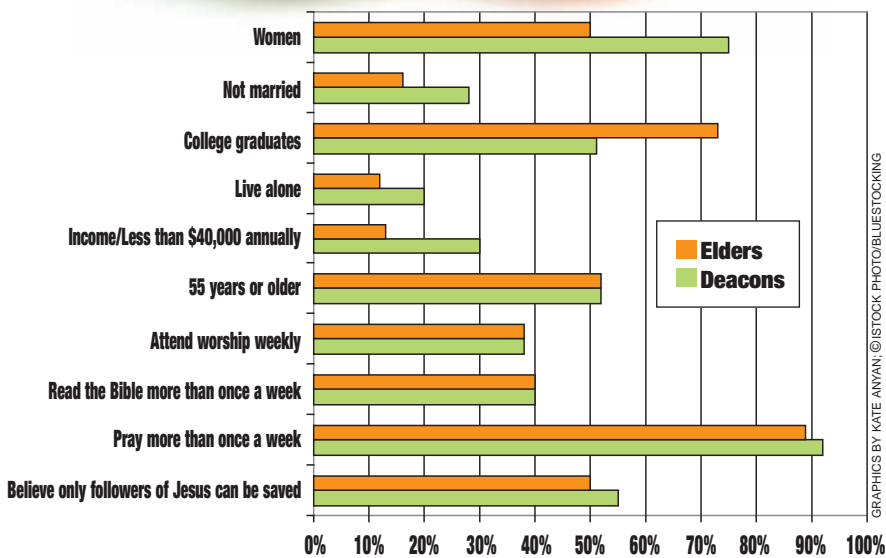


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



More deacons are women

Because deacons are called to “minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith,” and elders to “exercise leadership, government and discipline,” we might expect that individuals serving in those offices would differ from each other in important ways.

Let’s see whether that’s the case, using survey data from the Presbyterian Panel.

More deacons than elders are:

- **Women** (deacons, 75 percent; elders, 50 percent)
- **Not currently married** (28 percent; 16 percent)
- **Living alone** (20 percent; 12 percent)
- **Living on less than \$40,000** annual income (30 percent; 13 percent)

Fewer deacons than elders are:

- **College graduates** (51 percent; 73 percent)

At the same time, deacons and elders are *very similar* (differences of 5 percent or less) when it comes to the percentages who:

- **Grew up Presbyterian** (39 percent; 44 percent)
- **Are 55 years of age or older** (52 percent; 52 percent)
- **Attend worship weekly** (38 percent; 38 percent)
- **Have had a conversion experience** (55 percent; 52 percent)
- **Read the Bible** (40 percent; 40 percent) **or pray** (92 percent; 89 percent) **more than once a week**
- **Believe that only followers of Jesus Christ** can be saved (50 percent; 55 percent)

What the research shows

Congregations choose deacons and elders similarly when it comes to faith characteristics, but very differently when it comes to some demographic ones. The gender differential is especially significant, since many of the other differences (e.g., more deacons living alone) largely derive from it (more women live alone).

Historically, choosing women to take responsibility for the nurturing, caring tasks of a congregation would have seemed natural. But as society has increasingly questioned traditional gender roles, why are so many women still being tapped for such responsibilities?

It’s possible that the church is clinging to the past. Yet most congregations have embraced the inclusion of women in the traditionally male role of elder.

My hunch is that congregations simply have a harder time finding men than women—after all, 6 in 10 members are women—especially men with the experience, temperament and willingness to take on the responsibilities of the diaconate.

If you’ve served on a nominating committee recently, I’d be interested in knowing how gender factored into your deliberations. □

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Labyrinth Products from Relax4life

A **finger labyrinth** is a labyrinth design, inlaid in wood, that you trace with your finger. It functions in much the same way as a full-size walking labyrinth, (to further relaxation, meditation and prayer) except that the user traces the path to the center using their finger rather than their feet. For many, this combination of movement (tracing the path) with introspection (eyes closed), is a more relaxing way to meditate or pray. For those whose meditation or devotional practice seems demanding or sporadic, finger labyrinths provide a unique way to bring renewed vitality and meaning to these activities. Relax4Life's finger labyrinths are inlaid designs that are created in a sealed and clear-finished maple or plain compressed wood that are light in color and weight. On the back is a notch for hanging, as well as engraved suggestions for use.



18" Chartres
Maple - \$170 (shown)
Plain Wood - \$85

12" Cretan
Maple - \$110 (shown)
Plain Wood - \$55



12" Ely
Maple - \$105
Plain Wood - \$52 (shown)



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6" Chartres \$25



5" Man In The Maze \$25



4" Cretan \$18



4" Ely \$18

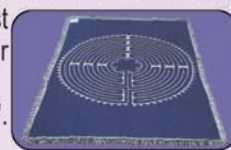
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