The Presbyterian Panel
Listening to Presbyterians

CURRENT ISSUES IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY
FINDINGS FROM THE FEBRUARY 2012 SURVEY

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, ruling elders serving on session, and teaching elders. For most analyses, teaching elders are split into two groups based on current call: *pastors*, serving congregations, and *specialized ministers*, serving elsewhere. New samples are drawn every three years. These pages summarize major findings from the second survey completed by the 2012-2014 Panel, sampled in the summer of 2011.

CONGREGATIONAL MISSION SUPPORT
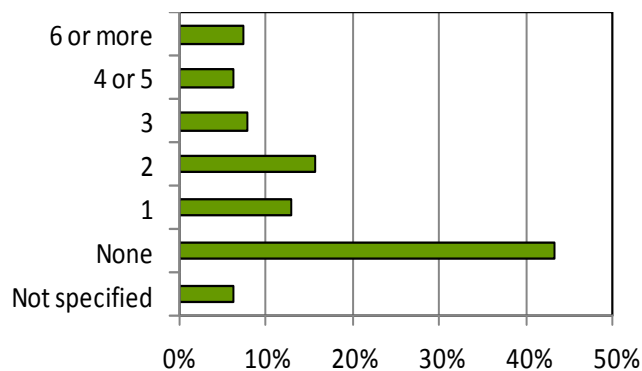
Financial Support for Missionaries

✓ A majority of pastors (57%) report that their congregation provides "financial support for one or more missionaries serving outside the United States."

✓ The median number of missionaries supported by these congregations is two. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Number of Missionaries Financially Supported by Congregations: Pastors' Responses

✓ Among pastors whose congregations support one or more missionaries, identical majorities report supporting at least one sent by the PC(USA) World Mission office and at least one by another organization (both 56%).

✓ Fewer than one in six of these pastors (16%), however, report that their congregation supports any missionaries that it sends directly, without the aid of another organization.

Budget Support for Non-PC(USA) Ministries

✓ A large majority of pastors (85%) indicate that their congregation gives money "through its budget to support the mission or ministry of one or more *non-Presbyterian* agencies or organizations."

✓ The median number of such organizations that these congregations support is five.

✓ Of nine possible reasons for giving money to such organizations, a majority of pastors report that these four apply to their congregation:
  • The non-PC(USA) organization is located in our community or area (93%).
  • The congregation or someone in it has ties to the organization (83%).
  • Habit; have given to it for many years (75%).
  • The organization does a type of ministry that the PC(USA) does not do (56%).

✓ Reasons that relatively few pastors give for their congregation's budgetary support of a non-PC(USA) organization include:
  • PC(USA) organizations take their giving for granted (12%).
  • The non-PC(USA) organization makes better use of the funds given to it (17%).
  • Lack of trust in PC(USA) national agencies (19%).
  • The congregation doesn't like the theological stance of national agencies of the PC(USA) (20%).
  • The non-PC(USA) organization provides better communication about the use of the funds that the congregation donates (25%).

Familiarity with Groups and Initiatives

✓ Few members and ruling elders are *very familiar* or *familiar* with each of 11 groups or initiatives in the PC(USA). Only one group, the Fellowship of Presbyterians, achieved a level of familiarity as high as 10% among members (17%). Only four did so among elders: the Fellowship (15%); Covenant Network (10%); More Light Presbyterians (10%); and Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (10%). (See Table 1.)

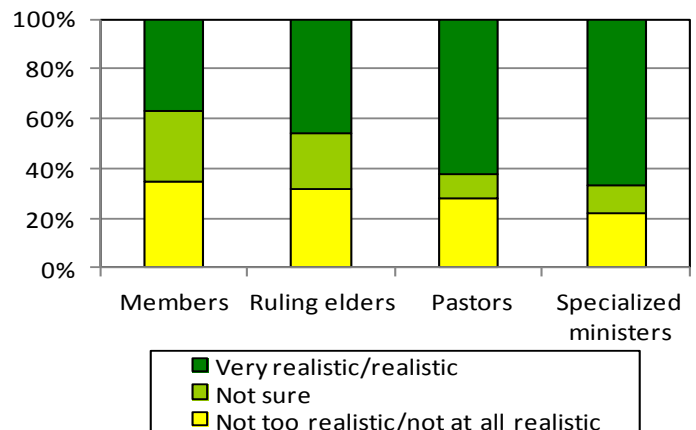| Table 1. Familiarity with PC(USA) Groups and Initiatives				
	M	**RE**	**P**	**SM**
	% very familiar or familiar			
Fellowship of Presbyterians	17%	15%	61%	38%
Covenant Network of Presbyterians	8%	10%	72%	68%
Presbyterians for Renewal	8%	7%	71%	59%
More Light Presbyterians	7%	10%	69%	68%
Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)	7%	10%	47%	32%
Growing the Church Deep and Wide	6%	6%	23%	18%
Presbyterian Coalition	5%	7%	52%	38%
Mid-Council Commission	3%	6%	35%	33%
1001 New Worshiping Communities	3%	3%	19%	18%
Nature of the Church in the 21st Century Special Committee	2%	2%	4%	9%
NEXT Church	1%	1%	17%	16%

M=members; RE=ruling elders; P=pastors; SM=specialized ministers

✓ Familiarity with each movement or initiative is greatest among teaching elders. Around two in three pastors and specialized ministers are *very familiar* or *familiar* with the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (72%; 68%) and More Light Presbyterians (69%; 68%). Similar shares of pastors (71%) but slightly fewer specialized ministers (59%) are as familiar with Presbyterians for Renewal.

✓ A majority of pastors are *very familiar* or *familiar* with two other groups, the Fellowship of Presbyterians (61%) and the Presbyterian Coalition (52%), but only 38% of specialized ministers are familiar with each. Slightly smaller shares in both groups of teaching elders are *very familiar/familiar* with the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (pastors, 47%; specialized ministers, 32%).

Starting New Communities of Faith

✓ Majorities of teaching elders (pastors, 61%; specialized ministers, 60%) but only four in ten members (39%) and ruling elders (41%) believe that creating "new communities of faith" is *very effective* or *effective* as an evangelism tool.

✓ Similarly, fewer members (59%) and ruling elders (64%) than pastors (78%) and specialized ministers (78%) believe that creating new worshiping communities is *essential* or *important* for "reaching the next generation of Presbyterians."

✓ When asked which "part of the PC(USA) is *best* equipped to start new worshiping communities," two-thirds or more in each group respond either *existing congregations* (members, 38%; ruling elders, 32%; pastors, 47%; specialized ministers, 38%) or *presbyteries* (28%; 41%; 32%; 35%).

✓ A PC(USA) goal of creating 1,001 new worshiping communities over the next decade is viewed as *not too realistic* or *not at all realistic* by more members (44%), ruling elders (46%), and pastors (54%) than view it as *very realistic* or *realistic* (32%; 36%; 40%). More specialized ministers lean the other way (44%; 48%). The rest are *not sure* (24%; 18%; 6%; 8%). (See Figure 2.)

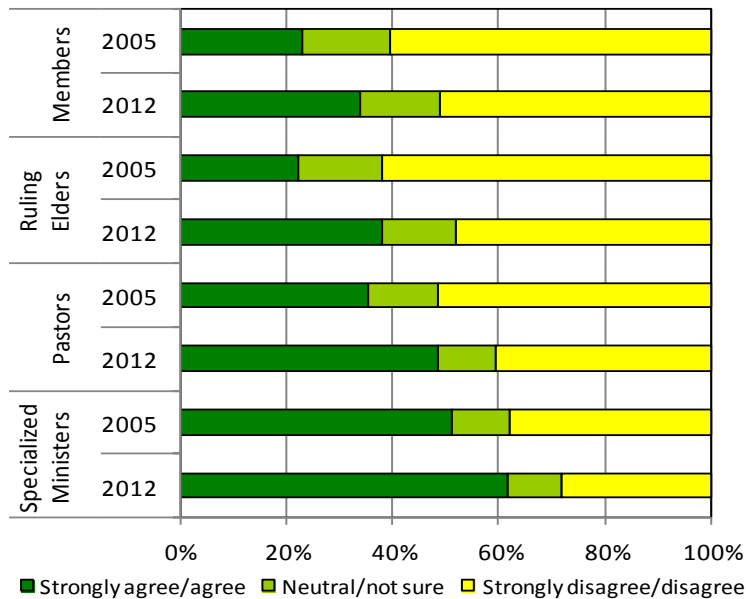**Figure 2. Creating 1,001 New Worshiping Communities: How Realistic a Goal?**

Legend: ■ Very realistic/realistic ■ Not sure ■ Not too realistic/not at all realistic

✓ Given a hypothetical $100 to divide between assisting existing congregations and developing new congregations and other new worshiping communities, most members and ruling elders would give more to existing congregations (medians of $75 and $70, respectively) than new ones ($25; $30). Teaching elders would split their giving equally (for both pastors and specialized ministers, a median of $50 for each category).

Same-Sex Marriage

✓ Around half of members (51%) and ruling elders (48%) *strongly disagree* or *disagree* that "same-sex couples should be allowed to marry"; that compares to around one in three who *strongly agree* or *agree* (34%; 38%). The rest respond *neutral or not sure* (15%; 14%).

✓ Among teaching elders, the pattern is reversed with more responding *strongly agree* or *agree* (pastors, 49%; specialized ministers, 61%) than *strongly disagree* or *disagree* (41%; 28%).

✓ Support for same-sex marriage has grown since 2005, when the same question was asked on a Panel survey. Among members, support has grown by 9 percentage points; among ruling elders, 16 points; among pastors, 14 points; and among specialized ministers, 10 points. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. Trends in Support for Same-Sex Marriage
Agree or disagree? Same-sex couples should be allowed to marry

Same-Sex Union Ceremonies

✓ Small majorities of members (52%) and ruling elders (51%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that PC(USA) "ministers should be prohibited from performing ceremonies that bless the union between two people of the same sex." Around one in three *strongly disagree* or *disagree* (33%; 37%); the rest respond *neutral or not sure* (15%; 12%).

✓ The pattern is reversed for teaching elders, with more pastors (48%) and specialized ministers (65%) responding *strongly disagree* or *disagree* than *strongly agree* or *agree* (42%; 29%) when asked whether PC(USA) ministers should be prohibited from performing same-sex union ceremonies. Another 10% and 7%, respectively, respond *neutral or not sure*.

Ordination of Gays and Lesbians

✓ A small majority of members (52%) and slightly fewer ruling elders (47%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that the PC(USA) "should prohibit sexually active gays and lesbians from being ordained to the ministry." A third of members (35%) and four in ten ruling elders (41%) *strongly disagree* or *disagree*.

✓ The reverse is true among teaching elders: Majorities of pastors (53%) and specialized ministers (64%) *strongly disagree* or *disagree* that the PC(USA) should prohibit the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians. A total of 41% and 30%, respectively, *strongly agree* or *agree*.

✓ Almost all teaching elders correctly understand that PC(USA) policy permits the ordination of gays and lesbians to the ministry (pastors, 93%; specialized ministers, 95%), as do two-thirds of ruling elders (69%) and a majority of members (56%).

Other Same-Sex Issues

✓ Half of members (50%) and large minorities of the other groups *strongly agree* or *agree* that "the Bible is clear in its teaching on homosexuality" (ruling elders, 48%; pastors, 46%; specialized ministers, 39%).

✓ Almost four in ten members (37%) and ruling elders (39%) but a majority of pastors (55%) and specialized ministers (65%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that they "would be comfortable with a pastor who is gay or lesbian."

✓ Large minorities of members (48%), ruling elders (47%), and pastors (45%), and three in ten specialized ministers (28%), *strongly agree* or *agree* that "a person who has sex with someone of the same sex is committing a sin." The *strongly disagree* or *disagree* shares are 33%, 35%, 46%, and 60%.

Cohabiting Older Adult Couples

✓ Sizable minorities of panelists, especially teaching elders, are aware of one or more older adult, opposite-sex couples who live together in a sexual relationship but have not married solely or primarily for economic reasons (members, 22%; ruling elders, 14%; pastors, 41%; specialized ministers, 38%).

✓ Except for pastors, more panelists indicate that cohabitation in this situation is *not sinful* (members, 36%; ruling elders, 38%; pastors, 30%; specialized ministers, 43%) than *is sinful* (27%; 27%; 33%; 18%). More than one in three respond *it depends* or *not sure* (37%; 35%; 37%; 38%).
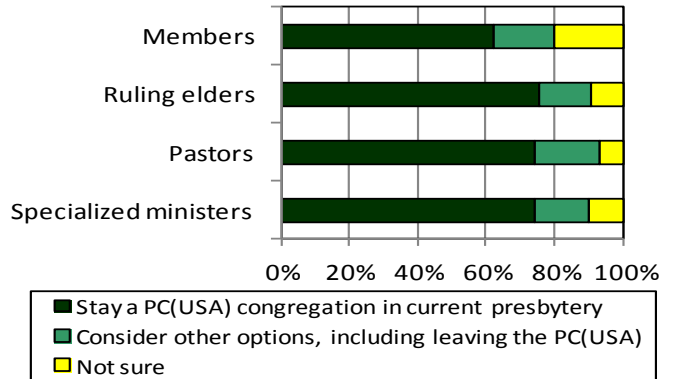
Discussions of Leaving

✓ Fewer than one in five panelists recall any discussion in their congregation in the past year about "switching to a different presbytery" (members, 12%; ruling elders, 16%; pastors, 18%; specialized ministers, 18%), including very few who recall *a lot* of such discussion (3%, 2%; 2%; 3%).

✓ Somewhat more, but still a minority, recall any discussion of their congregation leaving the PC(USA) (members, 17%; ruling elders, 21%; pastors, 33%; specialized ministers, 25%). Again, relatively few recall *a lot* of such discussion (5%; 2%; 7%; 8%).

Preferences for Leaving or Staying

✓ Fewer than one in five panelists are either *very interested* or *interested* in their congregation pursuing each of five options that have been proposed for congregations that are unhappy with the PC(USA):
  - Switching to a different, more theologically compatible presbytery (members, 18%; ruling elders, 16%; pastors, 17%; specialized ministers, 16%).
  - Setting up parallel structures in their current presbytery for congregations that share their theological views (17%; 18%; 18%; 14%).
  - Becoming dually aligned with the PC(USA) and the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, or ECO, a new Reformed body created earlier in 2012 (13%; 12%; 22%; 18%).
  - Leaving the PC(USA) entirely for the ECO (13%; 12%; 14%; 12%).
  - Leaving the PC(USA) completely for another Reformed denomination (besides the ECO) (12%; 11%; 11%; 9%).

✓ To a more general question, six in ten members (62%) and three in four ruling elders (75%), pastors (74%), and specialized ministers (74%) indicate they would like *to maintain the status quo* with their congregation staying in the PC(USA) in its current presbytery. Fewer than one in five would want the congregation to *consider other options*, such as leaving the PC(USA) (18%; 15%; 19%; 16%). (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Preferred Status for Congregation: Change or Status Quo

Legend:
- ■ Stay a PC(USA) congregation in current presbytery
- ■ Consider other options, including leaving the PC(USA)
- □ Not sure

Opinions on Schism

✓ One in five members (20%) and ruling elders (22%) but many more pastors (53%) and specialized ministers (39%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that a "split in the PC(USA) is inevitable."

✓ A third of members (31%) and ruling elders (36%), a majority of pastors (52%), and slightly fewer specialized ministers (45%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that "the PC(USA) would be better off if there were a gracious separation of congregations unhappy with current policies in the church."

	Members	Ruling Elders	Teaching Elders (Ordained Ministers)
Number of panelists	1,027	1,415	1,541
Number of undeliverable surveys and ineligible respondents	17	22	17
Number responding	590	925	1,072‡
Response rate	58%	66%	70%

‡Of returned surveys, 782 came from pastors and 288 from specialized ministers; 2 could not be categorized

The survey was distributed between February 3 and February 8, 2012, with returns accepted through April 2012. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. As a general rule, differences of less than 8% between samples are not statistically meaningful.

For more numbers and interpretation of these results, a longer report with more analysis is available for free download (www.pcusa.org/research/panel) or for $15 from PDS (1-800-524-2612) or the Church Store (pcusastore.com) (item #2005612316). It includes tables showing percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, ruling elders, pastors, and specialized ministers.