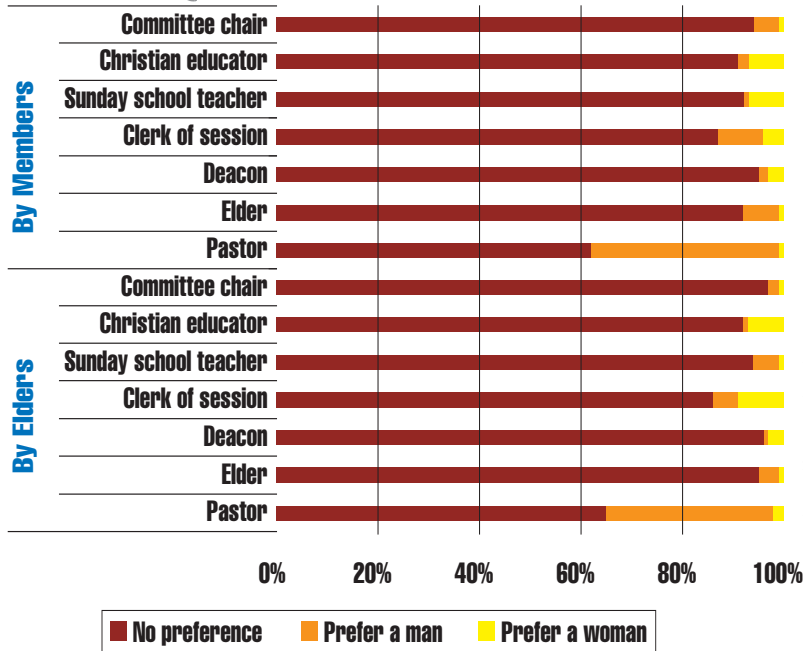


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



Gender preferences for church leaders



GRAPHICS BY KATE CANNON

What the research shows

Very few lay Presbyterians have a gender preference for any of several non-pastoral positions in congregations. That some of these roles, such as Christian educator, have been traditionally occupied by women suggests that the significance of gender for all church roles has largely disappeared.

There is one notable exception: pastors.

Should we be surprised, years after the decision to ordain women as ministers, that so many Presbyterians have no gender preference for their pastor, or that so many still do?

Given the centrality of the pastorate, and the (relatively) recent entry of women into this role, it is reasonable to expect some partiality for men over women to remain. Yet the percentages which prefer men are similar among both young and old respondents.

If age does not account for these findings, what does?

Part of the explanation may be that many Presbyterians have not yet been in a church served by a woman pastor. Among those who have, 32 percent of members prefer a male pastor; among those who haven't, 52 percent do.

It will be important to repeat this survey in a few years to ascertain whether, as more congregations call women as pastors, the sizable preference for men in that role declines. □

Is gender still an issue?

A survey taken late in 2007 provides a look at lay Presbyterians' preferences for the gender of pastors and those occupying other church roles:

- **Most members (62 percent) and elders (65 percent) have no preference for the gender of a pastor.**
- **Almost all of those who have a preference prefer a man (37 percent; 33 percent) to a woman (1 percent; 2 percent).**
- **No-preference responses are noticeably higher for every other congregational role listed on the survey, including clerk of session (members, 87 percent; elders, 87 percent), Christian educator (92 percent; 91 percent), and elder (93 percent; 95 percent).**
- **Majorities of laity have belonged to a congregation where a woman was serving as pastor or associate pastor (members, 73 percent; elders, 72 percent).**
- **Large majorities would support calling a woman as pastor the next time their congregation has a vacancy (members, 64 percent; elders, 68 percent).**

Other findings at www.pcusa.org/research

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