

Encouraging Figures

By Jack Rogers

Professor of Theology Emeritus, San Francisco Theological Seminary

Moderator, 213th General Assembly

Presbyterians are generally thoughtful people. We prefer not to rush into things. We study issues, gather information, pray to God, and talk to each other. Keith Wulff and his colleagues in the Research Services office of the General Assembly Council do a splendid job of providing us with information. The Presbyterian Panel can tell us what Presbyterians think about a given issue. The booklet now in your hands, *Comparative Statistics*, gives us a comprehensive picture of our denomination in statistical form.

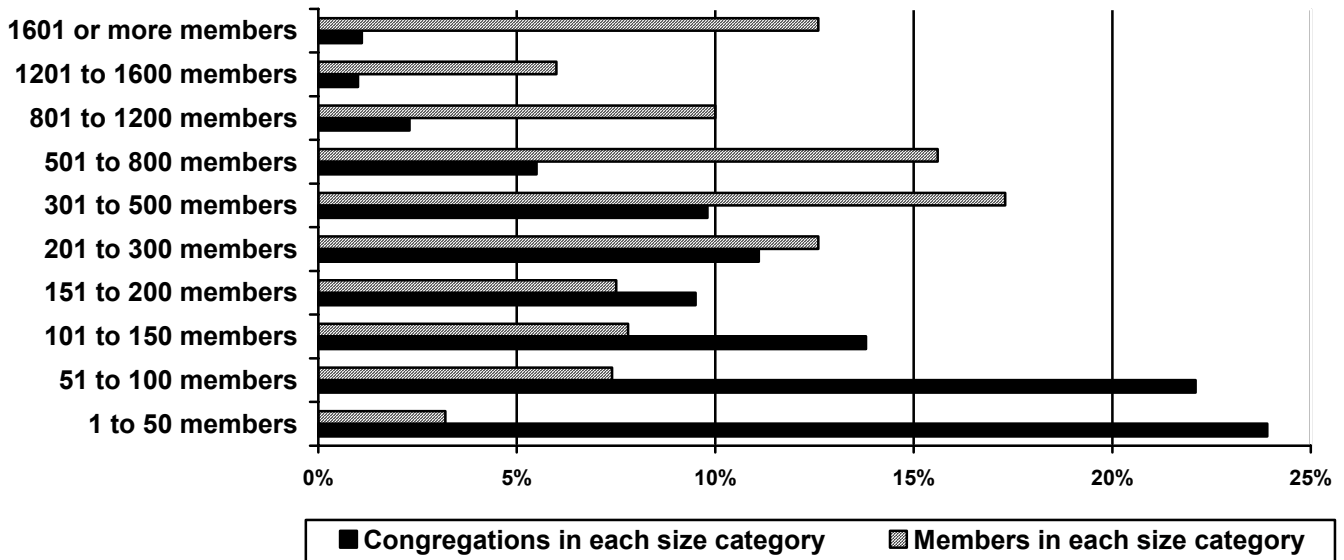
There is much to encourage us in these figures. They are a testament to the evangelism of generations of Presbyterians. Our denomination touches lives in every state of the union, in communities large and small (see Table 3). We can see areas of the country, like Pennsylvania and South Carolina, where our original Scots/Irish forebears immigrated in large numbers. We can also see areas such as Southern California where new immigrant groups are enriching our communities in increasingly large numbers.

Our statistics show the unifying power of Christ's message that cuts across human boundaries. It demonstrates the exciting variety of people and programs that are called Presbyterian. We are a marvelously diverse group in age, gender, and ethnicity. From that comes notable creativity.

Since I teach seminary students, I ask myself what in these figures might be especially meaningful to them. I have enjoyed seeing the way in which these statistics open the eyes of students in our General Assembly class for seminarians. They are able to find answers to most of their questions about what sort of people we are as we congregate for worship and service.

They can discover, for example, how our 2,405,311 members are divided into congregations (see Figure 1). While most of our members are in relatively large congregations (400 or more members), nearly 70% of our congregations have less than 200 members and 46% have less than 100 members (see Table 2).

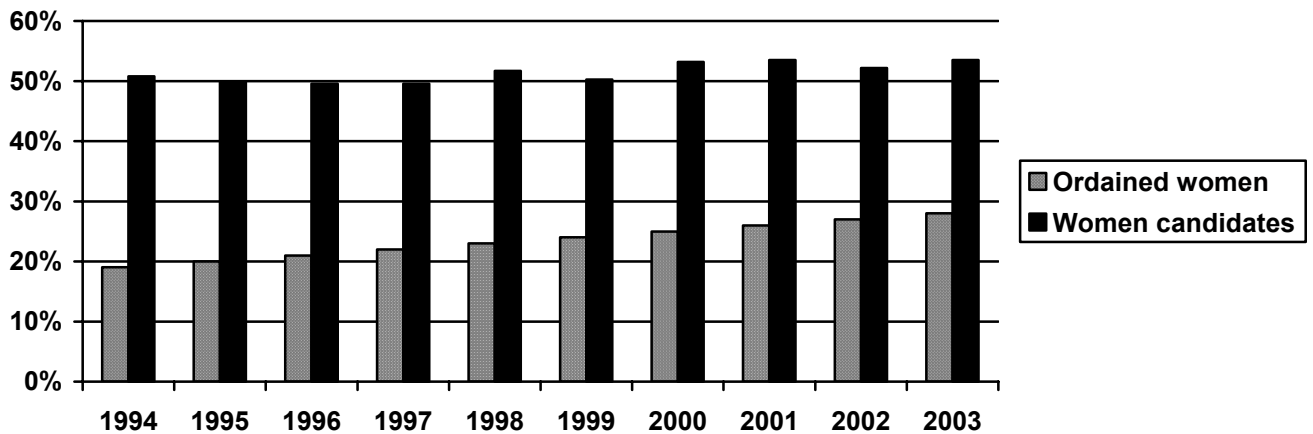
Figure 1
Distribution of Congregations and Members by Church Size — 2003



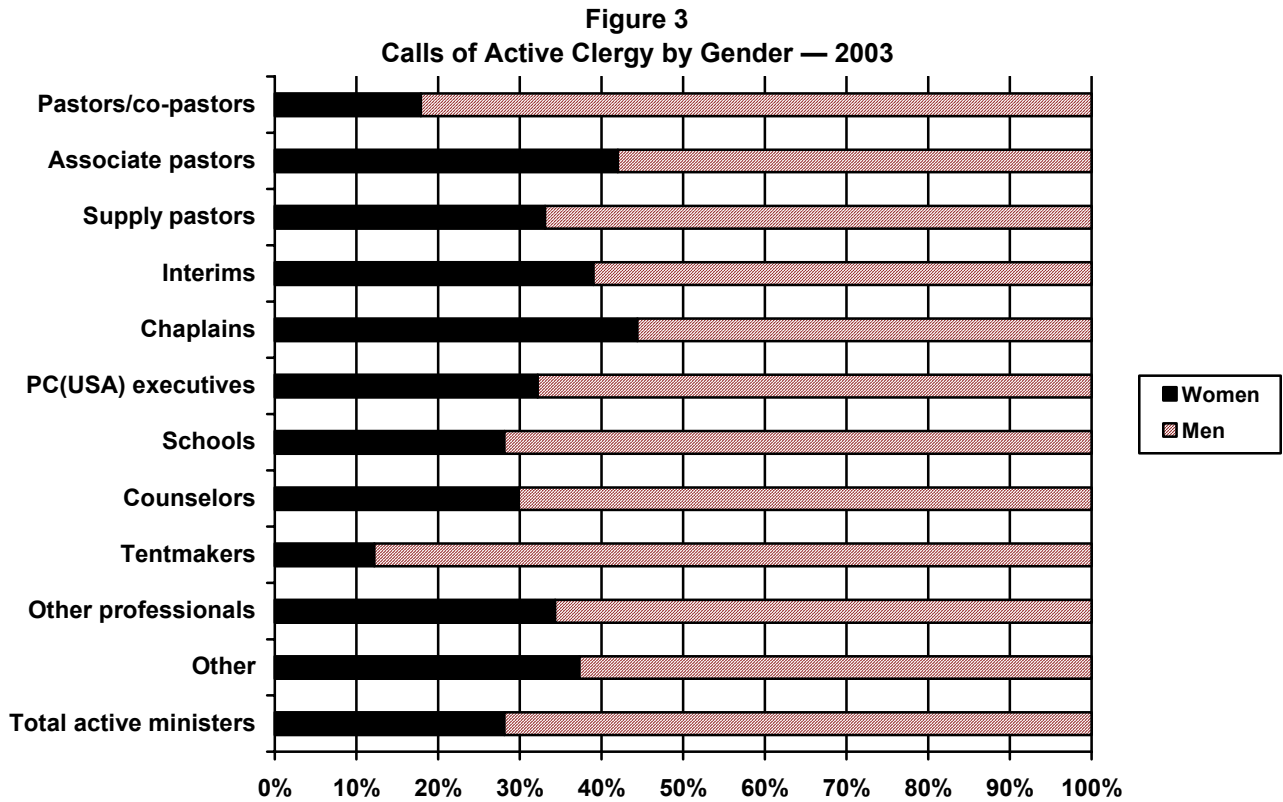
What catches the future pastor’s eye is the fact that almost 4/5ths of our smallest congregations are without an installed pastor (see Table 15). That could mean opportunities for mid-career people to have “tent-making” vocations.

What are the opportunities for women in the parish? In 2003, there were 733 women candidates under care out of a total candidate pool of 1,371 (see Figure 2). The number of women in seminary and in active ministry has shown steady growth over the last nine years.

Figure 2
Percentages of Active Clergy and Candidates Who Are Women — 1994-2003



Last year 3,884 of our 13,804 active ministers were women. What are their prospects for service? A smaller percentage of women can be found among pastors or co-pastors—53% of active male clergy and 30% of females are serving in such calls (see Table 9). Put another way, 86% of pastors/co-pastors are male (See Figure 3).

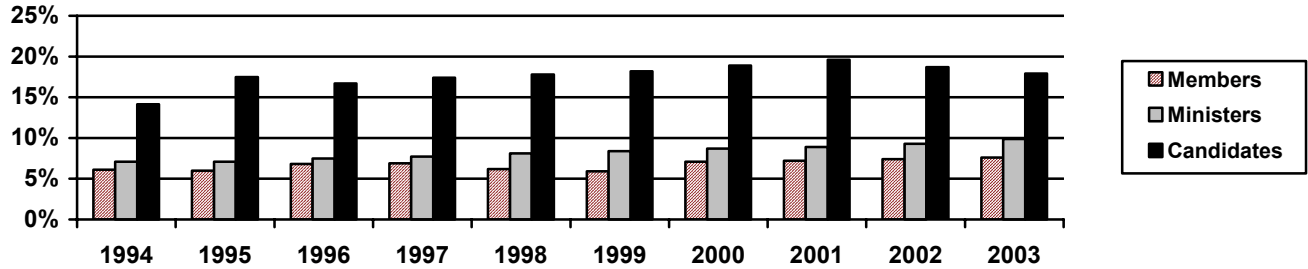


Women are more likely than men to be serving as associate pastors—15% of female clergy and 8% of male clergy are associate pastors. In addition, a larger percentage of women than men are in calls outside pastoral work.

Larger congregations are less likely to have women in pastoral leadership positions. As of 2003, only 14 women were serving as head of staff in a congregation of over 800 members, and none were pastors in the 118 congregations with over 1,600 members (see Table 15).

Our General Assembly classes, and the entire denomination, include a rainbow of ethnicities (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
Percentages of Members, Ministers,
and Candidates Who Are Racial-Ethnic — 1994-2003

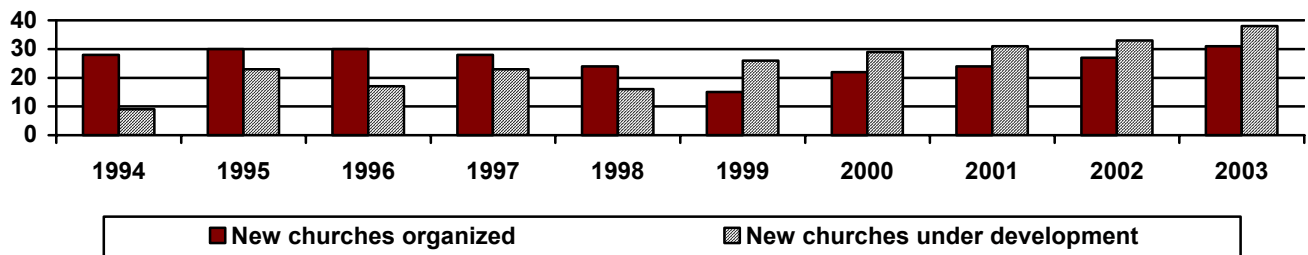


In the denomination as a whole, in 2003, there were 246 racial ethnic candidates, the most since 1995. What does that portend for the possibility of reaching the goal established by the 1996 General Assembly of increasing our racial ethnic membership from our current level of 7% of members to 10% by 2005 and 20% by 2010?

Some positive factors do not show up in the statistics. Immigrant fellowships are growing so fast and take so many forms that it is hard to track their numbers. They are no longer concentrated only in the large cities on either coast. There are large numbers of Sudanese refugees in the Midwest, for example. Most of them are Presbyterians as a result of evangelization by our mission personnel.

Another hopeful possibility that as yet lies outside the scope of our statistics is the *Mission Initiative: Joining Hearts and Hands*. It is in process of raising \$40 million, half for mission overseas and half for new church developments (NCDs) in this country. We had 38 NCDs in 2003—up from an average of 27 over the previous five years (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Number of New Churches Organized
and under Development — 1994-2003



Money from the *Hearts and Hands* campaign could enable us to double that number and to focus on NCDs among racial ethnic persons.

In some ways *Comparative Statistics* is like a snapshot of a really big family. It increases our appreciation of the goodness of God to us. These numbers reflect our achievements and our challenges. They remind us of our responsibility to expand this family and to pass on the Good News of God's love to the next generation.