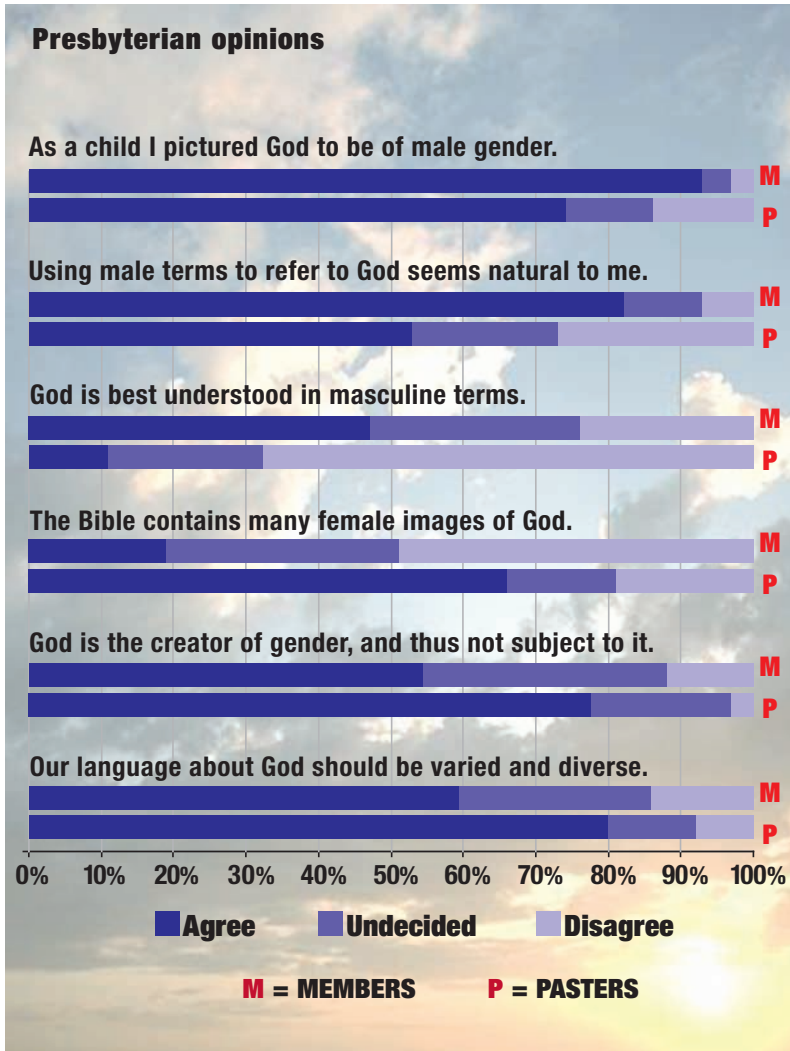


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



God and gender

Findings from a 2007 survey provide a snapshot of Presbyterian opinion on the issue of gender as it relates to God:

- **As children, most Presbyterians imagined God to be male** (members, 93 percent; pastors, 75 percent).
- **For somewhat smaller majorities, using male terms for God seems natural** (members, 83 percent; pastors, 53 percent).
- **Considerably fewer agree that God is best understood in masculine terms** (members, 47 percent; pastors, 11 percent).
- **Most pastors believe that the Bible contains many female images of God** (66 percent), but few laity do (members, 19 percent).
- **A majority agrees that God is the creator of gender, and thus not subject to it** (members, 55 percent; pastors, 77 percent).

Other findings may be found at www.pcusa.org/research

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What the research shows

Large majorities of Presbyterians grew up with a male image of God, something that still seems natural to most. Nevertheless, many, especially pastors, now reject the view that masculine imagery provides the best representation of God, in part because they believe God is beyond gender.

In practice, though, masculine imagery remains predominant in many PC(USA) congregations. Three in four members and five in six pastors report the use of gender-specific words for God at least occasionally in their worship services, and such language is mostly male or entirely male in most of these congregations.

Current efforts to move away from primarily masculine imagery emphasize the use of “expansive language” about God. Rather than eliminate masculine words or pronouns, this view holds that God should be referenced using the wide variety of terms that are found in the Bible and the Reformed tradition—terms such as “creator” or “shepherd.”

A minority of respondents report that their congregations use expansive language about God most or all of the time in worship (members, 40 percent; pastors, 41 percent). Such behavior seems likely to become more prevalent, however, because larger percentages report both agreeing with the use of expansive language (59 and 81 percent) and being comfortable with the practice (55 and 64 percent). □