

# PRESBYTERIAN PANEL SUMMARY

*Listening to Presbyterians*



## CHURCHWIDE SPECIAL OFFERINGS MAY 1995

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Number of panelists . . . . .	1,388	1,300	1,250	699
Number of questionnaires returned . . . . .	743	747	855	441
Percent returned . . . . .	54%	57%	68%	66%

*The May 1995 Presbyterian Panel questionnaire was developed at the request of the Special Offerings Task Group of the Stewardship Work Area, Congregational Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Questions asked panelists about suitable topics for churchwide special offerings; their opinions of, contributions to, and changes desired in the existing four churchwide special offerings; and their opinions concerning possible new special offering causes.*

### THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) HAS FOUR CHURCHWIDE SPECIAL OFFERINGS

For many years the General Assembly has designated certain causes as appropriate for special monetary appeals. Congregations are free to participate or to decline participation in any or all such offerings. Those congregations that choose to participate in a particular offering are asked to promote it among their memberships (promotional materials are free) and to receive donations on a designated Sunday. In general, these funds are then forwarded to national church offices for program distribution. Currently there are four churchwide special offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, received during Lent; the Witness Offering, received on Pentecost; the Peacemaking Offering, received on World Communion Sunday (first Sunday in October); and the Christmas Joy Offering, received during Advent.

### ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING RECEIVES MORE THAN HALF OF SPECIAL-OFFERING DONATIONS

For 1994, denominational records indicate that special-offering contributions totaled \$15.5 million, of which \$9.1 million was donated to One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS); \$4.6 million, to Christmas Joy; \$1.2 million, to Peacemaking; and \$0.6 million, to Witness.

### OGHS, CHRISTMAS JOY RECEIVED IN MOST CONGREGATIONS . . .

Consistent with the donated amounts above, the responses of pastors in the Panel indicate that the most widely received churchwide special offering is OGHS (92% report that their congregations receive it), followed by Christmas Joy (81%), Peacemaking (52%), and Witness (32%). Overall, only 19% of Panel pastors serve congregations that receive all four of the churchwide special offerings. Another one-third serve congregations that receive three. Together, just over one-half (53%) of their congregations receive at least three special offerings. At the other extreme, 6% receive none of these offerings, and 10% receive only one.

### . . . AND IN THOSE CONGREGATIONS, MANY GIVE . . .

Because giving opportunities for churchwide special offerings depend on congregational participation, any look at individual giving must be restricted to receiving congregations. Such a restriction reveals that, of potential donors, 74% of members and 89% of pastors reported that they had made donations to OGHS in the past year; 70% and 81%, to Christmas Joy; 54% and 72%, to Peacemaking; and 47% and 71%, to Witness. In short: relatively more pastors than members make

donations to every churchwide special offering; the proportions who give in both samples are highest for OGHs, second-highest for Christmas Joy, and lowest for Witness; and, once a congregation agrees to receive an offering, participation rates among the membership tend to be around one-half or higher.

**... BUT AVERAGE DONATIONS ARE RATHER SMALL**

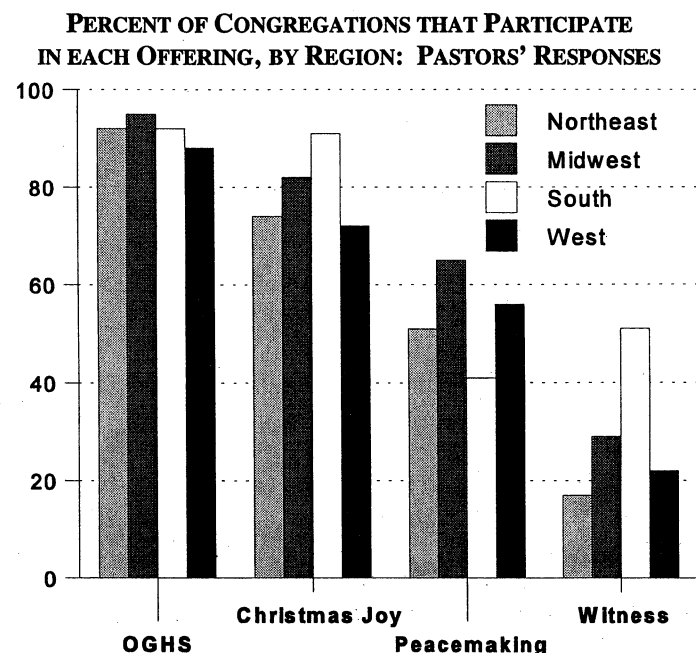
Among panelists who reported contributions to a particular special offering, average donations are small. The median amounts reported as given by members and pastors, respectively, to each special offering are: OGHs, \$20 and \$25; Christmas Joy, \$20 and \$25; Peacemaking, \$10 and \$25; and Witness, \$15 and \$20.

**MEMBERSHIP SIZE IS GENERALLY UNRELATED TO WHETHER OR NOT A CONGREGATION RECEIVES A PARTICULAR OFFERING . . .**

Church membership size is clearly *not* related to the receipt or non-receipt of three of the churchwide special offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Witness, and Christmas Joy. For the fourth, Peacemaking, the differences are small: larger-membership congregations (300 or more members) are a bit more likely to receive this offering (58% of them do, according to pastors) than are smaller-membership congregations (48%), based on pastors' responses.

**... BUT REGION IS**

OGHS is the only churchwide special offering for which there are no appreciable regional differences in the proportion of PC(USA) congregations that receive



it. Each of the other offerings shows considerable regional variations, with Christmas Joy and Witness relatively popular in the South, and Peacemaking relatively popular in the Midwest and, secondarily, in the West.

**SUPPORT HIGHEST FOR "PROVIDING EMERGENCY RELIEF" AND "GIVING PEOPLE BASIC NECESSITIES" AS SPECIAL OFFERING CAUSES . . .**

When presented with a list of 17 possible causes that special offering donations might be used to fund and asked to name their top choice, the response chosen by the largest proportion in every sample was "to provide emergency relief following disasters." That option was selected by 25% of members, 23% of elders, 27% of pastors, and 20% of specialized clergy. In three of the four samples, the second-highest percentage of panelists also agreed on an option as their top choice, in this case "to give people basic necessities." It was chosen by 19% of members, 16% of elders, and 14% of specialized clergy. Interestingly, among pastors the second-highest total of top-choice responses, 16%, was found for "to establish new Presbyterian congregations in the U.S." (This option was also selected as the top choice by 13% of specialized clergy.)

**... AND LOWEST FOR "ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE" AND "SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL AND WORLD COUNCILS OF CHURCHES"**

From the same total of 17 possible special-offering causes, a majority of members and elders selected one of these two as the least appropriate: "to address environmental justice" (so designated by 30% of members and 26% of elders) and "to support the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches" (26% and 32%, respectively). Large minorities of both pastors (41%) and specialized clergy (30%) also chose the National Council/World Council option as least appropriate, but for both clergy samples the cause chosen as least appropriate by the second-highest proportions was "to promote unity among the various Christian denominations" (chosen as least appropriate by 16% of pastors and 17% of specialized clergy).

**WHEN FACED WITH ALTERNATIVES, PANELISTS WANT MISSION, DECISION MAKING CLOSER TO HOME**

When asked to identify mission priorities for churchwide special-offering contributions by selecting from 11 sets of paired alternatives, responses showed that panelists in every sample clearly preferred: U.S.

mission over international mission; local mission over national mission; letting local or regional entities choose projects over letting the national church do so; and designating gifts to specific programs over letting the General Assembly make the allocations.

#### **TWO MISSION ALTERNATIVES ARE NOT ALTERNATIVES AFTER ALL**

In all samples, panelists had trouble choosing between some of the paired alternatives, indicating instead that *both* polarities need attention. In particular, panelists clearly want an equal emphasis on “spiritual/mental health” and “physical health.”

#### **MOST WANT AT LEAST A MONTH BETWEEN SPECIAL OFFERINGS**

When asked about their preferences for the minimum time period (in weeks) between churchwide special offerings, large majorities in every Panel sample gave numbers in the range of 4 to 12. In other words, almost everyone would like at least one month between churchwide special offerings, and many would prefer up to three months. (At the present time, the shortest gap is around two months, between the OGHs and the Witness Offerings.)

#### **MANY PANELISTS INDICATE GREATER LIKELIHOOD OF GIVING IF SOME CONTROL OF ALLOCATION IS LEFT TO CONGREGATIONS**

When asked, in general, “What effect would it have on your own personal giving if your congregation was permitted to keep and decide on the use (whether locally or elsewhere) of a sizeable proportion (e.g., 25%) of the special-offering monies it collected?” majorities of both members (51%) and elders (51%) selected the option “I’d be more likely to give,” and another one-third (33% of both samples) chose “it wouldn’t make any difference.” Pastors and specialized clergy revealed the same pattern in reverse: while one-third of both samples (32% and 33%, respectively) indicated that a congregationally-controlled portion would make them “more likely to give,” one-half (53% and 50%) indicated that “it wouldn’t make any difference.” Fewer than 10% in any sample indicated that partial local control of fund allocation would make them “less likely to give.” (The Peacemaking Offering is the only one of the current churchwide special offerings to use such an allocation system. In congregations receiving this offering, 50% of donations are forwarded to the national church and

25% to middle governing bodies, with the allocation of the remaining 25% determined by the congregation.)

#### **PANELISTS GENERALLY HAPPY WITH PROGRAM ALLOCATIONS IN EXISTING OFFERINGS**

Of the other three churchwide special offerings, program allocations currently are: for the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, 36% to Presbyterian World Service, 32% to Self-Development of Peoples, and 32% to the Presbyterian Hunger Program; for the Christmas Joy Offering, 50% to Board of Pensions and 50% to Racial-Ethnic Schools and Colleges; and for the Witness Offering, 50% to Worldwide Ministries, 30% to Evangelism and New Church Development, and 20% to Christian Education. When asked about possible changes in the relative amounts going to each of these causes, at least one-third in every sample responded that they be kept the same. (In fact, such large proportions of members and elders responded either “no opinion” or “not familiar with program” that had we excluded such respondents from the analysis, the majority response in all four samples for every cause would be “kept the same.”)

The *minorities* in every sample who indicated preferences for change tend to favor reallocating some of the Witness Offering monies from Worldwide Ministries to Christian Education and Evangelism/New Church Development, and some of the Christmas Joy monies from Racial-Ethnic Schools and Colleges to the Board of Pensions. As for OGHs, pastors and other clergy who want change (again, a minority) would favor shifting funds from Self-Development of Peoples to Presbyterian World Service and the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Members and elders want a relative increase in the OGHs funds going to the Hunger Program, and while some of them would do it at the expense of World Service, others are not clear where the increased hunger allocation would come from.

#### **OPINIONS MIXED ON ADDING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TO PEACEMAKING OFFERING**

A proposal to add environmental justice as an explicit part of the Peacemaking Offering received a mixed reaction from panelists. Around one-third of members (36%), elders (31%), and pastors (30%) chose as their responses “neither peacemaking nor environmental justice” when asked to choose one of six options to complete the statement, “I would prefer a churchwide special offering that funds programs concerned with . . . .” Restricting the analysis to panelists who chose one of the other responses reveals that in every

sample the largest single share of those who support an offering for one or both of these causes is in the middle: anywhere from 34% (members) to 49% (specialized clergy) responded by choosing “both peacemaking and environmental justice, with funds equally split.” The next most common response was “peacemaking primarily, with some funds to environmental justice” (ranging from 31% of members to 21% of specialized clergy), followed by “peacemaking only” (ranging from 15% of specialized clergy to 23% of elders). Combined, no more than 16% (specialized clergy) in any sample selected either “environmental justice only” or “environmental justice primarily, with some funds for peacemaking programs.”

**IDEA OF A CHURCHWIDE SPECIAL OFFERING FOR “YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY” IS WIDELY FAVORED**

A majority of panelists in every sample (ranging from 56% of pastors to 77% of elders) responded “favor” or “strongly favor” when asked, “In general, what is your opinion of a churchwide special offering to support ministries among youth and young adults?”

**PANELISTS STRONGLY SUPPORT MOST PROPOSED YOUTH-OFFERING PROGRAMS . . .**

When further asked to indicate their preferences for the use of donations to such a special offering, panelists expressed strong support for a variety of possible programs. Over 80% of both members and pastors indicated support for using such monies to fund a “young adult volunteer program,” “Bible study and other curricula,” and “youth mission work camps or work trips.” Almost as many members and pastors (at least 70% in each sample) also supported “family-life education,” “campus ministry,” “leader development,” and “ministries in individual congregations.”

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A copy of the full *Report* of the May 1995 Presbyterian Panel questionnaire can be ordered from PDS (Call 1-800-524-2612 and order PDS #70-360-95-205). Or send a check for \$5 payable to the Presbyterian Panel (no cash, please) to the address below. The Panel is administered by the Office of Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

**. . . WITH THE PARTIAL EXCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL CONFERENCES AND A NATIONAL YOUTH ORGANIZATION**

Relatively low support was expressed for “national conferences” and a “national youth ministry organization”: less than one-half of members and elders indicated their support for using potential youth ministry special-offering funds for either of these two items. The combined “favor” and “strongly favor” responses for “national conferences” were 38% for members and 40% for elders; for “national youth ministry organization,” the respective proportions were 44% and 47%.

Among pastors and specialized clergy, bare majorities indicated support for using funds for “national conferences” (53% and 51%, respectively, so responded). Like the laity, though, less than one-half of both clergy samples—44% of pastors, 41% of specialized clergy—expressed support for funding a “national youth ministry organization” out of donations to a possible youth and young adult ministries special offering.

**MOST CONGREGATIONS RECEIVE OTHER SPECIAL OFFERINGS**

Besides the current four churchwide special offerings, most congregations receive other special offerings, particularly for local causes: 87% of Panel pastors indicated that their congregations had participated in such a special offering in the past year. In addition, according to pastors, in the last year about one-half of their congregations (47%) have received a special offering for a presbytery-sponsored cause, and even more (58%) have received a special offering for a “national or international *non*-Presbyterian cause.”

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