



## SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL WELFARE—THE AUGUST 1997 SURVEY

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

### SOCIAL WELFARE: VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

✓ Majorities of members and pastors believe that welfare:

- *encourages people to work less*
- *makes it too easy for unwed fathers to neglect parental responsibilities*

But majorities also believe that welfare:

- *helps people get back on their feet*
- *helps to prevent hunger and malnutrition.*

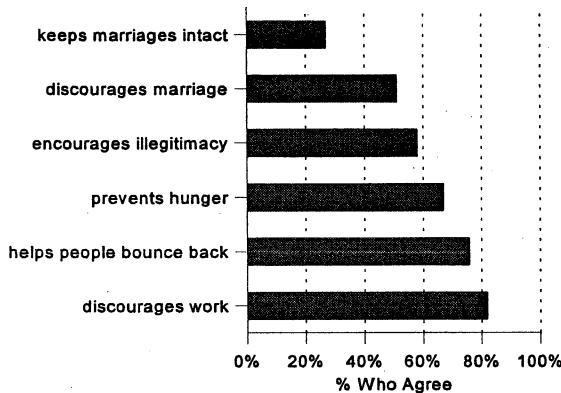


Figure 1

Elders' Opinions on Welfare

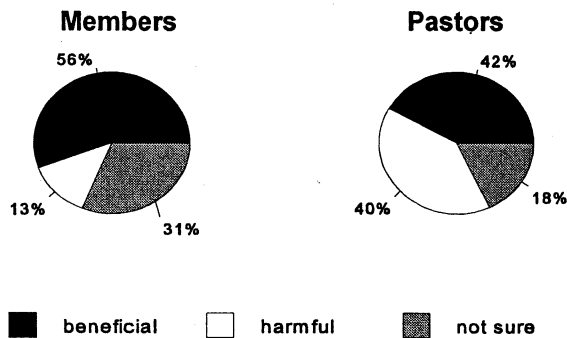
- ✓ A third of pastors (35%) believe that welfare *encourages young women to have babies before marriage*, while more, 40%, disagree with this view. Among members, 52% hold that welfare *encourages young women to have babies* prior to marriage, while 23% disagree.
- ✓ In each sample around one-third believe that welfare *helps keep people's marriages together in times of financial problems*, a third disagree with this statement, and a third cannot decide. At the same time, slim majorities of members

(53%) and elders (51%), 39% of pastors, and 34% of specialized clergy hold that welfare *discourages young women who get pregnant from marrying the father of the child.*

- ✓ At one time or another, 8% of members and elders, 19% of pastors, and 17% of specialized clergy were themselves *living in poverty*. Also, 1% of members and elders and 3% of ministers have, at some point in their lives, been *homeless*.
- ✓ Around one in five panelists in every sample have at some time received welfare or other government assistance (including unemployment insurance), although less than half as many (6% of members, 5% of elders, 7% of all clergy) report that they have ever received assistance from one or more of four major programs: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplement Security Income (SSI), Food Stamps, or Medicaid.
- ✓ 14% of members, 11% of elders, 15% of pastors, and 12% of other clergy report having a close relative or family member who *currently* receives either AFDC, SSI, Food Stamps, or Medicaid.
- ✓ A large majority of pastors report that one or more members of their congregations currently receive some form of welfare. Only 4%, however, describe the number of welfare recipients among their memberships as "many." Most use "some" (33%) or "few" (40%) to depict the numbers. Only 10% state that there are no welfare recipients in their congregations, while 13% respond "don't know."

## OPINIONS ON WELFARE REFORM

- ✓ One in every ten members (11%) and elders (10%) believes that the welfare reform provisions approved by Congress in 1996 will prove “definitely beneficial” to their communities. Another 45% of members and 50% of elders perceive the new law as “probably beneficial.” Among pastors, 7% believe the new law will be “definitely beneficial,” and 34%, “probably beneficial.”

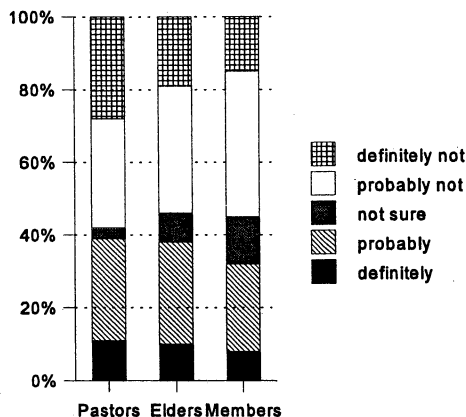


**Figure 2**  
Expected Impact of Welfare Reform on Local Communities

- ✓ When asked their *overall opinion of the new welfare law*, many panelists, ranging from 49% of elders to 33% of specialized clergy, select the statement “many good provisions, but could be modified a little bit to make it even better” as the one that best describes their opinion. However, one-third of members (30%), one-fourth of elders (22%), and one-eighth of all ministers (13%) respond “not sure” or “don’t know enough to have a definite opinion.”
- ✓ One in very six members and elders (16%) and one in every four pastors (23%) and specialized clergy (24%) report that they have given “a great deal” of *attention to recent changes in welfare laws*.
- ✓ Majorities of members and elders (both 56%) believe that one benefit of welfare reform for their communities will be *more employment*. Large minorities (41% of members, 40% of elders) also hold that welfare reform will result in *lower birthrates for unwed/welfare moms*.
- ✓ Few members foresee changes in crime rates as the result of welfare reform; while 12% expect *less crime*, a similar share, 15%, expect that *crime will increase*. Pastors are not so sanguine; only 8% expect *less crime*, compared to 25% who expect that *crime will increase*.
- ✓ In every sample, more panelists “disagree” than “agree” that welfare reform will have these harmful consequences for their communities:
  - *people will move away from the area*
  - *more families will break up*
  - *less money will be spent in local stores*.
- ✓ One in five members (21%) and elders (18%) believe that, *in the short run, more of today’s low income individuals and families will be economically better off* because of welfare reform. However, two-thirds (66% of members, 68% of elders) believe that welfare reform will improve the economic situation of the poor *in the long run*.
- ✓ Two segments of the population that many panelists believe will be harmed by welfare reform are: *poor people living in areas of high unemployment* (judged as “worse off” by 50% of members and 67% of pastors) and *undocumented immigrants* (judged as “worse off” by 45% of members and 62% of pastors).
- ✓ How will society respond to individuals who, under welfare reform, have reached the mandated five-year limit on welfare benefits and still have no income? Of six options presented, only one—*continue support, but for food and housing only*—is viewed as either an “excellent” or “good approach” by more than one-fifth of members (23%), elders (22%), and pastors (27%).
- ✓ Large majorities of panelists (two-thirds of members and elders, eight in ten clergy) favor *giving a second chance* to persons who have been denied welfare benefits because they failed to find a job and refused to participate in job training.

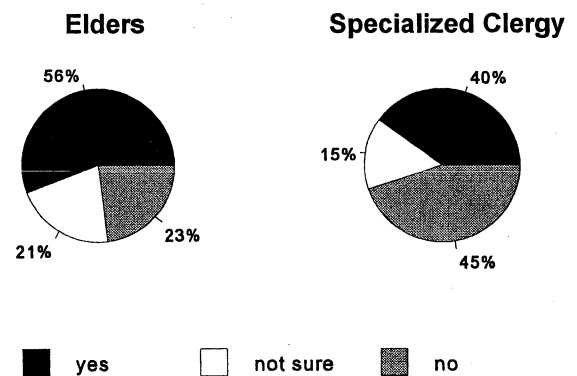
## THE CHURCH AND WELFARE REFORM

- ✓ Large majorities of panelists, ranging from 76% of members to 90% of specialized clergy, agree that a potential negative consequence of welfare reform for their communities is likely to be *more demands . . . on churches and other helping organizations.*
- ✓ Around one-half of panelists (ranging from 54% of elders to 43% of pastors) believe it is “not a good idea” for *states to contract with churches and other religious organizations to provide welfare benefits directly to needy families and individuals.* Another sizable share (23% of members, 17% of pastors) respond “not sure.”
- ✓ Only one in five panelists believe that *religious organizations in general* either “definitely” or “probably” have *sufficient financial and other resources to step in and significantly increase help to the poor.* In fact, large majorities in all samples (ranging from 65% of members to 78% of specialized clergy) hold that religious entities are *not* able to markedly expand their aid to the poor.
- ✓ More than one-third of pastors (39%) and elders (37%), and almost as many members (32%), believe that their own congregations have *sufficient resources to significantly increase help to the poor* in their localities. Nevertheless, majorities in all samples, ranging from 54% of members to 62% of specialized clergy, believe that such a shift is either “probably not” or “definitely not” an option.



**Figure 3**  
**Can Your Congregation Increase Help to the Poor?**

- ✓ How much more might congregations give to help the poor in the local community? Among pastors who believe that their congregations are able to significantly increase their gifts to the poor, the median estimated amount was \$4,000 per year.
- ✓ Pastors were divided on whether or not *there would be widespread consensus among church members* for their congregations to increase help to the poor. While four in ten pastors (42%) believe such a consensus exists, almost as many, 38%, do not. Another 20% of pastors are “not sure.”
- ✓ Majorities of members (53%) and elders (56%), 40% of specialized clergy, and 35% of pastors believe it is “definitely” or “probably” a *violation of the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment provision to provide for separation between church and state* for states and religious entities to enter into contracts by which the latter would provide welfare services paid for by the government.

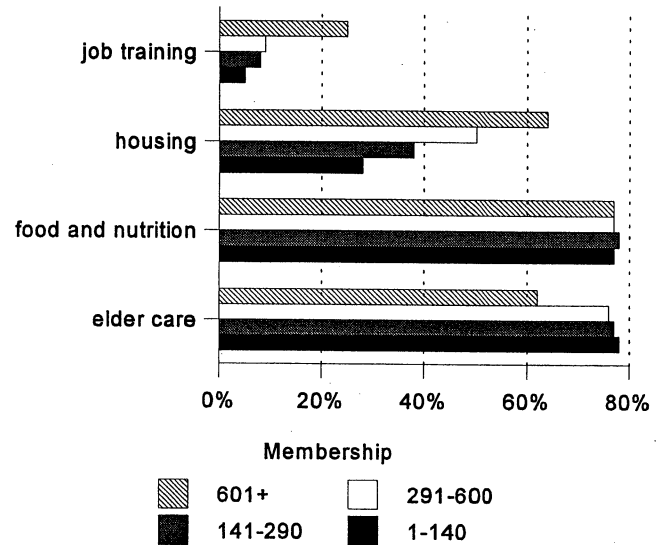


**Figure 4**  
**If States Hired Churches to Provide Welfare Services:  
Would it Violate the U.S. Constitution?**

- ✓ Only 7% of members, 10% of elders, and 12% of pastors believe that an “excellent” or “good” way for society to deal with persons who have already used their maximum of five years of welfare benefits is to *depend on churches to take care of them.*

## MINISTRIES TO THE POOR

- ✓ Almost all pastors—96%—indicate that one or more members are involved in programs in their communities *that address the needs of the poor*.
- ✓ Presbyterians who volunteer time and services to address needs of the poor do so in a variety of institutional ways. Large majorities of pastors report that member volunteers carry out such service *through the congregation* (78% so report), *through other religious organizations* (84%), or *through non-church community organizations* (74%).
- ✓ At least one-third of all pastors report that their congregations are involved in poverty-related programs that address such individual needs as *food and nutrition* (so reported by 79%), *counseling* (48%), *housing* (48%), *tutoring* (37%), and *child care* (37%).
- ✓ Some ministries that address the needs of the poor are relatively infrequent in Presbyterian congregations, including *teaching life skills* (18% of pastors report member volunteers), *teaching English as a second language* (14%), and *job training* (12%).
- ✓ Majorities of members (56%) and elders (59%), 46% of pastors, and 37% of specialized clergy believe that their communities have *enough jobs to provide work for adults now receiving welfare*.



**Figure 5**  
Ministries to the Poor by Size of Congregation  
(Pastors' Responses)

- ✓ Around two-thirds of members and elders report that their communities have public transportation services. Of these panelists, most (65% of members, 58% of elders) describe their local public transportation system as “definitely” or “probably” *adequate for people who do not have any other way to get to work*.
- ✓ Large majorities of panelists support *providing public transportation services to enable welfare recipients who do not own cars to get to work*.

	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed .....	1,341	1,309	1,875
Number returned * .....	586	718	1,280
Response rate .....	44%	55%	68%

\* Additional returned questionnaires from 181 members, 121 elders, and 5 ministers were unavailable for analysis.

This survey was initially mailed in August 1997, and returns were accepted until December 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 August 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 # 70360-97253. Included is a data appendix that presents the percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.