

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY COUNCIL TASK FORCE ON
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP GROWTH**

**A REPORT
APPROVED BY THE 203RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(1991)
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

The 203rd General Assembly (1991)
of the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Approved
“Task Force On
Church Membership Growth”

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September 1991

To Pastors of Churches and Clerks of Sessions of Vacant Pulpits,
and Stated Clerks and Executives of Presbyteries and Synods

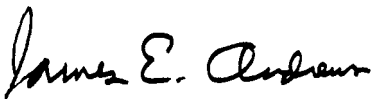
Dear Friends:

The 203rd General Assembly (1991) received the report and recommendations of the Task Force on Church Membership Growth, which calls upon congregations and presbyteries to a new commitment to evangelism. As instructed by the assembly, the Office of the General Assembly is distributing the report to the governing bodies and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for study and implementation.

I urge you to begin the process leading to the formal adoption of the Commitment to Evangelism by your session and your presbytery. Inquiries regarding resources for each aspect of the process may be directed to Gary Demarest, associate director of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, Room 3618, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

Information on ordering additional copies of this report may be found on the copyright page of this publication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James E. Andrews". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

James E. Andrews
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY COUNCIL TASK FORCE ON CHURCH MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

INTRODUCTION

The General Assembly Council, at its March 29-31, 1989, meeting, acted on the recommendation of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit to establish a Task Force on Church Membership Growth. The task force was appointed by the chair of the council.

The task force consists of twenty-two members representing congregations, presbyteries, and synods, and of eight persons representing General Assembly Council ministry units and related bodies.

The task force was given the following tasks:

1. To begin with a comprehensive analysis of the current studies, completed and in process, of the reasons for the decline of the membership of our denomination.
2. To develop recommendations for specific churchwide programs designed to reverse the decline of church membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), within the biblical and theological context of our Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, to be presented to the 203rd General Assembly (1991).
3. To be authorized, through the ministry unit, to develop and conduct model programs, if needed, in shaping its recommendations.

*Task force
established by
General
Assembly
Council.*

The task force has held six three-day meetings. We have:

- read widely in the relevant literature dealing with mainline church decline;
- reviewed prior reports and recommendations to the General Assembly, with specific attention given to the study of church membership trends in 1976, and the recommendations of the Special Committee on Evangelism and Church Growth in 1984;
- reviewed current studies dealing with such issues as membership assimilation and retention, the baby-boomer generation, the effectiveness of Christian education and youth ministries, the status of former Presbyterian youth, and the data generated by the Lilly Foundation study of mainline denominations;
- reviewed data from the Presbyterian Panel, the General Assembly Research Services department, and the Princeton Religion Research Center;
- held open hearings in various presbyteries, and conducted an open hearing at the 202nd General Assembly (1990) in Salt Lake City;
- solicited suggestions from all Chapter IX organizations and caucuses related to the General Assembly, from the Church Wide Administrative Coordinating Cabinet, the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, the directors of other General Assembly ministry units, and all executive presbyters;
- interviewed recognized church sociologists; and
- interviewed key personnel from the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry

We have read, reviewed, held open hearings, solicited suggestions, and interviewed.

Unit, and from other ministry units where related work is being done.

We have not developed or conducted model programs to support the shaping of our recommendations. Model programs require more time to develop, test, and evaluate than was given to the task force by its mandate.

Part One of this report describes key factors in the decline in membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Part Two provides a biblical/theological basis for faithfulness as it relates to church membership growth.

Part Three contains recommendations for church membership growth in six areas:

- 1. Revitalizing Congregations**
- 2. New Church Development and Redevelopment**
- 3. Racial Ethnic Membership Growth**
- 4. Enhancing Pastoral Skills**
- 5. Other Forms of Outreach**
- 6. Follow-Up to Task Force Recommendations**

Part Four contains a response to *Commissioners' Resolution 90-24*.

Part Five contains a bibliography.

We commend our recommendations to the General Assembly, trusting in the Holy Spirit to inform, inspire, and empower the whole church to be faithful in her witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.

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PART ONE THE DECLINE IN MEMBERSHIP IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

MEMBERSHIP TRENDS

MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS, 1978-1989

Membership trends have fluctuated since 1978, yet have been consistently downward.

Since 1960 the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has lost 30 percent of its membership. After the 1983 reunion of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., membership was 3,131,228; in 1988 membership was 2,938,830.

In 1983 the average number of members per congregation was 269; in 1988 the average number was 254.

The following figures show that the membership trends have fluctuated since 1978, yet have been consistently downward:

1978:	56,347
1979:	52,708
1980:	57,557
1981:	61,493
1982:	44,975

PC(USA) LOSSES

1983:	34,822
1984:	30,277
1985:	43,725
1986:	40,738
1987:	39,551
1988:	38,107
1989:	43,124

CONGREGATIONAL STATISTICS, 1978-1989

Since 1978 the number of congregations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its former denominations has declined steadily, from 11,854 in 1978 to 11,573 in 1988.

The following figures show a comparison of churches organized, churches dissolved, and churches dismissed. The figures for churches organized since 1983 include churches merged during those years.

The number of congregations has declined steadily, from 11,854 in 1978 to 11,573 in 1988.

Year	Churches Organized	Churches Dissolved	Churches Dismissed	Net Gain/Loss
1978	44	62	5	-23
1979	57	60	4	-7
1980	67	50	5	+12
1981	62	71	10	-19
1982	57	58	28	-29
1983	56	37	23	-4
1984	52	54	1	-3
1985	45	32	22	-9
1986	61	53	12	-4
1987	59	44	8	+7
1988	65	49	5	+11
1989	45	47	11	-13

During the 1950s, the two denominations organized an average of 130 new churches per year, over twice as many as the average during the 1980s (57 per year).

FACTORS IN MEMBERSHIP DECLINE

The Spirit of God enables a denomination or a local congregational community to grow in membership in three ways: (1) biological growth, e.g., childbirth and the Christian nurture of its youth; (2) transfer growth, e.g., attracting nonaffiliated Christians and Christians from other denominational families; and (3) conversion growth, e.g., converting non-Christians into the church community.

A denomination must foster active invitation into membership or at least present a faithful, spiritually nourishing church community to which non-Christians and Christians are attracted, invited, and assimilated with open arms.

For gains to occur through the first method, a denomination must have more births than deaths in its communion, and it must nurture the faith allegiances of those new participants in its church life during their childhood years. If the second and third means to church development are to be successful, a denomination must foster active invitation into membership or at least present a faithful, spiritually nourishing church community to which non-Christians and Christians are attracted, invited, and assimilated with open arms.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) exhibits mixed, if not contradictory, tendencies in all three of these avenues to church development and membership growth.

BIOLOGICAL GROWTH: BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND THE NURTURE OF YOUTH

Birth/Death Ratio

Lyle Schaller believes that "the number-one reason for the numerical decline of the mainline denominations can be summarized in one word: death" (*It's a Different World*, p. 72). In the 1960-80 period, eight mainline denominations lost 6 million members by death and were unable to gain a similar number of replacements.

Roof and McKinney agree: "The low birth rates of (Presbyterians and other mainline churches) are largely responsible for the declines. A small rate of natural growth combined with fewer gains from interdenominational switching in the post-1960s era have given them a weakened demographic base" (*American Mainline Religion*, p. 234). In 1958, for example, the UPC received nineteen new members by profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, and restoration for every four members lost by death. In 1982, only seven new members were received by these same avenues for every four who died. Therefore, the Presbyterian church can no longer passively expect membership growth from within the church family.

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Nurture of Youth

The Baby Boomers

Baby boomers are defined in general as persons born between the years 1945 and 1965.

Boomers have left the institutional church in larger numbers than previous generations of young adults. Results from 1,400 baby boomer telephone interviews by a research team funded by the Lilly Endowment reveal that 34 percent

Mainline churches lost the baby boomers of the cultural left and middle in massive numbers.

Boomers, if they return to the church, will bring with them values and cultural characteristics dissimilar to those of the current members.

have dropped out of the church and have stayed out. The research team also found that 41 percent of the boomers are still in a church of some kind, and that 21 percent have returned after dropping out. Of those no longer in the church, 40 percent consider themselves believers (e.g. they believe Jesus is divine and the Bible is an inspired book). (Donald Luidens, in a report to the task force, May 21, 1990.)

“To put it crisply, mainline churches lost the baby boomers of the cultural left and middle in massive numbers. The cultural shift in values cut them off from what had been major sources of new members” (*U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches*, Tex Sample, 1990, p. 19).

“In general, the Boomers are seen as ‘consumers’ looking to get something specific from a church, should they choose to join one. They are fussier (or more discriminating) than were their parents and will shop around to find the preacher, the spiritual atmosphere, or the church school believed to fulfill their needs. Those who go back to church look for two things in particular: religious education for their children and some kind of religious experience that helps make sense of their own lives” (Kenneth A. Briggs, *Progressions: A Lilly Endowment Occasional Report 2*, Issue 1 [Jan. 1990], p. 7).

Boomers, if they return to the church, will bring with them values and cultural characteristics dissimilar to those of the current members. Further, boomers tend to move more often than others, and to join groups that satisfy their sense of need. “This will be a time when the church’s receptivity and ability to assimilate them into the life of the congregation will be tested” (Oswald and Leas,

The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation, p. 7).

Christian Nurture of Youth

A summary report of a study of Christian education in six major Protestant denominations (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Christian Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church) included the following among its major conclusions:

- A majority of adolescents fall into the faith type called "undeveloped faith." Faith is least well formed among ninth and tenth grade boys.
- In examining the religious biographies of youth, the two experiences most associated with higher faith maturity are the level of family religiousness and the amount of exposure to Christian education (Peter L. Benson, Carolyn H. Eklin, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*. Search Institute [March 1990], pp. 3-4).

The two experiences most associated with higher faith maturity are the level of family religiousness and the amount of exposure to Christian education.

Of the two strongest connections to faith maturity, family religiousness is slightly more important than lifetime exposure to Christian education. The particular family experiences most tied to greater faith maturity are the frequency of family devotions, and the frequency with which parents and children together were involved in efforts, formal or informal, to help other people. Each of these family experiences is more powerful than the frequency with which an adolescent sees his or her parents engage in religious behavior like church attendance. (Ibid., 38)

While there may be no necessary one-to-one relationship between faith maturity and church membership growth, it can be expected that

biblically informed and theologically trained Christians will be more likely to demonstrate Christ-like attitudes and actions, talk openly about their faith in Christ, and invite friends and colleagues to share in the worship and activities of their faith communities. To the extent that Christians are immature, the church's witness will suffer and church membership will continue to decline.

Disaffiliation During College Years

It is common wisdom to suggest that churches lose a great many of their youth to non-affiliation during their college years. Studies have shown, however, that the greatest share of disaffiliation among youth occurs "before college, and it is related to how important religion is to the parents, the amount of love and affection given a child (specifically, more love is associated with a greater tendency to affiliate), and higher SAT scores." (Coalter, p. 11). While there are many Christians who are nurtured into the church, many youth are neglected and abused in their childhood and manage to make a complete turn around in their faith. Many who make this change become very committed Christians because of their suffering.

Nevertheless, the college years are critical for many reasons to the gaining and growth of faith in young adults, since religious affiliation or lack of affiliation is often set for life in the late teens and early twenties. Presbyterians have a longstanding commitment to higher education. Sixty-nine Presbyterian church-related colleges dot the American landscape. In addition, scores of Presbyterian campus ministers work on secular college and university campuses.

The greatest share of disaffiliation among youth occurs before college, and it is related to how important religion is to the parents, the amount of love and affection given a child (specifically, more love is associated with a greater tendency to affiliate), and higher SAT scores.

Presbyterian-related Colleges

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, many denominational colleges began to disassociate themselves from their parent churches. In many cases, religious studies departments no longer focused exclusively on Christianity, some religious course requirements were dropped, required daily chapel gave way to more broadly focused convocations, and faculty were no longer required to acknowledge faith in Jesus Christ or to have a denominational affiliation of some kind. Students coming from traditional Presbyterian homes and churches to some Presbyterian-affiliated colleges were met with a spirit of religious tolerance. This openness to other religious traditions, coupled with a lack of programs for religious nurture both on campus and in surrounding churches, led students, in many cases, to leave the church of their childhood.

Presbyterian Campus Ministry

Since the 1960s, the primary focus in Presbyterian campus ministry has changed in many ways. Whereas campus ministry once engaged students in Westminster Fellowship with its Presbyterian identity, campus ministry has become in recent years broadly ecumenical in its working relationships. This may have led Presbyterian youth to a broader sympathy with other religious traditions. A further concern has been the gradual erosion of financial support for Presbyterian campus ministry programs. In addition, the whole higher education scene has changed dramatically with the rise of the community college and the return of adult students to post-secondary institutions.

Since the 1960s, the primary focus in Presbyterian campus ministry has changed in many ways.

Again, many Presbyterian campus ministers also work with faculty and administrators as well as with students. Their service as lecturers and members of campus committees is time consuming but has provided opportunity for ministry to all members of the higher educational communities.

TRANSFER GROWTH: SWITCHING BETWEEN DENOMINATIONS

Switching Patterns

Roof and McKinney describe denominational switching under several important rubrics:

Stability

. . . the extent to which those who grow up in a religious group stay with it throughout their lives. The more stable a group, the stronger most likely will be its institutional attachments and religious bonds and the more likely it will add the children of its members. (*American Mainline Religion*: 165)

60 percent of Presbyterians remain in their faith.

For comparison, the following percentage of persons remain in their faiths:

Jews: 87 percent

Catholics: 85 percent

White Southern Baptists: 73 percent

Presbyterians: 60 percent

Evangelicals and Fundamentalists: 37 percent

Roof and McKinney believe that stability is more a reflection of communal belonging than of liberal or conservative theology.

Ethnic and Group Ties

Roof and McKinney argue that denominational labels are not as significant as "family groups." They offer the following percentages of stability for various family groups:

- Jews: 87 percent
- Black Protestants: 87 percent
- Catholics: 85 percent
- Conservative Protestants: 78 percent
- Moderate Protestants: 74 percent
- Liberal Protestants: 67 percent
- No religious preference: 45 percent

Capacity to Attract New Members

Roof and McKinney studied another aspect of switching: a group's capacity to attract new members. The following table shows switching patterns for seven groupings. For each, the table gives the number of sample members who were raised in the group, the number who switched to the group after being raised in another group or from nonaffiliation, and the number brought up in the group who have switched either to another religious group or to nonaffiliation.

Denominational labels are not as significant as family groups.

	Number in Sample	From Other Groups	From Non- affil.	To Other Groups	To Non- affil.	Net Gain (or loss)
Jews	357	19	3	12	36	(26)
Black Prots.	1,399	33	3	133	63	(160)
Cath.	4,012	331	37	287	294	(213)
Cons. Prots.	2,307	550	53	448	90	65
Mod- erate Prots.	3,896	708	84	796	225	(229)
Liberal Prots.	1,255	431	27	311	101	46
No Pref.	387	809	(207)			602

(Roof and McKinney, *American Mainline Religion*, pp. 167-168)

Presbyterians generally fall within the "liberal" family.

According to Roof and McKinney, Presbyterians generally fall within the liberal family where large gains from other families (431) and a small gain from nonaffiliation (27) are offset by large losses to other groups (311) and to nonaffiliation (101), resulting in a moderate net gain in membership (46).

In addition, "nonaffiliates are the greatest beneficiary of switching; all the groups lose more persons to this category than they receive from it" (*ibid.*, p. 170).

The Age of Switchers

"The net switching gains for liberal Protestants (e.g. Presbyterians) are wholly accounted for by older switchers" (*ibid.*, p. 171).

"Young persons are vastly over-represented among those who switch to nonaffiliation" (*ibid.*, p. 172).

Upward Switching

"All evidence points to less upward switching, or conservative-to-liberal transfer . . . now than in the past" (ibid., p. 175). "Those who switch to no religious preference have significantly more education and higher occupational prestige than those who remain religiously affiliated" (ibid., p. 176).

Conclusions Regarding Switching

- Mainline Protestant churches do not suffer net membership losses to so-called conservative denominations. We continue to gain from those denominations. Conservative churches grow from sources other than members lost from mainline churches.
- Upward switching on the social ladder tends to favor mainline denominations, though not so much as it did previously in the century; those who leave the more liberal churches tend to leave the church altogether.
- Presbyterians receive as many or more from other denominations as we lose to other denominations. Our greatest disparity in membership gain/loss lies in the area of the nonaffiliated, where we gain far fewer than we lose.
- The average age of Presbyterian membership seems to be rising, which may lead to further decline as more members die than are added by birth and by retention of the church's youth.

Mainline Protestant churches do not suffer net membership losses to so-called conservative denominations.

Non-Retention of Presbyterian Members

C. Kenneth Hall, Moderator of the 200th General Assembly (1988), stated his conviction that

one of the most important causes of membership decline in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the loss of members who slip out the back door.

The Alban Institute study of member assimilation by Roy M. Oswald and Speed B. Leas identifies five major factors that keep members active in the local congregation: (1) a positive identity; (2) congregational harmony and cooperation; (3) the pastor's ability to generate enthusiasm; (4) involvement in social action or social service; (5) adequate programming such as small groups. We may conclude that where a majority of these factors are absent, churches are likely to experience greater loss of members through the back door.

One of the most important causes of membership decline in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the loss of members who slip out the back door.

In his study of membership retention, Donald Smith found that 65 percent of the high loss congregations and 43 percent of the low loss congregations have experienced serious conflicts at some time during the past five years. In both groups a large majority of the conflicts involved pastoral leadership or interpersonal differences between pastor and members. Thirty-five percent of the high loss churches reported that their pastors had left the church as compared with 18 percent of the low loss churches. "It is abundantly clear that conflict management is of critical importance to membership retention," Smith states.

CONVERSION GROWTH: INVITATIONS TO AND THE EMBODIMENT OF THE CHURCH

Active Invitation to Participatory Fellowship

Lack of Verbal Witness

In his interim report on the Lilly Foundation study of mainstream denominations, John C. Long quotes from an interview with John Mulder,

president of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary: "The denomination in the '60s just reduced its commitment to evangelism. The big shift was away from what is sometimes called word evangelism—testifying to your faith—to deed evangelism, the social-justice agenda of the church" (*Progressions*, Jan. 1990, p. 2).

Milton J. Coalter adds, "The evangelism literature of the (Presbyterian General Assembly evangelism) division in the mid-1960s . . . gave permission for Presbyterians engaged in social action to remain silent verbally about the motivations for their social action" (*Preliminary Reporting on the Findings of the Study of the Presbyterian Church in the Twentieth Century*, p. 21). As membership began to decline, calls for reexamination were denied on the basis that the gospel demands self-sacrifice, even of the denomination itself if necessary. The dominant paradigm for the church shifted from the making of disciples to the giving of the church's life away for the world. "The Presbyterian Church undertook to lose its life for the sake of the world . . . And it was all very idealistic and filled with commitment. But it turned its back on a lot of areas of its life that contribute to the building and the nurturing of the church" (John Mulder, quoted in *Progressions*, p. 3).

The dominant paradigm for the church shifted from the making of disciples to the giving of the church's life away for the world.

The result has been "ambivalence, apathy, and/or discomfort with the topic of evangelism" (Coalter, op. cit., p. 22) among Presbyterians. The March 1989, Presbyterian Panel asked its correspondents to rate the importance of the following activity: "Encouraging church members to make explicit declarations of their personal faith to friends, neighbors and co-workers." Pastors rated the activity as of "high importance"; members

rated it as of "some importance." Out of fourteen activities, pastors ranked it third (so did elders) while members ranked it ninth.

Lack of Congregational Evangelism

A recent study of congregations by the General Assembly Research Services revealed a lack of evangelism in local churches. The following statements are extracted from material provided to the Task Force on Church Membership Growth by the Office of Research Services of the Stewardship and Communications Development Ministry Unit.

- (1) Overall, sharing the good news of the Gospel with the unchurched was rated as needing more emphasis in local churches more often than any other task.
- (2) Session members rated evangelistic concerns as the task least likely to be receiving the greatest emphasis within their congregation.
- (3) The perceived need to strengthen evangelism was the top-rated task across the fourteen mentioned areas, irrespective of church size.

These concerns point to a lack of evangelism by local congregations, not so much by intention as by default.

These concerns point to a lack of evangelism by local congregations, not so much by intention as by default. Elders, in particular, seem concerned about this lack and are asking for help.

Aversion to Change

Lyle Schaller has called attention to the tendency of congregations to formulate goals "concerned with (1) institutional maintenance, (2) reaching more 'people who are just like us, only younger,' and (3) perpetuating the past rather than breaking new ground and developing new ministries" (*Understanding Church Growth and Decline*, p. 355). His comments underscore the general

aversion to change found in all institutions, including Christian congregations.

Studies demonstrate that growing churches provide new ministries to meet the needs of persons in their communities. Yet, as geographical areas change in population, local churches tend to perpetuate ministries designed for, and effective among, earlier populations, thus failing to attract new populations.

Lack of New Church Development

New churches represent the best approach for reaching and assimilating people not actively involved in any worshiping community. They provide the 'drop-out' with a fresh start. Second, as the Assemblies of God and the Southern Baptist Convention have demonstrated so clearly in recent years, new congregations constitute the most effective means of reaching the new immigrants to America. (Schaller, *It's a Different World*, p. 80)

Presbyterian new church development efforts diminished in the three decades 1950-80. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its forebears averaged 131 new church developments per year in the 1950s, 75 per year in the 1960s, and only 36 per year in the 1970s. There has been a marked increase to 57 per year in the period 1980 to 1988.

The Lilly study of mainline denominations demonstrates that there was a conscious change of focus in the Presbyterian churches in the 1960s, from intentional verbal evangelism and church extension to social witness and experimental ministries. These ministries to urban areas and special groups were organized in response to the biblical calls for justice and concern for the

Local churches tend to perpetuate ministries designed for, and effective among, earlier populations.

Presbyterian new church development efforts diminished in the three decades 1950-80.

dispossessed, yet for the most part they did not become self-sustaining or add members to the church.

Although the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has pursued racial ethnic inclusion at all levels of church life, other denominations have concentrated on new church development. Among racial ethnic persons, other denominations have succeeded in launching numerous new congregations, while Presbyterians launched few new congregations of any type. For example, while the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has fewer than a hundred Hispanic churches, the Southern Baptist Convention had more than 2,000 Hispanic congregations by the end of 1985. Further, the Southern Baptist Convention, "now the most inclusive Protestant denomination in the nation, also included at the end of 1985 600,000 Black members in nearly 1,000 congregations, 466 Native American congregations reaching people from 97 tribes, 151 Chinese congregations, 85 Laotian congregations, and 77 Vietnamese churches as well as congregations representing 60 language, nationality, and ethnic groups" (ibid., p. 78).

Among racial ethnic persons, other denominations have succeeded in launching numerous new congregations, while Presbyterians launched few new congregations of any type.

The March 1989, Presbyterian Panel listed fourteen church activities and asked members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy to rate them in terms of importance. Pastors and specialized clergy rated "establishing new congregations" as of high importance, while members and elders ranked new church development activity between high importance and some importance. New church development activity was ranked "1" among the fourteen activities by pastors. Members, elders, and specialized clergy ranked new church development as "3," "2," and "3"

respectively. These figures indicate a consensus regarding the priority of new church development in the life of our denomination.

But do new church developments really result in membership growth? A recent study of Southern Baptist Convention membership statistics revealed that

new churches contributed slightly over one quarter (25.7 percent) of the members added to the Southern Baptist Convention between 1981 and 1986. New churches not only add members when they come into a denomination, but they tend to grow faster than older churches. So the impact of new church development is cumulative. When denominations cut their levels of new church development, as many did in the late 1960s, they not only lose the potential growth of these new churches, they are also saddled with a progressively higher proportion of slower-growing older congregations. (C. Kirk Hadaway, "The Impact of New Church Development on Southern Baptist Growth," *Review of Religious Research* 31, No. 4 [June 1990], Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention)

We conclude that the relative lack of new church development in recent years has been a key factor in the decline in membership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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Presentation of a Thriving Spirituality Within Our Communion

Leadership

The Effects of the Incorporation of the Church

The church at all levels has increasingly utilized a corporate structure to oversee its ministries. While this has obvious advantages, there may be some drawbacks.

- As the pastor assumes the role of a chief executive officer in the local congregation, she or he may devote more time and energy to administrative affairs. As this happens, the central roles of the minister of Word and Sacrament (preaching, teaching, providing pastoral care) are often slighted. The result is that the center of the church's life—a focus on the word of God—becomes diminished. Members not fed deeply by that word, nor sustained by adequate pastoral care, may become inactive and drop out of the church.
- The incorporation of the Sunday school into the life of the local church (a rather recent phenomenon, dating from the early 19th century) has had an unintended consequence on religious instruction within the family. The family's role has declined as the role of the Sunday school has advanced. "Parents frequently rely on the Sunday school for their children's religious instruction, and ignore their critical role in nurturing faith" (Coalter, op. cit., p. 14). Yet, retention of youth in the church depends in great measure on the

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quality of parental faith and its transmission from parent to child.

- The use of the corporation model for the church has also led to specialization in ministry. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament once served as pastors to, and theologians for, the entire congregation: children, youth, and adults. Specialization permits the pastor to withdraw from certain areas of ministry while concentrating on other areas. Areas typically ignored by pastors are the Sunday school, youth ministry, and visitation in homes, all areas of major influence in the inviting, nurturing, and retaining of disciple/members.

Issues Regarding Ministerial Leadership

Since apostolic times, leadership in the church has been the special responsibility of persons called out by God, through the voice of the people, i.e., ordained persons. We have come to assume that those ordained to office bring to the church not only the call of God, but also the gifts and training for their roles. While there is much agreement that effectiveness of ministerial leadership is linked to decline and growth, the data is both subjective and open to interpretation.

Lay persons and pastors alike have shared observations concerning church growth in at least five factors relating to ministerial leadership. These are:

- Congregational Care—People actively participate in churches where they perceive their spiritual/personal needs are being met, yet many pastors are lacking in “people” skills, visitation skills, and personal outreach, as

We have come to assume that those ordained to office bring to the church not only the call of God, but also the gifts and training for their roles.

well as in the administrative skills to develop the teams of care-givers who fill these needs.

- **Preaching and Teaching**—The Presbyterian church has prided itself on the quality of its preaching. Yet there is a perception that many clergy are not providing biblically-grounded sermons in the language of the people, delivered in the context of inspirational and celebrative worship.
- **Evangelism**—There is a perception that clergy are inadequately prepared to do evangelism. It appears that many clergy do not view this task as a priority. Nor are many able to train the laity for effective faith-sharing. Unless clergy are committed to and equipped for the task of evangelism, the church languishes.
- **Church Life and Administration**—Beyond the area of evangelism, there is a perception that many ministers are not helping the laity to understand the “Great Ends of the Church” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0200), and are not equipping them for the tasks of ministry. Unless officers and members share in church administration, they cannot grow in discipleship and ministry.
- **Personal Spiritual Influence**—Enthusiastic disciples are primarily developed through relationships with committed Christians. Pastors serve as models of Christian discipleship. Yet, at times, pastors have failed to live in ways that “commend the gospel to all persons and that communicate its joy and its justice” (*Book of Order*, G-6.0202).

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Issues Regarding the Calling, Preparation, and Role of Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Making lasting disciples among God's people requires ministers with (1) a distinct calling to the parish; (2) broad biblical, theological, and pastoral preparation; and (3) an agreed-upon, affirmed role in the team effort of church leadership. Developing these ministers requires a partnership between the congregation, the theological institutions, and the presbyteries to which pastors belong. Responses from clergy and laity indicate that meaningful church life and active member participation are directly affected by such factors as:

- Calling—Where clergy are confused about God's call, or are uncertain about their place in ministry, they give uncertain leadership, and indeed, may be misplaced in ministry. To improve the quality of ordained leadership, pastors, elders, and others should seek out the "brightest and best" among the church's members for leadership, inviting them to explore and clarify a call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.
- Preparation—Some ministers say, "The classroom experience is not adequately related to the real world! We are trained in theology but not in the shepherding that the church needs or expects. Pastoral education lacks emphasis on evangelism. Theological institutions are not training pastors to communicate the historic faith, guide and manage congregational life, or develop lasting disciples."

Developing these ministers requires a partnership between the congregation, the theological institutions, and the presbyteries to which pastors belong.

Studies of theological education indicate that a large share of the problem relates to "atomization" or fragmentation of theological

education (Max Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education*). "Atomization" describes the specialization of courses and departments that equips students within narrow fields, but does not adequately integrate their training. This leaves the ministerial candidate ill-prepared for the breadth of demands presented when dealing with the spiritual concerns of the whole person.

Since gains and losses in church membership relate specifically to the meeting of people's needs, theological training, continuing education, and other avenues of equipping will enable ministers of Word and Sacrament to wed the disciplines necessary for ministry to the whole person and to the wholeness of the community.

It has been further suggested that the lack of standards and requirements for demonstrable knowledge and ability in areas of evangelism and discipleship development is a weakness of most curricula in the theological institutions.

- **Role**—In an increasingly rootless church community, there must be persons who can clearly express the distinctives and the call of Reformed faith and Presbyterian heritage. Someone must lead in the deepening of congregational discipleship, the equipping of leadership teams, and the providing of pastoral care. When that role is accepted and affirmed by those trained for it, stronger and healthier churches are built; deeper discipleship commitments are maintained; vigorous partnerships between elders,

Clearly, there is confusion about the role of clergy as it relates to the membership growth of the church.

deacons, and ministers are established; members are warmly assimilated; and evangelism is undertaken. Yet, while 66 percent of members and 65 percent of elders feel that growth or decline is "to a great extent" the responsibility of the pastor, only 44 percent of ministers agree, and only 40 percent of the ministers said they would make a clear commitment of time and effort to reach the unchurched. Clearly, there is confusion about the role of clergy as it relates to the membership growth of the church.

A Diversity of Identities

The Effects of Social Change

Sociologist Robert Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*) has chronicled a basic shift of ethos in late twentieth century America from a nation dedicated to the good of the community to a nation of individuals concerned primarily for their own welfare and comfort. Roof and McKinney speak of this phenomenon as "the new voluntarism."

The world in which school, family, and church united to validate a single set of moral standards and community behavior has been replaced by several disparate arenas, each proclaiming its own code. One may live in a suburb, work in the city, spend weekends in the country, and be influenced by any number of voices through radio, TV, cassette tape, computer modem, print media, or special purpose group. The world has become a cafeteria in which individuals are encouraged to pick and choose among many options. Religion, to many, constitutes only one section of the cafeteria and, cafeterias being what they are, one may choose not to visit the religion section, let alone partake of its entrees.

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Benton Johnson describes a parallel development within the mainline denominations and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) itself that he calls "devitalization" ("Devitalizing Processes in American Mainline Protestantism and Their Implication for Membership Trends," a paper presented at the session on Leaving Church: Religious Diversity and Change, annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Anaheim, California, November 19, 1989). As society has moved to a greater toleration of differing values, viewpoints, and lifestyles, the Presbyterian church has gone through "an erosion of commitment" to what Johnson calls "the denomination's 'old agenda' of social concerns." That old agenda consisted of Sabbath observance; total abstinence from alcoholic beverages; avoidance of such worldly amusements as dancing, theater-going, and card playing; and the upholding of traditional norms governing sexuality and family relations, including strict rules on divorce and opposition to the use of birth control in family planning. The process of change has taken place, Johnson claims, without interruption though not simultaneously on all fronts, and the changes have been "genuinely popular in the church at large" (ibid., p. 5).

This devitalization of collective disciplines leads to a relaxed view of the Christian faith and undermines the church's attempts to call for costly discipleship.

This devitalization of collective disciplines leads to a relaxed view of the Christian faith and undermines the church's attempts to call for costly discipleship. If the church responds by revising the cost of discipleship downward (as mainline churches have tended to do in the twentieth century), the process will inevitably lead to a point where the benefits of membership in the church will be "too small to offset the costs of institutional involvement itself" (ibid., p. 11). Johnson states:

"If this conceptual model fits recent reality, as I think it does, then the membership decline of the mainline churches was a development whose time had come. It would have happened at some point, baby boom or no baby boom, counterculture or no counterculture" (ibid., p. 11).

The effects of social toleration may be seen in the high number of persons who switch to nonaffiliation. In an earlier era social pressure would prod most persons to ally themselves with one of the churches or synagogues in town. Today the religious bodies compete with scores of other institutions and groups bidding for people's allegiance. At least one study of inactive members suggests that persons who drop out of active church membership may wait for as long as six weeks to see if anyone misses them. If no contact is made within that time, inactive members will "re-invest" their energies in some new commitment, after which the church will have a difficult time reclaiming them.

Many of those who switch to nonaffiliation continue to think of themselves as Presbyterians. In the late 1980s the nationwide General Social Survey found that almost 4.3 percent of Americans (about 7.7 million adults) aged 18 and over identified themselves as "Presbyterians." Combined membership in all U.S. Presbyterian denominations totaled approximately 3.4 million members. Therefore, a minimum of over 3 million individuals in the United States identified themselves as Presbyterians, yet did not belong to any Presbyterian church. It would certainly be appropriate to address our efforts to these "mental members."

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Two other groups are growing rapidly in our society, "the once churched but now no preference," and "the never churched and no preference." "The 'once churched but no preference' spawn the 'never churched and no preference.' The 'never churched' appear to have been quite small in number in the past, but as the 'once churched but no preference' group grows, the 'never churched' will increase exponentially" (Milton J. Coalter, in a study paper presented to the task force, p. 9). That is, the children of Presbyterian dropouts will not only be unchurched; they will have no residual allegiance to the Presbyterian church, as their parents had.

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Of special concern is the fact that 11.5 percent of youth reared in Presbyterian homes are now among those who claim "no preference." According to Roof and McKinney, the "no preference" group is made up of young, predominantly male, individuals who are "well-educated, committed to the new morality, and oriented generally to an ethic of personal fulfillment" (quoted by Coalter, p. 10).

Mainline churches "draw more of their members from the upper socioeconomic brackets that have been most influenced by the value shifts taking place in our society, especially those shifts away from church participation" (Oswald and Leas, p. 9). Therefore, the new voluntarism tends to inhibit growth in the Presbyterian church.

The Effects of Theological Relativism

A recent Presbyterian Panel asked its correspondents to respond to the following statements:

- all the different religions have equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth;

- all the great religions of the world are equally true and good;
- not all the churches have God's truth, many are in serious error;
- the only absolute truth for humankind is in Jesus Christ; and
- only followers of Jesus Christ and members of His church can be saved.

When the responses were combined into a scale, the following percentages showed medium to high theological relativism:

- 56 percent of members
- 44 percent of elders
- 33 percent of pastors
- 52 percent of specialized clergy

The same panel reports percentages of agreement with the statement, "We should stop imposing Christianity" on the peoples of the world:

- 27 percent of members agree
- 18 percent of pastors agree
- 24 percent of elders agree
- 37 percent of specialized clergy agree

It is apparent that there exists a significant measure of uncertainty among the clergy, leaders, and members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) regarding the essential place of Jesus of Nazareth in God's purpose to save humankind. In the face of this relativism, the claims of Jesus Christ become muted not only to the world at large but to members of the church who are unsure whether they have any right to recommend their particular faith experiences to other persons. In the name of toleration, witness often falls silent and membership growth suffers.

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The Influence of Special Purpose Groups

Robert Wuthnow notes,

Denominations have not ceased to exist but have become to a greater extent diverse federations of special purpose groups rather than monolithic, homogeneous structures. They provide some continuing degree of identity and coordination, but much of the concrete action in which religious people are engaged takes place in more specialized groups that may fall either within or across denominational lines. (*The Restructuring of American Religion*, p. 125)

The presence of special purpose groups in American religion clearly constitutes one of the ways in which the faith is continuously revitalized at the same time, special interest groups may unwittingly foster church membership decline.

In the Presbyterian church these special purpose groups have, for several years, been recognized as "independent, autonomous groups which are not official agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," but that "bear a responsibility to the Church and shall respect the appropriate governing bodies in matters affecting decency, order, peace, and unity of the Church" (G-9.0601). The 202nd General Assembly (1990) recommended to the presbyteries that these provisions in the Form of Government be deleted, thus removing all official and unofficial recognition to these special purpose groups in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is expected, nonetheless, that these groups will continue to exist and to exert influence at all levels of the denomination.

Wuthnow notes that "the presence of special purpose groups in American religion clearly constitutes one of the ways in which the faith is continuously revitalized" (p. 121). At the same time, special interest groups may unwittingly foster church membership decline. "For these groups, bringing more people into the Presbyterian communion may often be secondary to

bringing people into a particular special interest movement" (Coalter, p. 11).

The Influence of Denominational Policies

The influence of denominational policies on church decline and growth is a subject of continuing debate. At one level, denominational policies since 1960 have focused on justice ministries more than verbal witness. Further, we have pursued those ministries in concert with the ecumenical community and with groups that have no religious identity. According to some observers, these policies and ministries, while laudatory on their own merits, have blunted the denomination's commitment to verbal witness and inhibited efforts to grow numerically.

Recent General Assemblies have acted to correct this imbalance by positioning "doing evangelism and developing congregations" as one of the two major emphases of the church.

At another level, it is asserted by many that persons are leaving the Presbyterian church in protest against the church's alleged liberalism and social activism. The task force received from the Presbyterian Lay Committee a report summarizing 616 unsolicited letters from persons who have left the Presbyterian church in the last eight years. "Most of the authors of the letters gave several reasons for leaving the denomination . . . The majority of reasons were directed toward the denomination and its positions rather than at the local church and/or minister" (From a letter to the task force from J. Robert Campbell, president of the Presbyterian Lay Committee, dated July 20, 1990). Fifty-seven of the 616 correspondents objected to the church's "political positions," and

The influence of denominational policies on church decline and growth is a subject of continuing debate.

thirty-six objected to what they perceived as "sympathizing with leftist/anarchist governments, anti-USA government positions." A total of 159 others objected to the church's support of the World and National Councils of Churches, to "liberal views/leftist leanings," and to the church's policy of "divestment of stocks in U.S. companies."

On the other hand, a 1988 Gallup Poll found that

many people outside . . . the church identify themselves as Presbyterians, but criticize the church for being too uninvolved and irrelevant. Thus we must think simultaneously of several different patterns: while it may be that the church "drives out" members who think of themselves as conservatives, at the same time it may attract people from more conservative denominations, and the church may actually be scandalizing or holding at bay people who expect more from it, by way of attending to both their personal religious quests and the issues facing the contemporary world. (Eugene TeSelle, in the Witherspoon Society's *Network News*, May/June, 1989, p. 9)

The task force did not find data to show that more persons are leaving the church than joining it because of its policies.

In summary, there are at least four responses to denominational policies: (1) members affirm the Reformed tradition of taking positions on public issues and remain loyal to the church; (2) members object to denominational positions on public issues and leave the church; (3) believers unite with the Presbyterian church because they perceive it to be active in the public arena; (4) believers remain aloof from the Presbyterian church because they perceive it is not sufficiently active in the public arena.

The task force did not find data to show that more persons are leaving the church than joining it because of its policies. The task force agrees with the following comments by John L. Boone:

Of those who leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), most are motivated less by anger than by apathy. They forsake the church not because they find it too strongly activist, but rather because they find it weak and irrelevant—not caring enough, not sufficiently committed to meeting either their personal needs or the broader needs of our society. If we wish to reverse our shrinkage in numbers, therefore, the main question is not: Who is to blame for Presbyterians walking out the door? Instead the question should be: How can we make the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) more inviting, more attractive to outsiders who might come in our door? (From a letter to the task force from John L. Boone, president, Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom, dated August 28, 1990)

The Nurture of Christian Maturity in Congregations

Ignorance of the Biblical Story

The Presbyterian Panel recently discovered that 60 percent of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) church members read the Bible at home less than once a month, and that 44 percent of our members aren't convinced that the Bible is any more important than the sacred scriptures of other world religions. In the Fall 1989, Outlook Forum, Elizabeth Achtemeier stated:

Somewhere along the line, and despite all our Christian education curricula, we let a vast pall of ignorance about the biblical story settle over the church, and so we lost our authority. We have no biblical ground upon which to stand

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anymore, and so we can never size up some ideology or competing theology and say clearly, on the basis of the biblical authority, "No, that is not true."

John Leith agrees:

The church is at risk because we have given priority in the church to derivative, secondary activities. We have lost an awareness that the reality of the church and the unity of the church are established by the hearing of the Word of God. The one thing that is essential for the church is the Word of God. ("The Open Letter," Fall 1989)

Lack of Adequate Christian Nurture in Congregations

An Alban Institute study has "found that baby-boomers were most responsive to those congregations which had clarity about their central religious function—people don't come primarily for program, but for some connection with the transcendent" (Bob Gribbon, "New Hints About Ministry with the Baby Boom Generation," *Action Information* XII no. 2).

In his study of the growing Canadian Presbyterian churches, James B. Sauer lists three priorities that contribute to membership growth: (1) spirituality; (2) warm fellowship, and (3) evangelistic outreach (From a report of the Committee on Church Growth to Double in the Eighties, Presbyterian Church of Canada). Experience demonstrates that the third priority (evangelistic outreach) often fails because the first priority (spirituality) has not been adequately fostered in congregational life.

It is evident that lack of Christian nurture in congregations leads to biblical illiteracy, moral

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relativism, theological ignorance, and evangelical apathy, resulting in (among other things) membership decline.

Pastors and denominational leaders must continually ask themselves, "What is our primary business?" If the answer lies in the direction of helping the largest possible number of people related to God in a life-changing way, the denominations and congregations will grow. If pastors get confused and concentrate on Christ plus something else, their denominations and congregations shrink and eventually die. (Herb Miller, *How to Build a Magnetic Church*, p. 112)

LOCAL FACTORS

According to the 1978 publication *Understanding Church Growth and Decline* by Dean Hoge and David Roozen, there are several community factors that inhibit church growth. Among them are:

Affluence

- older homes near the church: negative correlation;
- an older church building: negative correlation;
- higher percent of renters near church: negative correlation.

Demographic Change

- increase in older persons: slight negative correlation;
- increase in minorities: slight negative correlation.

Community Facilities

- location of church near banks, retail stores, and public schools: slight negative correlation.

It is evident that lack of Christian nurture in congregations leads to biblical illiteracy, moral relativism, theological ignorance, and evangelical apathy, resulting in (among other things) membership decline.

Church Competition

- other Protestant churches nearby: small negative correlation.

Yet "it needs to be noted that no factors have overwhelming influence on whether a church will grow or not. Demographic change, which is the most significant factor, accounts for only eight percent of the change" (Oswald and Leas, p. 12).

KEY ISSUES IN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP DECLINE AND GROWTH

The task force has identified the following "key issues" relating to church membership decline and growth:

Faithfulness to Jesus Christ in a particular congregational setting may lead to membership growth or decline, or may maintain the current membership level.

1. The congregations that make up the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, the Head of the body.
2. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ calls for congregations to commit themselves to the two major mission emphases of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): (a) doing evangelism and developing congregations; and (b) doing justice.
3. In evangelism, the Holy Spirit works through disciples of Jesus Christ individually and corporately to share joyfully the good news of the sovereign love of God, and to call people to repentance, to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to active membership in the church, to obedient service to the world (Adapted from the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit's "Working Definition of Evangelism").

4. With regard to "doing evangelism and developing congregations," the 201st General Assembly (1989) called on the church to "focus on spreading the good news throughout the world, inviting all people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. All members are called to proclaim the Gospel in all areas of their lives. Emphasis will be on spiritual growth and renewal of individual members and on the formation and development of new and existing faith communities or congregations."
5. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ in a particular congregational setting may lead to membership growth or decline, or may maintain the current membership level.
6. Significant changes in the birth-death ratio among Presbyterians have contributed to membership decline.
7. Failure to respond to demographic changes by reaching out to new or different people accounts for many of the factors in the declining membership of the church.
8. Conflict in congregations is a major factor in membership decline.
9. In a society of changing values, differing viewpoints and lifestyles have led to an indifference to the gospel on the part of many of the unchurched and to an erosion of commitment on the part of many of the churched. This challenges the church to present the claims of the gospel to a changing culture.
10. Evangelism is the task least likely to be receiving the greatest emphasis within many congregations.

Conflict in congregations is a major factor in membership decline.

11. The most effective evangelism takes place at the congregational level as believers share their faith with their children, families, friends, and others in their communities.
12. Religious education in the home is a critical factor in the nurture and retention of our youth.
13. The commitment of ministers of the Word and Sacrament to evangelism is a crucial influence in the motivation, training, and implementation of the congregation's work of evangelism.
14. All members of the church are ministers of Jesus Christ, with particular gifts for ministry. Members are called to discover, develop, and share their gifts in the church and the community.
15. Ministering to the needs of persons in the community is a faithful response to the gospel and contributes to church membership growth.
16. Persons who respond to the gospel need to be supported and sustained in a caring and loving community of faith that provides worship, pastoral care, life together in small groups, and nurturing in biblical knowledge and Reformed faith.
17. The racial ethnic population of the United States will reach almost half the total population in the twenty-first century, affording the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) a significant opportunity for membership growth by sponsoring and supporting church development among racial ethnic and new immigrant groups.

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18. Growing denominations throughout the world place significant emphasis on new church development and redevelopment.
19. It is essential that governing bodies provide support for membership growth through the planning and funding of new church development and redevelopment, the motivation of sessions to engage in evangelism, the training of church leaders for evangelism, the networking of leaders wanting to grow in evangelistic skills, and the celebration of churches that reach their evangelism goals.
20. It is essential that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit and other General Assembly ministry units continue to provide support for membership growth by inspiring, equipping, mobilizing, and resourcing congregations and their members for evangelism.

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PART TWO

A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR FAITHFULNESS

God calls the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be the body of Christ in this world and to make Christ known. Jesus Christ is the vine and we are the branches; apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Therefore health and growth in the Presbyterian body begins with calling people to life in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Human sinfulness severed the relationship with God for which humankind was created, resulting in a separation beyond repair apart from Divine initiative. Thus the urgency of the good news: God took the initiative in sending Jesus Christ to this earth "to seek and save those who are lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus Christ came to call all peoples to repent and become his disciples, for "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

This good news of God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ calls for an active response of faith, which includes a personal commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord expressed in corporate involvement in the church, his body, and obedient service in the world. Without this response the work of restoration remains unfulfilled; the branch still remains apart from the vine. Through faith, relationship with the living God is restored, for "by grace you are saved through faith . . ." (Eph. 2:8).

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The restored relationship with the living God accomplished in Jesus Christ provides the one ultimate source of joy, healing, wholeness, and life. Thus the urgent calling of God upon the whole church is to proclaim in word and deed "the gospel for the salvation of humankind" (*Book of Order*, G-1.0200) as the only source of abundant life and eternal hope.

The theological basis of this report is faithfulness to Jesus Christ, expressed by calling people into life-commitment to:

The Person of Christ:

In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God. (*Book of Order*, G-1.0100d)

The theological basis of this report is faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

The Body of Christ:

The Church is a fellowship of believers which seeks the enlargement of the circle of faith to include all people, and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone. (*Book of Order*, G-4.0201)

The Work of Christ:

The Church is called to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of him as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples . . . participating in God's activity in the world . . . ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the powerless. (*Book of Order*, G-3.0300b-.0300c(3)(b))

PART THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor denominations have a long record of faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The very existence of Presbyterian churches in the United States of America testifies to the missionary fervor of earlier generations in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and other European nations where the Reformed faith had taken root following the Reformation and from which immigrants came to this continent to establish and extend the Christian faith through Reformed congregations. Further, many racial ethnic groups are currently enriching the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with their unique patterns for worship, their modes of discipleship, and their models of evangelism and membership growth.

Recent General Assemblies have repeatedly called the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to make evangelism a priority mission, not primarily that we may reverse our membership decline, but that we may be faithful to the Lord of the church.

Recent General Assemblies have repeatedly called the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to make evangelism a priority mission, not primarily that we may reverse our membership decline, but that we may be faithful to the Lord of the church who commanded, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

The 1989 General Assembly stated:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will focus on spreading the good news throughout the world,

inviting all people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. All members are called to proclaim the Gospel in all areas of their lives. Emphasis will be on spiritual growth and renewal of individual members and on the formation and development of new and existing faith communities or congregations.

In faithfulness to our theology and history, growing out of our analysis of the factors in church membership loss, and based upon our study of the current literature dealing with church membership growth, the task force makes the following recommendations to the 203rd General Assembly (1991):

REVITALIZING CONGREGATIONS

It is imperative that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) more deliberately promote evangelism in the 1990s and beyond. To survive as a vital denomination we must grow both in faithfulness to Christ and in numbers of members. We must recommit ourselves to our calling, to spread the gospel, and to invite persons to become disciples of Christ.

The most effective types of evangelism take place at the congregational level as enabled believers share their faith with their children, their families and friends, and with others in their communities.

In order for congregations to help promote the faith sharing that can lead to church membership growth, the congregation must have a proactive evangelism plan. That plan should be grounded in a serious attempt to discern and act upon God's will for the congregation. It must fit the unique opportunities that encircle that congregation, be

*To survive as
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numbers of
members.*

built on the congregation's strengths, foster a spirit of love and caring, and be fed by programs that lead to each members spiritual growth.

THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

We therefore recommend that all congregations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) be encouraged to adopt a five-year Commitment to Evangelism.

The Commitment to Evangelism is to be signed by session and a copy sent to presbytery and the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit.

The Commitment to Evangelism

All congregations are encouraged to adopt a five-year Commitment to Evangelism.

We, the session of _____ Church, commit ourselves to the task of evangelism. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we accept our identity as witnesses to Jesus Christ in our immediate community, our county, our nation, and around the world (Acts 1:8). We affirm that we are called to reach out in word and deed to those beyond our walls, and we dedicate ourselves to being hospitable and inviting within our walls. For these reasons we commit ourselves:

1. To pray regularly for the church around the world, to pray for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and for our congregation that we might all be used as instruments for God's purpose.
2. To accept "A Theological Basis for Faithfulness" as our theology of evangelism, or to develop and accept our own theological statement consistent with the Reformed faith.

3. To assess evangelistic opportunities and the needs of the unchurched within reach of our congregation, and to pursue those opportunities and meet those needs.
4. To develop and/or initiate programs to train persons how to share their faith, such as parents relating to their children, and laity relating to unchurched neighbors and co-workers.
5. To develop action plans to increase attendance in worship and participation in Christian education over the next five years. This goal is to be shared with the entire congregation and recorded by the presbytery.
6. To establish annual goals for each of the next five years for adding new members, and to develop action plans to move toward the goal. This goal is to be shared with the entire congregation and recorded by presbytery.
7. To develop a plan to include and involve all members in the full life of the congregation.
8. To provide over the next five years, within the life of the congregation, programs for those persons who are new to the Christian faith. This will mean an intentional effort to be basic and introductory in worship, Bible study, and mission, working to be inclusive of, and sensitive toward, persons just beginning their faith journey.

*The
Commitment to
Evangelism is to
be signed by
the session.*

9. To seek out and invite persons gifted for evangelism to consider whether they are called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament or other church vocations.
10. To evaluate annually our progress on this commitment, to recommit ourselves to evangelism, and to make adjustments as needed.

Date	Moderator
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Date	Clerk
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The presbytery has a responsibility to initiate and support ministries of evangelism.

THE PRESBYTERY

The task force recognizes that the presbytery has a responsibility to initiate and support ministries of evangelism through its congregations and other ministries within its bounds, and to establish new communities of faith where none exist.

We therefore recommend that all presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) be encouraged to adopt a Commitment to Evangelism such as the following:

Presbytery Commitment to Evangelism

We, the _____ Presbytery, commit ourselves to the task of evangelism. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we accept our identity as witnesses to Jesus Christ through our churches, through other ministries within the bounds of our presbytery, and around the world.

We affirm that we are called to reach out in word and deed, proclaiming the good news of God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ.

For these reasons, we commit ourselves:

- 1. To pray regularly for the church around the world, to pray for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and to pray for the congregations and ministries of our presbytery, that we might all be used as instruments for God's purpose.**
- 2. To accept "A Theological Basis for Faithfulness" as our theology of evangelism, or to develop and accept our own theological statement consistent with the Reformed faith.**
- 3. To encourage all sessions in the presbytery, during regular presbytery visitations and in other ways, to adopt a congregational Commitment to Evangelism.**
- 4. To design and implement, in consultation with the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit and the synod, a ten-year church development plan, with specific five-year goals for new church development and redevelopment.**
- 5. To assess and pursue opportunities for evangelism through ministries of the presbytery, and through other ministries within the bounds of the presbytery.**
- 6. To help congregations and other ministries carry out their evangelism plans by:**
 - a. making Evangelism Opportunity Assessments and other evangelism materials available;**

This commitment is to be signed by the presbytery's moderator and stated clerk at a stated meeting.

- b. holding evangelism training events dealing with witnessing and faith-sharing for ministers and lay leaders; and
 - c. aiding churches and other ministries in setting growth goals, and celebrating annually, those that reach their goals.
7. To seek out and invite persons gifted for evangelism to consider whether they are called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament or other church vocations.
 8. To evaluate annually our progress on these commitments, to recommit to evangelism, and to make adjustments as needed.

This commitment is to be signed by the presbytery's moderator and stated clerk at a stated meeting, and forwarded to the synod and the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit.

Many synods actively work to provide resources and networking for their presbyteries.

Date	Moderator
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Date	Stated Clerk
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THE SYNOD

The task force recognizes that synods have a responsibility to coordinate ministries of evangelism in the presbyteries within their boundaries, and that many synods actively work to provide resources and networking for their presbyteries.

We therefore recommend:

1. That synods pray regularly for the church around the world, the Presbyterian Church

(U.S.A.), and the presbyteries and congregations within their boundaries, that we might all be used as instruments for God's purpose.

2. That synods assist presbyteries to fulfill their Commitment to Evangelism.
3. That synods be encouraged to initiate and facilitate the networking of presbyteries and their churches interested in mentoring or being mentored in evangelism skills.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ENTITIES AND RELATED INSTITUTIONS

The task force recognizes that General Assembly entities and related institutions have a significant role to play in the resourcing of congregations, presbyteries, and synods in their task of evangelism. The task force commends the personnel of the ministry units, theological institutions, and other agencies and related institutions for their work in this area, and further recommends:

1. That the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit:
 - a. Distribute the congregational and presbytery Commitment to Evangelism forms to every church and presbytery, and develop accompanying explanatory materials.
 - b. Develop and make available the Evangelism Opportunity Assessment tool.
 - c. Create a packet of materials for churches of various sizes and locations, enabling them to take practical steps in fulfilling their Commitment to

General Assembly entities and related institutions have a significant role to play in the resourcing of congregations, presbyteries, and synods in their task of evangelism.

Evangelism, encouraging them to consider in their planning:

- (1) a worship style that is attractive to the unchurched;**
- (2) a preaching ministry that is intentionally aimed at the "not-yet-Christian" and new Christian;**
- (3) encouragement of the congregation in the ministry of invitation;**
- (4) programs that are intentionally inclusive of the "unchurched," "not-yet-Christian," and new Christian;**
- (5) an intentional effort to nurture Christian youth and adults;**
- (6) introductory Bible courses for youth and adults;**
- (7) training of officers and members in faith sharing;**
- (8) the creation of attractive, newcomer friendly facilities;**
- (9) discussion and assessment of the potential stresses accompanying change in a growing congregation;**
- (10) programming for those persons who are new to the Christian faith; making an intentional effort to be basic and introductory in worship, Bible study, and mission; working to be inclusive of, and sensitive toward, persons just beginning their faith journey.**

- d. Survey other ministry units and agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),**

and other denominations, to create a directory of programs, materials, and resources and that this annotated bibliography be made available to congregations.

2. That the theological institutions be encouraged:
 - a. To develop continuing education courses to help pastors develop skills to meet and befriend people and lead their people in more effective witness to diverse cultures and age groups (e.g., the baby-boomer generation) with diverse lifestyles, tastes, interests, and religious backgrounds.
 - b. To offer continuing education events for pastors and congregations in the use of communication media and concepts for reaching the unchurched.
3. The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly:

*Continuing
Education*

The task force believes that the annual statistics of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as reported in *Minutes, General Assembly, Part II, Statistics* will be more helpful in assessing the faithfulness and membership growth of our denomination if data can be gathered showing average year-round worship attendance and the number of persons 18 years and older uniting with the churches by profession and re-affirmation of faith.

*Annual
Statistical
Report*

We therefore recommend:

- a. that the Office of the Stated Clerk be instructed to revise the congregational statistics recorded in the *Minutes of the General Assembly, Part II, Statistics* as follows:

- (1) a new column be added between column 2 and 3 (the new column would become column 3, with the following columns renumbered) that would contain "Average Year-round Worship Attendance" figures for each congregation; and
- (2) the labels of the three columns under "Gains" be revised to read:
 - (a) "by profession and reaffirmation 18 and older";
 - (b) "by certificate";
 - (c) "by profession and reaffirmation 17 and younger."

*Commitment to
Evangelism*

The task force notes that the annual statistical report forms, prepared for the *Minutes of the General Assembly, Part II, Statistics*, allow churches to present information about congregational priorities in ministry.

We therefore recommend:

- b. that a new section be added to page two of the "Congregational Annual Report" as follows (with subsequent sections re-lettered):

"B. Evangelism

"1. Has your session adopted the 'Commitment to Evangelism' (either with the text suggested by the General Assembly or with revisions made by your session)? 1 _ Yes 2 _ No

"2. Has your congregation been involved in evangelism efforts during this last year?

1 _ Yes 2 _ No"

NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT

The task force notes that growing denominations throughout the world place significant emphasis on new church development and redevelopment. For example, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. experienced significant growth during the 1950s when new church development was carried out in greater numbers than during more recent years. As part of its Five-Year Plan, the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit has targeted new church development and redevelopment as priority concerns.

The task force supports these efforts and further recommends:

- A. That the General Assembly request each presbytery to develop a ten-year new church development and redevelopment mission plan in consultation with the appropriate offices in the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit of the General Assembly; that the presbytery review the progress of the plan and update it annually; and that the plan include:
 1. a demographic analysis of the presbytery, targeting major population centers of new growth, if any;
 2. the number of new church developments and redevelopments planned;
 3. the potential size of each new church development and redevelopment;
 4. the projected start-up date of each development;

The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. experienced significant growth during the 1950s when new church development was carried out in greater numbers than during more recent years.

Presbytery Planning

5. the target population of each development, including racial ethnic developments;
6. personal and programmatic support for the organizing pastor; and
7. patterns of funding.

B. That the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit be directed to gather and compile annually the new church development and redevelopment plans of the presbyteries and to share annually a summary of the plans with the executive presbyters and the General Assembly.

C. That the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, in consultation with the Stewardship and Communication Development Ministry Unit and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation, be directed to explore new and creative ways of funding new church developments, redevelopments, and loans to support an expected increase in the next decade in the number of new church developments and redevelopments, and to report their findings to the 204th General Assembly (1992).

D. That presbyteries:

1. encourage existing congregations to provide funding for new church development and redevelopment within their presbyteries;
2. include such funding in the approved mission causes giving totals of those congregations;
3. invite sponsoring congregations to provide representatives on the pastor

- nominating committees of the new church developments;
 - 4. invite sponsoring congregations to develop a supportive relationship with the new church developments; and
 - 5. invite and encourage congregations to develop supportive and resourcing relationships in redevelopment efforts.
- E. That the Church Growth and New Church Development Office of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit enter into conversations with the theological institutions and the Committee on Theological Education to seek a seminary to work with the Church Growth and New Church Development Office to initiate two special emphases in support of new church development:**
- 1. Establish a nondegree continuing education program designed to train persons with pastoral experience to become new church development pastors, including training in cross-cultural evangelism.
 - 2. Become a center for the study of new church development research, including the study of issues relating to racial ethnic new church developments.
- F. That the Church Growth and New Church Development Office of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit develop a national new church development strategy that will include:**
- 1. an initial focus in the next five years on the ten to fifteen presbyteries where the

*Education for
New Church
Development*

*New Church
Development
National
Strategy*

The racial ethnic population in the United States will reach almost half the population in the twenty-first century.

Development of Comprehensive Strategies

largest unchurched population growth is occurring;

2. training programs for racial ethnic commissioned lay preachers and racial ethnic pastors from other denominations, to meet the need for pastoral leadership in racial ethnic groups that have few, if any, trained Presbyterian pastors; and
3. the development of a ten-year new church development plan.

RACIAL ETHNIC MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a predominantly white denomination in which racial ethnic congregations represent less than 5 percent of our total membership. However, the church is committed to inclusiveness through participation. Racial ethnic Presbyterians recognize the importance of their faith journey, culture, and identify as partners in mission in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Further, the racial ethnic population in the United States will reach almost half the population in the twenty-first century.

Viewing these factors as an important opportunity for mission and membership growth, the task force recommends:

- A. That the General Assembly direct the Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit, with the assistance of the Church Vocations, Stewardship and Communications Development, and Evangelism and Church Development ministry units, to study patterns of immigration and location of both immigrant and existing racial ethnic populations, and develop jointly a

comprehensive strategy for racial ethnic new church development and redevelopment.

Racial ethnic congregations, while attempting to participate in governing bodies and mission partnership, are sometimes hindered by language barriers and cultural differences. Further, several hundred racial ethnic congregations from Presbyterian backgrounds elsewhere in the world have chosen not to unite with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) because they do not yet accept certain provisions in our *Constitution* (e.g., the ordination of women, the rotation of elders). Recognizing that our own progress as a denomination toward these convictions has taken many years, the task force urges that special opportunities be offered to racial ethnic congregations not now a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to allow them to bring their talents and gifts into our denomination, and that they be accorded time to accommodate themselves to the provisions of our *Constitution*.

*Special
Committee on
Racial Ethnic
Congregations*

We therefore recommend:

- B. That the General Assembly appoint a special committee not to exceed fifteen persons to provide for the full inclusion of racial ethnic congregations in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in consultation with the Churchwide Administrative Coordinating Cabinet, the Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit, the Women's Ministry Unit, all racial ethnic caucuses, Hanmi and Dakota presbyteries, the Synod of Boriquen (Puerto Rico), and any others whose wisdom and experience may inform this task, and report to the 204th General Assembly (1992).**

Because the racial ethnic population of the United States will grow significantly in the twenty-first century, it is essential that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) actively recruit racial ethnic leadership.

We therefore recommend:

C. To further the recruitment of racial ethnic membership:

1. That the General Assembly direct the Church Vocations, Education and Congregational Nurture, and the Racial Ethnic ministry units to develop jointly a comprehensive recruitment plan to include the following elements:

- a. Christian education materials that highlight the role of the ministry of Word and Sacrament; and**
- b. printed and visual materials regarding the ministry of Word and Sacrament for use with high school and college students.**

2. That theological institutions and the Committee on Theological Education be urged:

- a. to develop programs and curricula that are culturally plural and representative of the contributions of racial ethnic persons; and**
- b. to recruit additional racial ethnic faculty.**

3. That racial ethnic and other congregations be urged:

- a. actively to seek competent persons of growing faith, inviting them to con-**

*Recruitment of
Racial Ethnic
Leadership*

sider entering the ministry of Word and Sacrament; and

- b. to provide scholarship funds and other incentives to racial ethnic candidates in Presbyterian theological institutions.

ENHANCING PASTORAL SKILLS

The task force is aware that the quality, competence, and spiritual health of leadership in the church is related to the growth of the church. It is also aware that the presbytery bears the primary responsibility for the oversight of and care of ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The oversight and care is crucial for the nurture, growth, and excellence of the pastoral leadership of the church.

We therefore recommend:

CALLING OF LEADERS

1. That the Church Vocations Ministry Unit encourage Committees on Preparation for Ministry in each presbytery to assist congregations within their bounds to invite competent persons of growing faith to consider prayerfully the call of God to the ministry of Word and Sacrament;
2. That the General Assembly direct relevant units and agencies (e.g., Church Vocations Ministry Unit, Committee on Theological Education), and work with the theological institutions and ecumenical bodies (e.g., the Lilly Foundation, the SEIC [Study for the Enrichment of Inquirers and Candidates] project) to provide resources to aid presbyteries and congregations in calling

The quality, competence, and spiritual health of leadership in the church is related to the growth of the church.

competent persons to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

PREPARATION OF LEADERS

The task force, noting that presbyteries assess the readiness of persons seeking ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), believes that potential ministers of the Word and Sacrament should be able to explain the gospel to others in personal, conversational settings.

We therefore recommend:

1. That the *Book of Order* be amended by adding a new paragraph (4) under G-14.0305j, to read:

“(4) presenting in a conversational context a basic, biblical understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord as it could be presented in a practical, pastoral setting.”

And that the remaining paragraphs under G-14.0305j be renumbered.

Noting the need for nurture and renewal among ministers of the Word and Sacrament, the task force recommends:

2. That the Church Vocations Ministry Unit be asked to seek presbyteries that have developed models for the nurture and renewal of pastors, and publish these models to the presbyteries and to the church at large.
3. That the Church Vocations Ministry Unit be asked to publish periodically a directory of continuing education opportunities.

Noting that believers in the work place have opportunities for evangelism for which they are often poorly equipped, the task force recommends:

Potential ministers of the Word and Sacrament should be able to explain the gospel to others in personal, conversational settings.

4. That the Women's Ministry Unit and the Ministry with Men Office of the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit be asked to work with theological institutions to equip pastors and congregations for work place evangelism.

OTHER FORMS OF OUTREACH

CAMPUS MINISTRY

1. We recommend that the Office of the Stated Clerk adapt the current membership referral system to inform congregations located near a college campus and affiliated campus ministries when students from Presbyterian churches move into their area to attend a college or university.
2. We recommend that the Committee on Higher Education, in cooperation with the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, identify five congregations in the environs of a college or university and five on-campus ministries that have shown special skills in evangelistic efforts with college students. Further, we urge that representatives from these congregations and campus ministries be asked to lead workshops during the next three years regarding such ministries. We recommend that this information be published for use by the entire church.
3. We recommend, in concert with the Committee on Higher Education in its 1991 report "Loving God with Our Minds," that the General Assembly mandate a consultation and report on the church's mission in

*Strengthening
Campus
Ministry*

higher education to the 1994 General Assembly. We recommend that the consultation address the question: How is campus ministry related to the numerical growth of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

OUTREACH MINISTRIES TO THE UNCHURCHED

Young Adults

We recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit identify up to twenty congregations that have demonstrated an ability to do outreach with young adults and with baby boomers. Further, we urge that representatives from these congregations be asked to lead workshops during the next three years regarding such ministries. We recommend that this information be published for use by the entire church.

MEDIA

Effective Media Outreach

1. We urge all Presbyterian Theological Institutions engaged in multimedia education for ministry to offer continuing education events that instruct congregational leaders in the use of media for reaching the unchurched.
2. We recommend that a list be compiled on a regular basis of the best illustrations of churches who have effectively used media to reach the unchurched and disseminate that list to congregations. We also recommend that evangelism committees of synods and presbyteries annually celebrate these churches' accomplishments.

3. We recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit research and prepare strategies in how to use local and national media in reaching out to the unchurched. We also recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit train congregations in those strategies and findings.
4. We recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit explore the feasibility and effectiveness of a national presence in the mass media for the purpose of reinforcing membership allegiances, for building public awareness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and in creating an environment for evangelism. Possibilities for outside funding should be explored.

*Celebrations at
General
Assembly*

FOLLOW-UP TO TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit present to General Assembly, each year, a brief celebration of New Church Developments in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) initiated in the previous year.
2. We recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit present to General Assembly, each year, a brief celebration of the Commitments to Evangelism made by congregations and presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) during the previous year.

*Progress
Report*

3. We recommend that the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit present a progress report to the 1993 General Assembly on the implementation of the 1991 recommendations from the Task Force on Church Membership Growth.

PART FOUR
RESPONSE TO COMMISSIONERS'
RESOLUTION 90-24
CONCERNING EVANGELISM IN THE PRES-
BYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) FOR THE
1990S

Commissioners' Resolution 90-24 (Minutes, 1990, Part I, pp. 842-43) was referred to the Task Force on Church Membership Growth created by the General Assembly Council upon recommendation of the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit. In reviewing *Commissioners' Resolution 90-24* (which recommends a goal of "one million [professions of faith] . . . by the year 2000") and preparing a response, the task force affirmed its commitment to increasing the numbers of persons professing faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and becoming members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and its conviction that the report of the task force includes measurable goals that challenge the church to grow again in membership. It also noted the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit Five-Year Plan is directed to this end.

Response: The Task Force on Church Membership Growth of the General Assembly Council

and that, while the task force firmly believes that "to survive as a vital denomination we must grow both in faithfulness to Christ and in numbers of members," it believes the church is better served by committing itself to the tasks outlined in the report than to a specific numerical goal.

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