

State College Presbyterian Church Congregational Survey: Summary of findings

Introduction (demographics)

On May 8, 2011, the Self-Study Committee administered a congregational survey during both worship services. We received 398 responses, representing 34 percent of total members (1,186) and 81 percent of average worship attendance (494), for the calendar year 2010. Overall, respondents are predominantly white (98%), English speaking (96%), and live within 15 minutes of SCPC (86%). Almost half of respondents (44%) are over 65 years of age, with another third (32%) between 45 and 64 years of age; six in ten (59%) respondents are female. Over two-thirds (68%) of respondents are married. While a majority of respondents (76%) have one or more children, only one-third (34%) have children living at home with them. The respondents are highly educated: a large majority (87%) has a college degree and 43% have a graduate degree (compared with the 29% of all Americans who have a college degree). Respondents come from relatively affluent households: more than half (56%) of respondents have annual household incomes above \$75,000 (compared to the US median household income of \$49,777). Most respondents regularly contribute money to the church, and nearly half (47%) of respondents give 5% or more of their net income to the congregation.

The following sections discuss overall strengths and areas for improvement as highlighted in the survey; provide a summary of other survey questions; and present survey responses on several special items for the future regarding pastoral characteristics and duties, and congregational topics of interest.

Strengths and areas for improvement identified by the survey

One question (on the survey insert) asked worshipers how satisfied they are with 21 various activities, programs and services at our church. The results, ranked from highest to lowest according to the percent “very satisfied” or “satisfied” are in the following table.

Program or activity	% responding very satisfied or satisfied
Worship/worship schedule	96
High school youth programs (e.g., FISH)	94
LOGOS/Chrysalis	90
Physical facilities	90
Music	89
Communications (e.g., PresbyPost)	89
Children's Christian education	87
Local Mission/outreach	82
New member class and integration of new members	81
Young children ministries (Nursery/Stay and Play)	79
Global Mission/outreach	71
Adult education	69
Pastoral care	67
Collegiate ministry	63
Social justice	63
Inclusiveness/diversity	60
Young adults (young professionals and/or families with young children)	55

Program or activity	% responding very satisfied or satisfied
Seniors ministry and concerns	52
Spiritual formation/small groups	52
Presbyterian Women's group	38
Presbyterian Men's group	30

These satisfaction scores highlight several strengths of the church: worship/worship schedule, children's ministries (including Sunday school, LOGOS/Chrysalis, and FISH), mission/outreach, physical facilities, music, and communications (such as PresbyPost).

Strength: Caring for Children and Youth

The table above shows widespread satisfaction with FISH, LOGOS/Chrysalis, Children's Christian education, and young children ministries (such as nursery and Stay and Play). This strong support for children's and youth programs is also echoed in question 18, where the vast majority (89%) report being satisfied or very satisfied with programs for children and youth (<19 years of age). Similarly, over half (52%) of respondents chose ministry for children and youth as one of the top three aspects of the congregation that they most value (question 25); no other aspect of the church was selected by more than 43 percent of the respondents. Clearly, the SCPC ministries for children and youth are a strong and highly valued element of our church.

Strength: Meaningful Worship and Music

In the table above, 96 percent of respondents report being satisfied or very satisfied with the worship service and/or schedule. Similarly, when asked to identify the top three aspects of the congregation that they most value (question 25), 43 percent chose the traditional style of worship or music, 39 percent chose sermons/preaching, and 27 percent chose sharing in Holy Communion. Other indicators that our congregation engages in meaningful worship are that about two-thirds of respondents always or usually experience joy, inspiration, and God's presence during worship, but rarely experience boredom or frustration (question 50). Ninety percent of respondents feel that SCPC worship services and other congregational activities help them in everyday life (question 7).

One key aspect of worship is music during the service. The table above indicates that 89 percent of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with music at SCPC. Although many styles of music are enjoyed, there is a strong preference for traditional hymns in the service. When asked to choose their top two preferred styles of worship music, three-quarters of respondents listed traditional hymns (73%), with contemporary music as a strong second preference (41%). Sizable minorities ranked praise or gospel (27%), classical music or contemplative chants (23%), and music from a variety of cultures (16%) in their top two preferences (question 23).

Strength: Focusing on the Community

Regarding the top three programs/activities most valued by respondents (question 25), the final option selected by at least one-third of the congregation is: wider community care or social justice emphasis (34%). Further, 18 percent report "openness to social diversity" as one of their three most valued aspects. Members of this congregation are active in social service or advocacy groups both through the congregation (37%; question 5) and in the community (55%; question 15). And respondents are politically, financially and socially active in the community (question 17). For example, almost 90 percent donated money to a charitable organization (other than this congregation) and/or voted in the 2008 presidential election; 61 percent donated or prepared food for someone outside their family or congregation; and one-third (34%) worked with others to try to solve a community problem (question 17).

Strength: Participating in the Congregation

Survey respondents are very active in the life of this church. Almost three-quarters (74%) usually attend worship services every week or more than once a week; another 20% attend two or three times a month (question 1). Two-thirds (65%) are involved in one or more small groups (e.g., Sunday school, prayer, Bible study, discussion groups) (question 4). Almost half (49%) have one or more leadership roles in the congregation, for example, as Sunday school teachers, Session members, Deacons, choir members, and service leaders (question 6). We have many lifelong members (35% of respondents have been involved with SCPC for over 20 years), but we also have a sizable number of individuals (21%) who have been participating for five years or less (question 2).

Financial support is another method of being involved with the church. Most respondents (94%) regularly contribute to SCPC, and nearly half (47%) of respondents give 5% or more of their net income to the congregation (question 41). This is about the same as the 2008 average for congregations (of all denominations) with more than 350 regular worshipers, but is somewhat lower than the 2008 average for all Presbyterian churches (for which 58% of worshipers give 5% or more of their net income to the congregation). Focusing on the top level of giving, 9 percent of survey respondents regularly give 10% or more of their net income to our congregation; nationally, 18% of worshipers give 10% or more of their net income to their place of worship.

Areas for improvement for the future:

Looking instead at the bottom of the table above, where less than half of respondents reported being satisfied, we find several programmatic areas in which there is room for improvement: Presbyterian men's and women's groups; small group ministries in general; Seniors' ministry; and programs for young adults.

Area for improvement: Vision for the future

In addition to the program areas listed above, one place where we can do better is creating and communicating a vision for the future. This is to be expected given our current state of transition. While over half of respondents (56%) express a clear understanding and commitment to the vision, goals, and direction of our ministry and mission, a significant number (40 percent) do not believe there is a clear vision, goals, or direction. A small number (4%) agree that a clear vision and goals exist, but report that they are not committed to these goals (question 20).

On the other hand, there is a strong and positive sense of the congregation's future. Three quarters (75%) of the respondents have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future (question 52). A majority of respondents (57%) say we are currently deciding (43%) or moving (14%) in new directions as a congregation, 7 percent say we need to rethink our direction, and 15 percent feel that we are or need to maintain past directions (question 54). And over half (55%) of respondents agree with the statement, "*This congregation is always ready to try something new;*" only 8% disagree (with the remaining 37% neutral or unsure; question 55).

One purpose of the Self-Study committee is to help the congregation to clearly identify future directions for the church.

Summary of other survey questions

About Your Faith (Questions 8-14)

Overall, there is a strong and confident feeling of faith among respondents, and this congregation is meeting their spiritual needs. Respondents are open-minded about other faiths/religious traditions, but have a strong affinity to Christianity.

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents reported spending time in private devotional activities at least once a week or more often (question 8).
- A large majority (88%) report experiencing a growth in faith over the last year (question 9).
- Three-quarters (75%) of respondents consider the Bible to be the word of God, to be interpreted in light of historical and/or cultural contexts and the Church's teachings. Another 9% say the Bible is the Word of God and should be taken literally, and 13% say the Bible is not the word of God, but contains God's word to us and is valuable (question 10).
- Over half (56%) of the respondents agreed with the statement: *"All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth"* (question 11).
- Over three-quarters (83%) agree with the statement: *"My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation"* (question 12).
- Two-thirds (66%) feel at ease talking about their faith with others (question 13).
- Just over one-third (38%) of all respondents report having had a conversion experience or distinct moment of decisive faith commitment (question 14).

About your Involvement (Questions 15-25)

A strong majority of respondents has close friends in the congregation, reports a strong sense of belonging, and would feel comfortable inviting family or friends to participate in worship.

- While nearly three-quarters (73%) report having close friends in the congregation, almost 1 in 10 (8%) say they have little contact with others from the congregation outside of SCPC activities (question 19).
- A clear majority (86%) of respondents report a strong sense of belonging to this congregation, and over one-third (38%) say their sense of belonging is growing; however, almost 1 in 10 persons (8%) report a strong but declining sense of belonging. And 4% report a desire to have a stronger sense of belonging (question 22).
- Eighty-eight percent (88%) would invite a friend or relative who does not attend a congregation to a worship service at SCPC, and over one-third (37%) have done so in the last year (question 16).

Additional Questions (Questions 47-60)

There is a sense of limited conflict and a balanced leadership style that respects and appreciates input from the congregation.

- Most (84%) respondents report no conflict (62%) or very limited conflict (22%) in the congregation in the past two years (question 53).
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) believe the pastor takes into account the ideas of the congregation (question 56).
- A majority (54%) of respondents describes the leadership style of the pastor as one that inspires people to take action; another 22% describe the leadership style as one that acts on goals set by the people (question 57).
- Nearly all respondents (90%) agree that there is a good match between the congregation and the pastor(s) (question 24).
- Over eighty percent (83%) have been encouraged to use their talents by church leaders (question 49).

Although most people feel able to participate in congregational decision-making, less than half choose to do so.

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents report that they have been given the opportunity to participate in congregational decision-making, but less than half say they often (13%) or occasionally (29%) get involved in actual

decision-making. Of the one-quarter (26%) of respondents who say they have not been given an opportunity to be involved, 4% are unhappy about this situation (question 21).

Respondents believe in an active and engaged God, and the saving power of Jesus Christ.

- One-quarter of respondents agree with the statement, *“Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved.”* Exactly half (50%) of respondents disagree with this statement, and one-quarter (23%) are neutral or unsure (question 51).
- Two-thirds of respondents (62%) agree with the statement, *“God is directly involved in worldly affairs.”* Eight percent disagree with this statement, and 28% are neutral or unsure (question 58).
- Nearly half (47%) of respondents agree with the statement, *“God is angered by human sin.”* Twenty-three percent disagree, and 29% are neutral or unsure (question 59).

The congregation is theologically balanced between liberals, conservatives and those who are right in the middle.

- One-third of respondents (35%) describe themselves as theologically conservative, an equal percentage (35%) describe themselves as theologically liberal and the remaining third (30%) say they are right in the middle (question 60).

Looking to the future

As we look to the future, three questions (on the survey insert) give guidance on respondents’ preferences regarding pastoral leadership style, important pastoral tasks, and topics of interest.

First, with respect to style of ministry, the top ten leadership characteristics (those ranked as very high or high priority by 60 percent or more respondents) are:

Characteristics	% responding “very high” or “high” priority
Is a strong preacher	95
A warm outgoing personality	93
Expertise in Biblical and theological matters	90
High degree of spirituality	88
Tends to be thought-provoking and challenging	86
Tends to be comforting and assuring	82
Works hard to accomplish tasks	79
Is a strong administrator	65
In preaching and teaching, usually emphasizes the Bible	62
Helps people figure things out for themselves	60

Second, with respect to pastoral duties, respondents feel the ten most important tasks for the pastor (those ranked as very high or high priority by 60 percent or more respondents) are:

Pastoral tasks	% responding “very high” or “high” priority
Planning/leading worship sensitive to the needs of the worshipping community	88
Preaching the Word of God with urgency and conviction	81
Developing a strong sense of community among members	81
Attending to the spiritual development of members	79
Being a caring and enabling counselor	78
Handling administrative tasks effectively and efficiently	70
Developing and supporting Christian education for all ages	68
Leadership of visioning and planning of congregation mission	67
Involving laity in planning, participating in, and leading congregational events	65
Visiting the sick and bereaved	62

Third, with respect to worshipers’ interests, at least one-quarter of respondents expressed interest in the topics listed in the table below. These topics, along with the areas for improvement discussed previously (page 3), can be considered as the congregation articulates its vision for the future.

Topic	% expressing interest
Life transitions	37
Christian friendship	32
Death and dying	31
Hunger/homelessness	30
Care of the elderly	29
Retirement	29
Children's education	28
Grieving and loss	28
Parenting	28
Commitment in relationships	25
Health issues	25