

# PRESBYTERIAN PANEL SUMMARY

*Listening to Presbyterians*



## MAY 1994 COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

	<u>Members</u>	<u>Elders</u>	<u>Pastors</u>	<u>Specialized Clergy</u>
Number of Panelists . . . . .	1,465	1,348	1,257	686
Number of questionnaires returned . . . . .	863	839	916	478
Percent returned . . . . .	59%	62%	73%	70%

The topic of the May 1994 Presbyterian Panel questionnaire was communications. The questionnaire had three parts. The purpose of the first part was to obtain panelists' opinions about the types of information they want the "national church" (i.e., the General Assembly, the General Assembly Council, and their staff offices in Louisville) to provide. The second part was designed to determine *how* they want the information delivered. The third part gathered information about how Presbyterians presently talk to one another.

### MEMBERS WANT SUCCESS STORIES

When asked whether they want to receive 24 different types of information about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the type of information that the largest percentage of members (28%) said that they "yes, definitely" want to receive was "success stories about Presbyterian programs." There was a close second, though—27% of members said they "yes, definitely" want "articles on spirituality/growth in faith." But another 27% of members said they either definitely did not or probably did not want to receive information on spirituality or growth in faith.

### MEMBERS DESIRE BOOK REVIEWS AS MUCH AS INFORMATION ON FINANCIAL STATUS

Only 14% of members definitely want to receive "information about the denomination's financial status" and the same percentage want to receive "reviews of books, movies, television programs, etc." In contrast, 41% of the

members said they definitely or probably did *not* want financial information about the denomination, compared to 46% saying the same thing about reviews of books and movies.

### PASTORS MORE LIKELY THAN ELDERS AND ELDERS MORE LIKELY THAN MEMBERS TO WANT ALL TYPES OF INFORMATION

In general, elders want to receive more information than members. For example, the type of information that the largest percentage of elders said they definitely want to receive is news coverage of the annual General Assembly meetings—36% of elders, but only 25% of members, want to receive this type of information. At the same time, 78% of pastors and 70% of specialized clergy said they definitely want to receive General Assembly news coverage. Compared to 54% of pastors, only 37% of specialized clergy, 34% of elders, and 28% of members definitely want "success stories about Presbyterian programs."

Table 1 lists the 24 types of information panelists evaluated and the percentage of panelists who reported that they "yes, definitely" want to receive each. The types of information are listed in descending order, with the information type for which the largest percentage of members responded "yes, definitely" listed first.

**Table 1**  
Percentage of Panelists Who Definitely Want to Receive  
Each Information Type

	Specialized			
	Members	Elders	Pastors	Clergy
"success stories" about Presbyterian programs . . . . .	28%	34%	54%	37%
articles on spirituality/growth in faith . . . . .	27%	34%	52%	47%
news of annual General Assembly meetings . . . . .	25%	36%	78%	70%
discussions about theological issues . . . . .	24%	25%	48%	49%
"success stories" about Presbyterian members . . . . .	19%	23%	38%	28%
human interest stories about Presbyterians who are in the news . . . . .	17%	18%	32%	28%
information about recommendations ("overtures") from presbyteries to the General Assembly . . . . .	16%	22%	29%	32%
stories/news about Presbyterian and other Christian mission around world . . . . .	16%	20%	45%	32%
information about resources available from the national church . . . . .	15%	23%	40%	35%
news of General Assembly Council meetings . . . . .	14%	22%	41%	35%
information about the denomination's financial status . . . . .	14%	21%	32%	29%
information about programs of the denomination . . . . .	14%	20%	35%	29%
reviews of books, movies, television programs, etc. . . . .	14%	14%	20%	17%
stories/news about Presbyterian congregations . . . . .	13%	16%	40%	28%
stories/news about Presbyterian colleges and universities . . . . .	11%	09%	11%	13%
opinion pieces (e.g., editorials and letters to the editor) . . . . .	11%	13%	19%	18%
news of decisions of the Permanent Judicial Council . . . . .	10%	13%	30%	30%
news of meetings of ecumenical groups . . . . .	08%	12%	09%	16%
stories/news about staff of the national church . . . . .	08%	08%	17%	14%
news of meetings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Foundation . . . . .	07%	08%	04%	05%
announcements of deaths, retirements, and new positions of ministers of the Word and Sacrament . . . . .	06%	06%	48%	41%
stories/news of Presbyterian theological institutions . . . . .	06%	08%	18%	21%
news of meetings of the Board of Pensions . . . . .	04%	04%	16%	17%
news of meetings of the divisions and boards of the national church . . . . .	04%	08%	04%	05%

**GENERAL RELIGIOUS TV PROGRAMS MORE LIKELY TO BE WATCHED THAN SPECIFICALLY PRESBYTERIAN PROGRAMS**

Forty-nine percent of elders, 45% of pastors, 43% of members, and 37% of specialized clergy said they would watch "discussions about Jesus Christ and the Bible" on television. That compares to 28% of elders, 49% of pastors, 21% of members, and 37% of specialized clergy who said they would watch "brief announcements that describe the mission programs and people of the PC(USA)." Of the 14 programs presented, "programs that highlight PC(USA) activities" are the second *least likely* to be watched by members, but they are the fifth *most likely* to be watched by pastors and the sixth most likely for specialized clergy. Table 2 summarizes the findings for this series of questions. Different types of television programs that could be produced by the denomination are presented in order by the percentage of members who said they would personally watch that type of program.

**Table 2**  
Percentage of Panelists Who Say They Would Watch  
Various Television Programs

	Specialized			
	Members	Elders	Pastors	Clergy
discussions about Jesus Christ and the Bible . . . . .	43%	49%	45%	37%
discussions about our faith . . . . .	34%	38%	46%	39%
public service announcements on family values and faith . . . . .	34%	35%	48%	38%
documentaries about social issues and concerns . . . . .	34%	34%	40%	40%
dramas with a Christian perspective . . . . .	32%	33%	37%	28%
situation comedies with a Christian perspective . . . . .	31%	29%	30%	20%
Christian education programs for children/young adults . . . . .	23%	25%	28%	21%
broadcasts of PC(USA) worship services . . . . .	22%	24%	23%	20%
brief announcements that describe the mission, programs, and people of the PC(USA) . . . . .	21%	28%	49%	37%
discussions about other Christian denominations . . . . .	20%	19%	14%	14%
talk and interview shows with Presbyterian lay leaders . . . . .	18%	22%	29%	20%
news of Christians around the world . . . . .	18%	20%	30%	26%
programs that highlight PC(USA) activities . . . . .	17%	21%	43%	36%
discussions about other (non-Christian) religions . . . . .	16%	13%	16%	20%

**PRESBYTERIANS LIKE PRINT MEDIA**

In general, most panelists would like to receive information about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in print form. Of the four samples, pastors and specialized clergy are somewhat more likely to want to receive some types of information via videos (e.g., for success stories about Presbyterian congregations) or by computer (e.g., for information about overtures to the General Assembly). The type of material being considered greatly influences how panelists want to receive such information, though, so any other generalizations in this area would be misleading.

**MANY PANELISTS KNOW THERE IS NO FREE LUNCH**

When we examined distribution preferences for the type of information members want most ("success stories" about Presbyterian programs), we found no clear consensus—32% of members want to receive this information in a general interest publication distributed to all Presbyterians at no cost to the recipients, but 22% would prefer a more general publication available by subscription. For most other types of information, the percentages preferring distribution by subscription were very similar to those preferring free distribution.

**NO AGREEMENT ON HOW PROGRAM MATERIALS SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED TO CONGREGATIONS**

Presently, program materials produced by the national church for distribution to congregations are typically sent to the pastor. When asked about this distribution system, 41% of pastors and 33% of members and elders said they would like it to continue it as is. Similar percentages of panelists (38% of members, 37% elders, and 33% of pastors) would like materials to be sent to *both* pastors and other appropriate leaders in congregations. However, the support for distributing materials to both pastors and other leaders drops dramatically if the cost is 50% more than the present distribution system.

**MOST PANELISTS WANT A SUBSCRIPTION VIDEO SERVICE**

Over 60% of panelists said they would recommend that their congregations subscribe to a video service in which one or more videotapes presenting stories of Presbyterians and other people of faith would be distributed on a monthly basis (at an estimated cost of \$40 a year). This potential service had equal support from all four groups of panelists.

When asked about interest in videos designed for different uses, two-thirds to three-quarters of member panelists said that members of their congregations would be interested or very interested in three types: those designed for use in adult church school classes, those designed for use in other adult study groups, and those designed for viewing in other church meetings (e.g., women's groups). The percentage saying they personally would watch such videos, however, was about twenty percentage points lower in each case.

**PANELISTS SUPPORT SPENDING \$7 MILLION TO PROVIDE EVERY CONGREGATION WITH A COMPUTER AND MODEM**

One way to share information throughout the PC(USA) would be to provide every congregation with a computer and modem that could be used for accessing a denominational electronic mail and conferencing system. Such a system would cost about \$7 million and provide access to news and minutes of meetings of the boards and agencies of the denomination. When asked their opinions of this idea, 25% of members, 22% of elders, 32% of pastors, and 34% of specialized clergy said they thought it was an "excellent idea."

**ONE-FIFTH OF PANELISTS *DISSATISFIED* WITH THEIR CONTACTS WITH THE NATIONAL CHURCH**

—OR—

**FOUR-FIFTHS OF PANELISTS *SATISFIED* WITH THEIR CONTACTS WITH THE NATIONAL CHURCH**

We asked panelists who had tried to get in touch with national staff in Louisville in the last year, "Overall, how satisfied were you with your contacts with (or attempts to contact) the national church in Louisville?" Look at the table below and you can decide for yourself which of the two headlines above you think is more appropriate. From panelists' written comments, it appears that use of the voice mail system is the major cause of dissatisfaction.

**Table 3**

Satisfaction with Attempts to Contact National Staff in Louisville

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
very satisfied . . . . .	51%	44%	40%	45%
moderately satisfied . . . . .	19%	23%	32%	29%
neither satisfied nor dissatisfied . . . . .	12%	12%	19%	15%
moderately dissatisfied . . . . .	07%	08%	04%	05%
very dissatisfied . . . . .	11%	14%	04%	06%

**NO CLEAR WINNER REGARDING THE BEST TYPE OF SYSTEM FOR INFORMATION SHARING AMONG PRESBYTERIANS**

Panelists were asked which type of system or publication they would prefer if the PC(USA) could afford to support only one method for information sharing among individual Presbyterians. (Just over 10% of members, elders, and specialized clergy choose not to answer this question.) The results are shown in Table 4. As can be seen, the largest percentages in all four samples favor a publication consisting largely of an exchange of letters. But, about a quarter of panelists prefer a "ministry of dialogue" allowing face-to-face contact among Presbyterians.

**Table 4**  
Preferences for Information Sharing Among Individual Presbyterians

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
journal/magazine consisting of an exchange of letters . . . . .	47%	46%	37%	32%
denominational-sponsored computer network for electronic mail . . . . .	17%	18%	21%	27%
interactive video conferences between church leaders and those attending presbytery or synod meetings . . . . .	13%	11%	12%	14%
ministry of dialogue in which national staff persons and elected board members travel around the country to speak with groups of Presbyterians . . . . .	23%	25%	29%	26%
other . . . . .	*	01%	01%	*

\* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

For a copy of the full *Report* of the May 1994 *Presbyterian Panel* questionnaire, send a check for \$3 (no cash, please) to the address below. The *Panel* is administered by the Office of Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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**PRESBYTERIAN PANEL**  
 Congregational Ministries Division  
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
 100 Witherspoon Street  
 Louisville, KY 40202-1396

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