one of the most valuable.



OTHER COMMUNICATION ISSUES

Media Ads and Notices

- ✓ Very few members or elders (around 5% of each group) are at all familiar with the PCUSA's "National Cooperative Media Campaign" (*Stop in and Find Out*). Few clergy indicate any awareness: 48% of pastors and 63% of specialized clergy responded *not at all familiar* when asked about this campaign, and another 14% and 20%, respectively, responded *don't know*.
- ✓ A majority of pastors would be interested in "PC(USA)-produced print, TV, or radio advertisements that your church could purchase for a nominal amount and then pay to use" in local media (21% are *very interested* and 31% are *generally interested*). Among elders, 6% are *very interested* and 15%, *generally interested*.

Teleconferences

- ✓ Panelists show modest interest in future teleconferences that permit "participants, watching from downlink sites around the country, . . . to ask questions of church leaders." The combined *very interested* and *interested* responses range from 13% among members to 25% among pastors.
- ✓ Were they to participate in a future teleconference, more panelists would want to do so "by home computer or video device," which permits participation from almost any location, than "by satellite or video conferences, which requires

[travel] to a special site." Among pastors, 8% prefer the satellite method, while 39% prefer home computer. Another 36% have *no preference*, and 18% *don't know*.

Contacting Louisville

- ✓ Most pastors (80%) and specialized clergy (60%) report at least one occasion when they tried "to get in touch with a national church office or staff member in Louisville." Relatively fewer members (8%) and elders (17%) report such contact. Most panelists who tried to contact national church offices did so only a few times.
- ✓ Of panelists who attempted to contact staff in Louisville, more than one-half of members and more than four in ten in the other samples are *very satisfied* with their experience(s). Overall, only around one in ten panelists express dissatisfaction with their contacts.
- ✓ Among the minority of panelists who reported an unsatisfactory experience while attempting to reach a national church office, the most common complaints centered on inability to make an appropriate contact. Among pastors, for example, 29% were unhappy that they reached voice mail, 28% had calls that were not returned, and 19% were not able to reach (or had difficulty reaching) the appropriate person.

	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers*
Number of surveys mailed	1,263	1,269	1,808
Number returned	605	680	1,170
Response rate	48%	54%	65%

* Of the 1,170 returned surveys, 780 were from pastors and 390 were from specialized clergy.

This survey was initially mailed in May 1998, and returns were accepted until August 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 May 1998 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 # 70360-98256. 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 the denomination's Communications Office, contact Gary Luhr at 502-569-5515.

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