



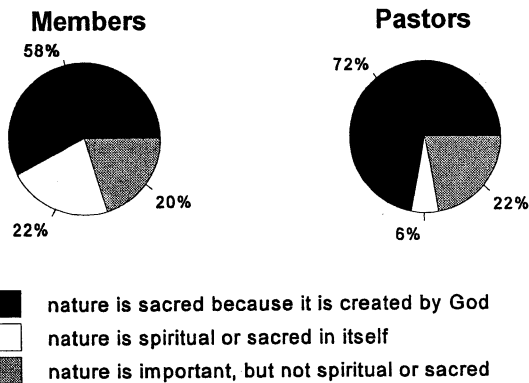
NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT—THE MAY 1997 PRESBYTERIAN PANEL

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally-representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders (lay leaders), and ordained ministers (for analysis, split into two groups based on current call: *pastors*, serving in a congregation, and *specialized clergy*, serving elsewhere). New samples are drawn every three years. These pages summarize major findings from the third survey completed by the 1997-1999 Panel.

ENCOUNTERING NATURE

God and Nature

- ✓ A majority of panelists believe in the sacredness of nature, with most attributing that sacredness to God's role as Creator:



- ✓ Most panelists—89% or more in each sample—*agree* that they “often feel the presence of God when . . . out in nature.”
- ✓ Around nine in every ten panelists in each sample *agree* that one thing they “enjoy most in life is going someplace like the woods, the mountains, or the ocean to be surrounded by nature.”
- ✓ More than two-thirds of members (72%) and elders (69%), as well as majorities of pastors (56%) and specialized clergy (51%), *agree* that “nature is far more beautiful than things made by humankind.”

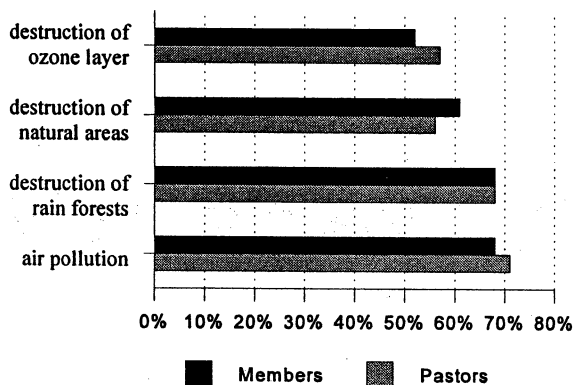
Outdoor Activities

- ✓ Four in every five Presbyterians take part fairly regularly in two types of outdoor activity: “gardening/yard work” and “walking/running/jogging.”
- ✓ Other outdoor pursuits that at least a third in every Panel sample have done *five or more times* in the last year include “visiting a local park” (members, 45%; pastors, 60%); “water sports” (36% and 42%, respectively); and “bird watching” (34%, 32%).
- ✓ At least one-half of members and elders report that in the past year they have *never* participated in these outdoor activities: “skiing/ice skating” (77% of members and 79% of elders so respond); “camping” (68%, 67%); “fishing” (65%, 61%); “hiking/backpacking” (58%, 57%); and “bicycling” (both 50%).
- ✓ Large majorities of pastors report *never* when asked about participation over the previous year in “skiing/ice skating” (69%) and “fishing” (61%), but only a minority report *never* participating in “hiking/backpacking,” “camping,” and “bicycling.” Still, the percentage of pastors who report participating *five or more times* in the past year in “camping” is only 11%; in “hiking/backpacking,” 24%; and in “bicycling,” 30%.

ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

Ranking the Seriousness of Various Problems

- ✓ From a list of 26 “environmental problems,” a majority in each sample rate the following ones as among *the most serious*:



- ✓ Other problems that are *one of the most serious* according to a majority in at least one sample are:
 - “agricultural runoff”
 - “consumer demand for more material goods”
 - “consumption of oil, gas, and other nonrenewable resources”
 - “destruction of swamps and wetlands”
 - “environmental contamination from chemical waste disposal”
 - “environmental contamination from nuclear waste disposal”
 - “oil spillage from tankers and pipelines in lakes, rivers, oceans”
 - “rapid population growth in poor countries”
 - “water pollution from disposal of waste products by manufacturing plants”

Animal Rights

- ✓ Large majorities—ranging from 80% of elders to 87% of specialized clergy—*agree* that “animals . . . as creatures made by God . . . have inherent value in God’s sight.”
- ✓ When asked whether or not “Animals should have the same moral rights as human beings do,” 48% of members, 57% of elders, 63% of pastors, and 58% of specialized clergy *disagree*.

- ✓ Few panelists (members, 10%; pastors, 7%) oppose the use of “animals for medical testing if it might save human lives.”

Evolution

- ✓ Did human beings evolve from other biological species? Presbyterians hold differing views. Around one-third of members (31%) and elders (32%) *agree* that “human beings developed from earlier species of animals.” However, even more members (47%) and elders (49%) *disagree*.
- ✓ On another Darwinian theme, two-thirds of members and elders, and around one-half of clergy, agree to some extent that “nature is really a fierce struggle for survival of the fittest.” But relatively few hold this opinion with intensity: the percentage of *strongly agree* responses range from 7% among both clergy samples, to 15% among members.

Faith & Science

- ✓ For most panelists, the pendulum has swung too far toward science and away from “feelings and faith.” That is, one-half or more in every sample (60% of members, 55% of elders, 56% of pastors, and 50% of specialized clergy) indicate that, to the detriment of faith, “we believe too often in science and technology”
- ✓ Consistently, anywhere from 43% (elders) to 62% (specialized clergy) *disagree* with the statement, “New technologies will surely come along to solve environmental problems before they get out of hand.”
- ✓ The sense that faith has been pushed too far into the shadow of science does not mean that most panelists dismiss science out of hand: majorities (elders, 57%, pastors, 58%, and specialized clergy, 55%) or a large minority (members, 49%) in every sample *disagree* that “any change humans cause in nature—no matter how scientific—is likely to make things worse.”

Working as Individuals for a Better World

Recycling & Retrenching

- ✓ Most panelists “recycle household items such as newspapers, cans, and bottles”; at least 84% in every sample do so *on a regular basis*, and most of the rest do so *from time to time*.
- ✓ In every sample, about one-half of the panelists (48% of pastors, 49% of members and elders, and 51% of specialized clergy) report that they, *on a regular basis*, “take steps to reduce the amount of items their household puts into the waste system.” Of the remainder, most—ranging from 37% of pastors to 39% of specialized clergy—do so *from time to time*.
- ✓ “Cutting down on the use of automobiles by using public transportation, car pooling, bicycling, etc.” is not a widespread practice among Presbyterians. Many *never* forsake their cars for more energy-friendly alternatives. And among those who do leave the automobile at home, most do so *from time to time* (e.g., 27% of members, 31% of pastors) rather than *on a regular basis* (8% of members, 12% of pastors).

Voting “Green”

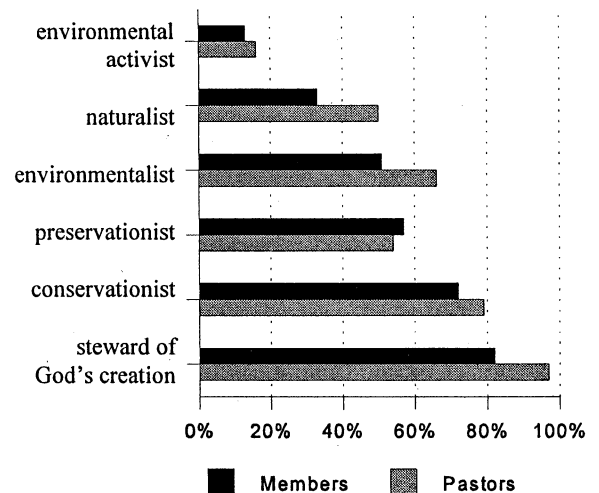
- ✓ One-half of members (52%) and elders (50%) have “voted for or against a candidate for public office because of that candidate’s stand on environmental issues,” although relatively few (18% and 15%, respectively) have done so *on a regular basis*. Even more pastors (61%) and, especially, specialized clergy (75%) report political votes that were influenced by environmental issues, including 22% and 34%, respectively, who have *on a regular basis* cast environmentally-influenced votes.
- ✓ Anywhere from one-sixth (elders, 16%) to almost one-third (specialized clergy, 29%) of panelists report writing “letters to politicians expressing opinions on environmental issues.” For most, such correspondence has been occasional; only 2% of members, elders, and pastors, and 5% of specialized clergy, have written letters of this type *on a regular basis*.

Organizational Memberships

- ✓ Around one in five or six members (17%), elders (18%), and pastors (20%) are dues-paying members of an environmentally-related organization, such as the National Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, or Ducks Unlimited. The rate is a bit higher among specialized clergy, at 29%. The proportions who report that they ever “volunteer time to an organization or program primarily concerned with environmental issues” is similar, including 18% of both members and elders, 20% of pastors, and 23% of specialized clergy.

Wearing the Environmental Mantle

- ✓ One-half or more in every sample label themselves as “stewards of God’s creation,” “conservationists,” “preservationists,” and “environmentalists”:



Willingness to Pay

- ✓ Compared to members and elders, more pastors and other clergy are willing to make personal financial and consumptive sacrifices “to protect the environment.” A fifth of pastors (21%) and a quarter of specialized clergy (26%), but only 11% of members and 12% of elders, report they are *very willing* to “pay much higher prices.”

The Greening of the Church

Churches and the Environment: A Good Fit?

- ✓ Majorities in every sample (68% of members and elders, 91% of pastors, and 96% of specialized clergy) *agree* that “environmental issues are appropriate social concerns for the church.” In fact, a majority of both pastors (58%) and specialized clergy (74%) *agree completely*.
- ✓ More panelists *agree* than *disagree* with the statement, “My congregation should become more involved in environmental issues.” *Agree* responses for each sample are: members, 52%; elders, 51%; pastors, 74%; and specialized clergy, 91%.

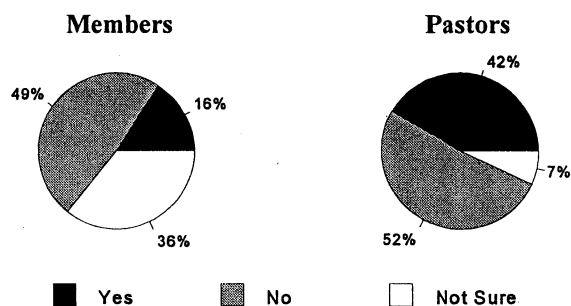
Knowledge of PCUSA Programs & Resources

- ✓ Few lay panelists (10% or less) express awareness of any PCUSA environmental programs or initiatives. Only 5% of members indicate that they know of the church’s “office of Environmental Justice,” and only 6% indicate knowledge of the General-Assembly-approved policy statement on the environment (“Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice”). Around one-half of pastors (54%) and specialized clergy (49%) have heard of the Environmental Justice office, and 70% and 59%, respectively, know of the “Restoring Creation” policy.

Congregations and the Environment

- ✓ More than two-thirds of pastors report that during the last year all or part of their congregations “participated in a community recycling program” (72%) and “took steps to reduce the energy consumption in church buildings” (78%).
- ✓ According to pastors, 29% of PCUSA congregations held a Sunday worship service with an environmental theme in the last year, most “on or around Earth Day (April 22).”
- ✓ More pastors than laity report at least one sermon “emphasizing environmental issues” in worship in the last year:

**In Last Year:
A Sermon Emphasizing Environmental Issues**



	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed	1,357	1,315	1,884
Number returned	893	756	1,413
Response rate	66%	57%	75%

This survey was initially mailed in May 1997, and returns were accepted until August 1997. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. As a general rule, differences of less than 6% between samples are not statistically meaningful.

For more numbers and interpretation of the May 1997 Presbyterian Panel results, a longer report with additional charts and graphs is available for \$5. Contact PDS (call 1-800-524-2612) and order PDS # 70360-97252. Included is a data appendix that presents the percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

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