The Word and the web

Daily technology usage by pastors

40% Email with a worshiper

22% Do church business by email

13% Use email to plan church events

90% Send or receive email

7% Forward a spiritual email

88% Use the internet (any purpose)

4% Participate in online groups

41% Use the internet (religious use)

2% Use a blog in ministry
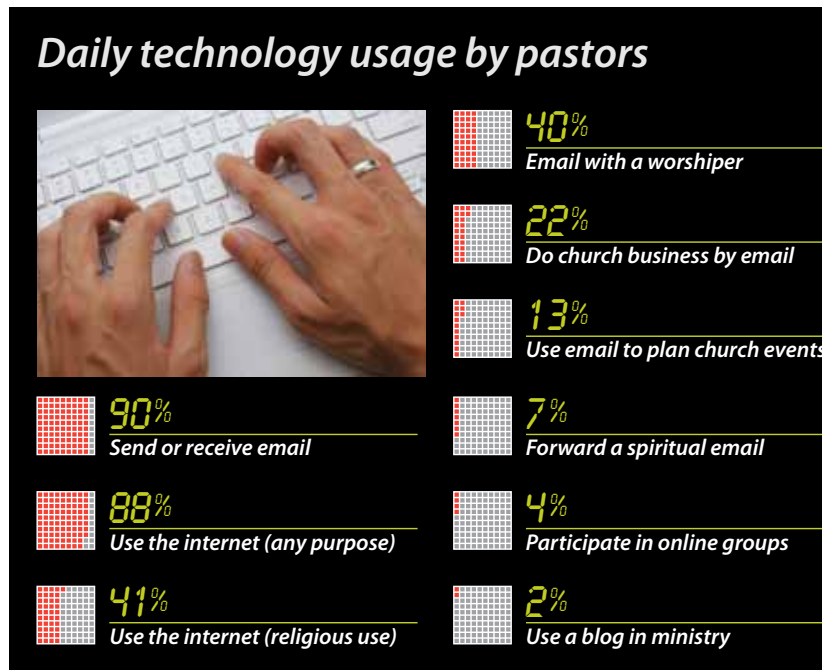
Presbyterian pastors increasingly rely on technology in their work, as results from a 2008/2009 survey show:

- **Nearly all pastors use email (90 percent) and the Internet (88 percent) daily.**

- **Two out of five pastors (41 percent) use the Internet for religious or spiritual purposes (including sermon preparation) every day,** with many of the rest (39 percent) doing so at least weekly.

- **Two out of five pastors (40 percent) use email daily** to interact with individual congregants, while another 39 percent do so at least weekly.

- **Nearly a quarter (22 percent) conduct congregational business by email daily,** and 42 percent do so at least weekly.

- **A few pastors (13 percent) use email daily to help plan church events;** 29 percent do so at least weekly.

- **Fewer pastors forward emails with spiritual or religious content to members** (7 percent daily; 23 percent at least weekly), participate in Listservs/online groups related to the congregation (4 percent daily; 9 percent at least weekly) or maintain blogs related to their ministry (2 percent daily; 3 percent at least weekly).

» Other findings www.pcusa.org/research

What the research shows

Most Presbyterian pastors use the web daily, often as part of their ministry. More generally, Presbyterian congregations are also using the Internet to stay in contact with current and potential attendees. In 2008, 72 percent of Presbyterian congregations used email to communicate with congregants (up from 57 percent in 2001). Many Presbyterian churches use email to disseminate information (96 percent), publicize activities (84 percent) and share the joys and concerns of members (75 percent).

Presbyterian congregations also increasingly communicate with people using church websites. Presbyterian congregations with a website increased from 43 percent in 2001 to 63 percent by 2008. The most common offerings on these websites include a church calendar (88 percent), an online newsletter (62 percent) and a list of volunteer needs (51 percent).

Despite this activity, the survey also found that only 37 percent of web-using Presbyterian attendees visit their congregation's website at least monthly. Perhaps attendees are more often informed about congregational happenings through email updates or other means. Pastors and congregations may increasingly be using social media (for example, Facebook and Twitter) and texting to share news with congregants. Such communication methods have mushroomed in the three years since the survey. In the years ahead, websites may become primarily an outreach tool, with email and social media the preferred means of communicating with current participants.

Joelle Anderson is research assistant and Ida Smith-Williams is research information associate for Research Services of the General Assembly Mission Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).