



GRACE PRESBYTERY GENERAL PRESBYTER

Report to the Search Committee



**RESEARCH
SERVICES**

Susan Barnett, PhD
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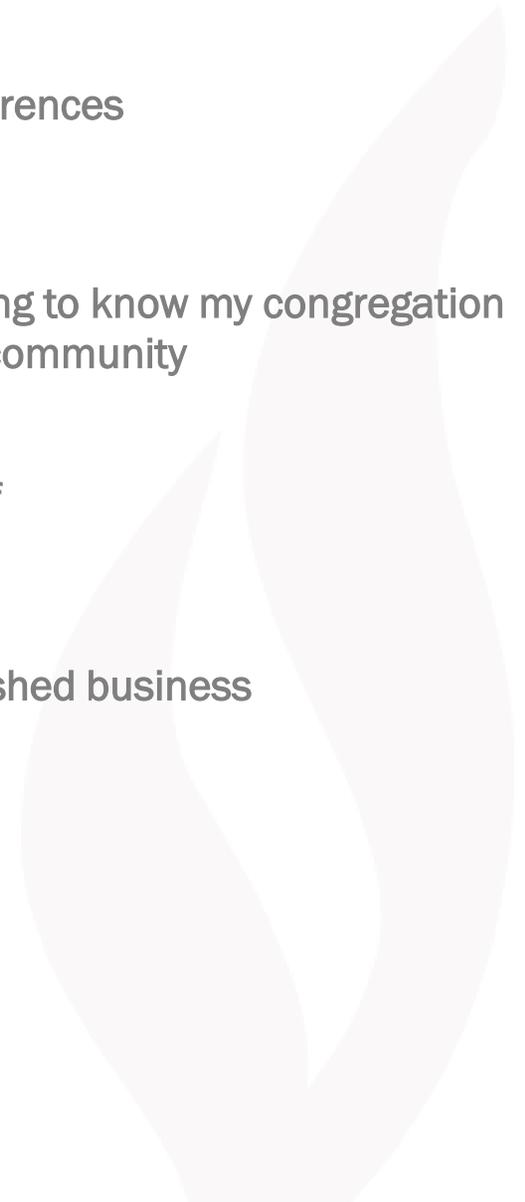
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Summary

Communication, the ability to communicate openly, honestly, frequently, and transparently is the skill most valued by both survey respondents and focus group participants.

This is followed by the ability to create and lead in the development of a unifying vision for the presbytery.

The diverse nature of congregations in Grace Presbytery creates a challenge. Congregations are small/large, rural/urban, racial diverse/not, excelling/surviving/dying, and spread over a large geographic area. This increases isolation for pastors and increases the difficulty for in-person participation at presbytery meetings and events. This was true prior to COVID-19; a concern that is compounded by the pandemic. One suggested the presbytery is too large and could be realigned by the existing four regions to form new presbyteries. As that is not possible, what are the challenges for the General Presbyter?

The five leading concerns for the presbytery are:

1. Membership decline
2. Conflicting priorities for congregations (small vs large & rural vs urban)
3. Pastors in need of support
4. Congregations that are closing
5. Financial decline

The General Presbyter will face significant challenges. In the focus groups, participants indicated that they are willing to help share in the work themselves and to introduce church members who are both skilled and available to help. One suggestion was to call on the available retired ministers to serve as staff extenders.

Process

Respondents and distribution

Grace Presbytery engaged PC(U.S.A.)'s Research Services to conduct both survey and focus group research as part of its discernment process for a to be hired General Presbyter.

Grace Presbytery congregations have a great geographical spread. For meetings and other organization activities, the presbytery is divided into four quadrants: north, south, east, and west. Respondents were asked to identify their congregation then the congregations were linked to their respective quadrant. It was hoped that the respondents would represent an even distribution across the four quadrants.

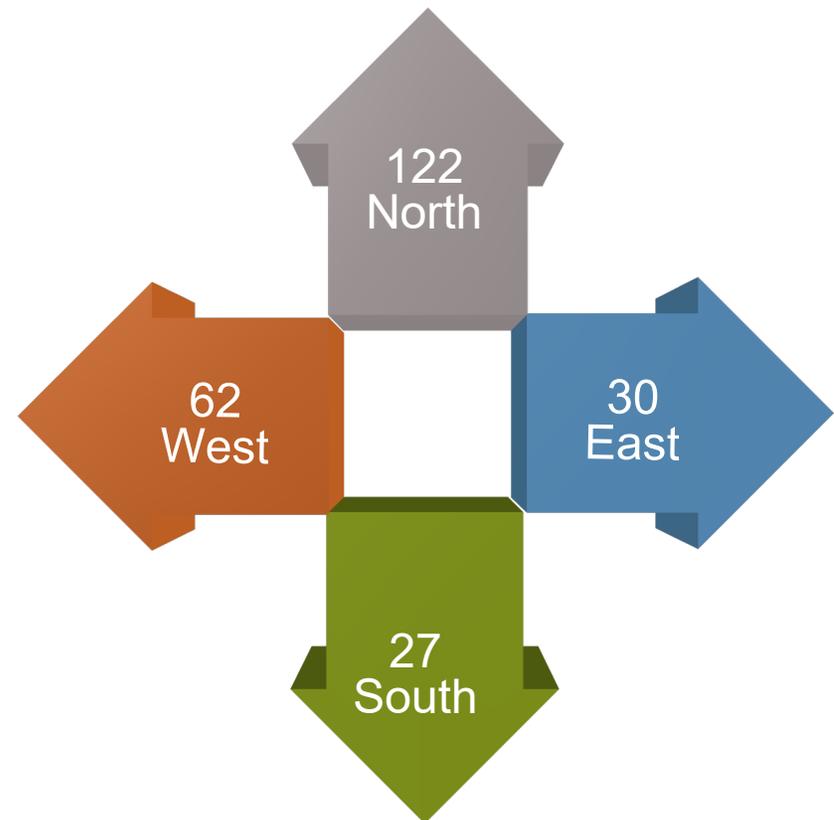
- 413 individuals responded to the survey

- 44 churches had a single respondents

- 10 churches did not have a response

- 2 churches had 9 responses each:

 - First, Fort Worth & St. Barnabas, Richardson



Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held to ask these questions.

1. What are the strengths and concerns for the presbytery?
2. What skills do you want in the General Presbyter?
3. What are you willing to do?



Strengths & concerns

What are the strengths and concerns for Grace Presbytery?

Strengths

Leadership Development	There is succession planning within the congregations and in presbytery leadership
Vital Congregations	Some congregations are actively engaged in mission. They are both spiritually and financially strong.

Concerns

Struggling congregations	Congregations that are elderly, very small, rural, without pastoral leadership,
Declining membership	Individuals leaving the church, no longer seeing its relevance for their lives. Churches are missing those who are middle age and younger.
Address wounds	Something that has happened in the local congregation and presbytery that has not been sufficiently addressed.
System issues	Congregations do not see the need of a presbytery
Trust	For presbytery leadership to trust the congregations without controlling them. The presbytery is either irrelevant or hostile.
Isolation of pastors	Pastors expressed loneliness and lack of support. It would be helpful to have pastor support groups, time to meet and lift one another, a pastor's circle.

Hope

What is needed in the General Presbyter?

Skills

Communication

Open, transparent communication. Being available to talk with and be available for the pastors.

Connector

Being able to bring members of multiple congregations together to accomplish mission or other work.

Visionary

The ability to see hope and a plan for Grace Presbytery.

Team player

One who builds relationships with congregations and their staff who seeks to empower both individuals and congregations

Missional

Charge the presbytery with mission, encouraging collaboration

Pastor

There has been a lot of hurt with limited healing. Being willing to work with the congregations and presbytery leadership to address the hurt and to promote healing.

Change agent

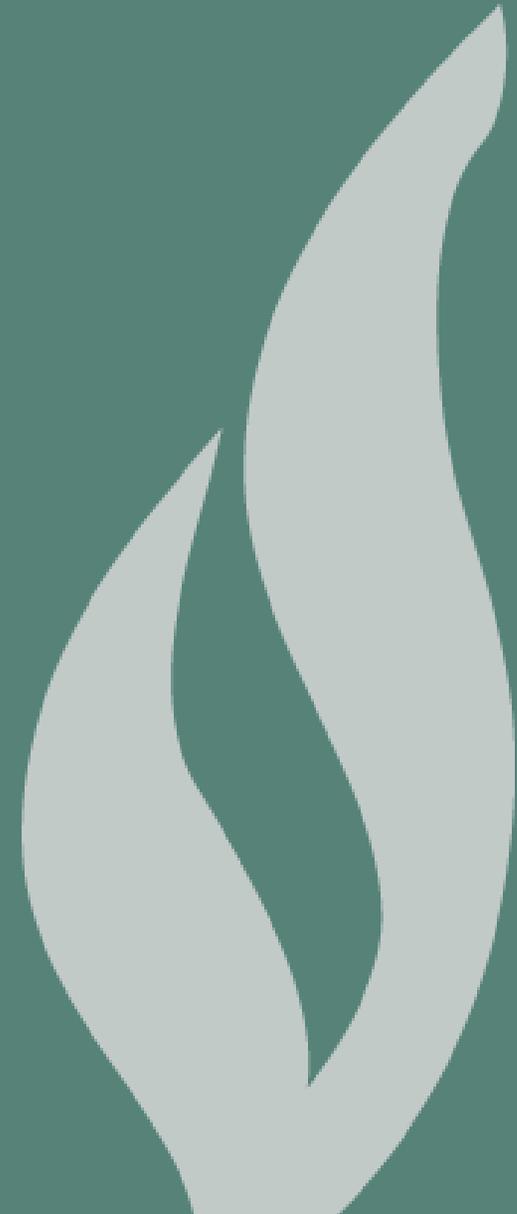
One who is willing to remove some of the system's structure to remove barriers for individuals and congregations who want to work with the presbytery

Encourager

Many members and pastors are discouraged, particularly during this time of pandemic, they need someone to walk along side of them in ministry.

Challenges & Prayers

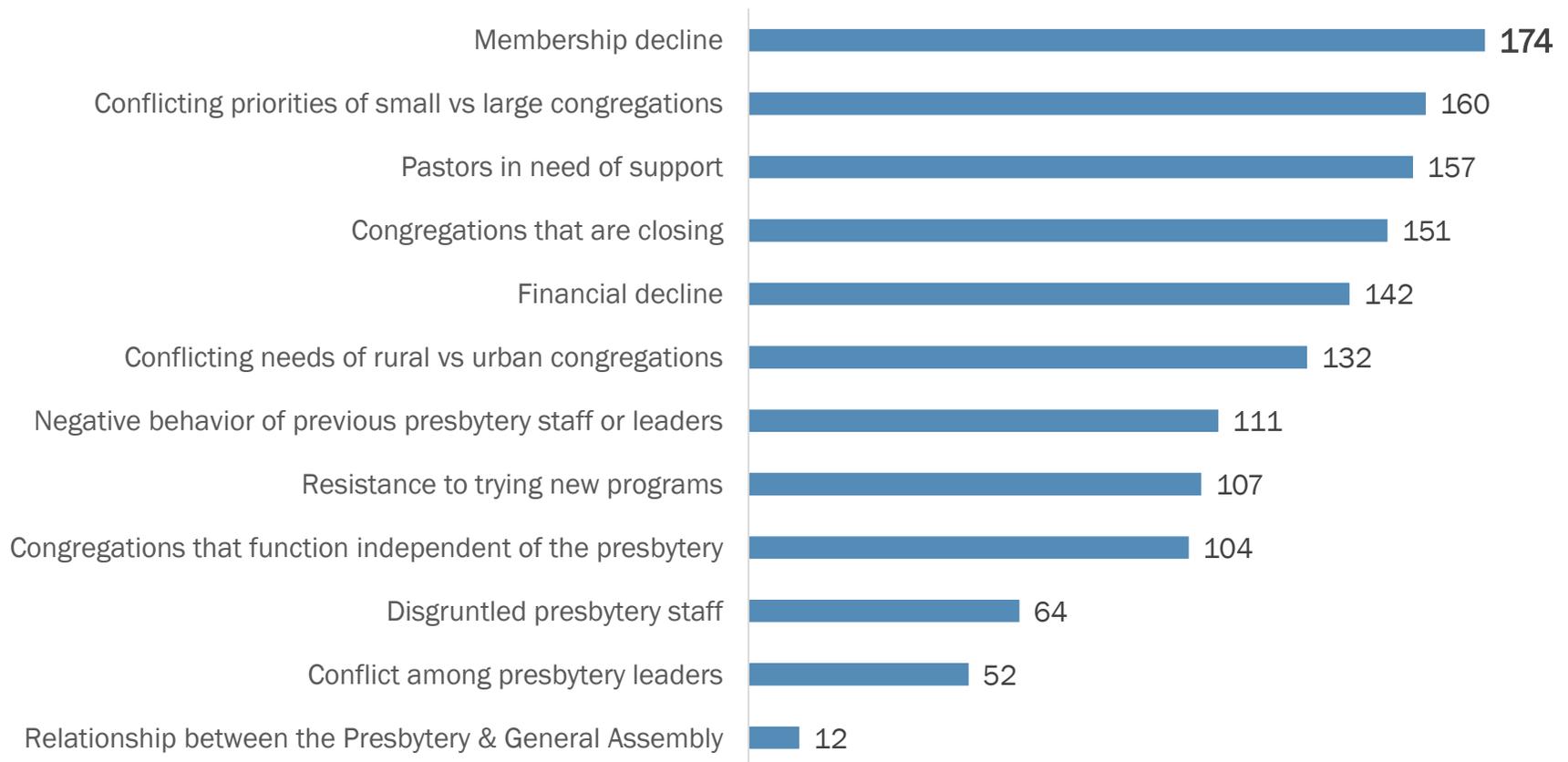
The following page describes the challenges that were identified in the survey and the prayers that its members and leaders have for the presbytery.



Challenges

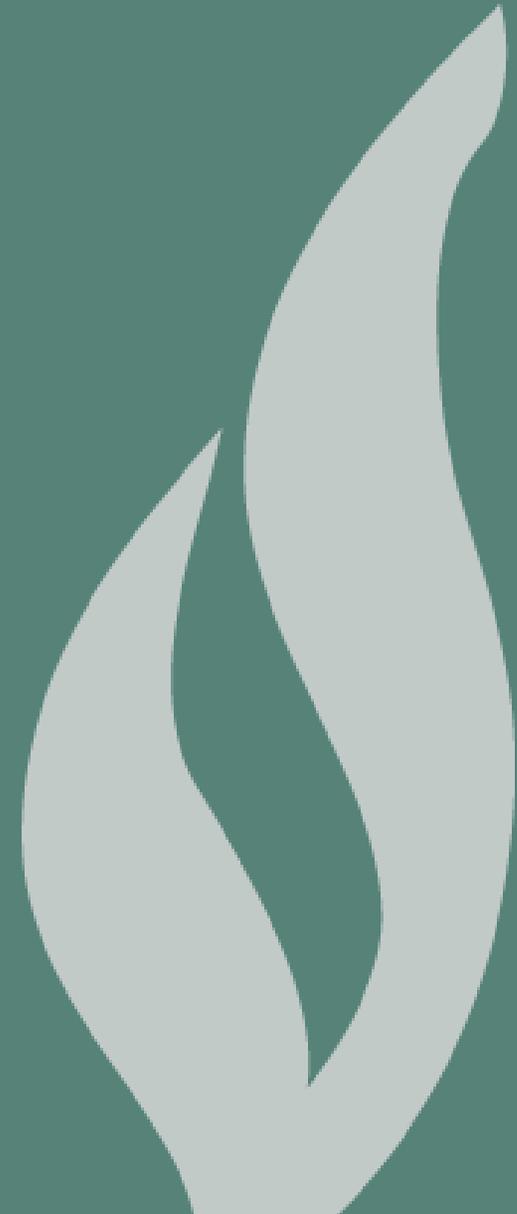
Membership decline is the greatest concern

Respondents were given this list of twelve concerns and were asked to rank them in the order of *their* greatest concern for the presbytery. The concerns are based Research Services' research findings and comments from the General Presbyter Search Committee.



Preferences

The following pages describe the skills, experience, and time allocation that the respondents think will promote success for the General Presbyter.



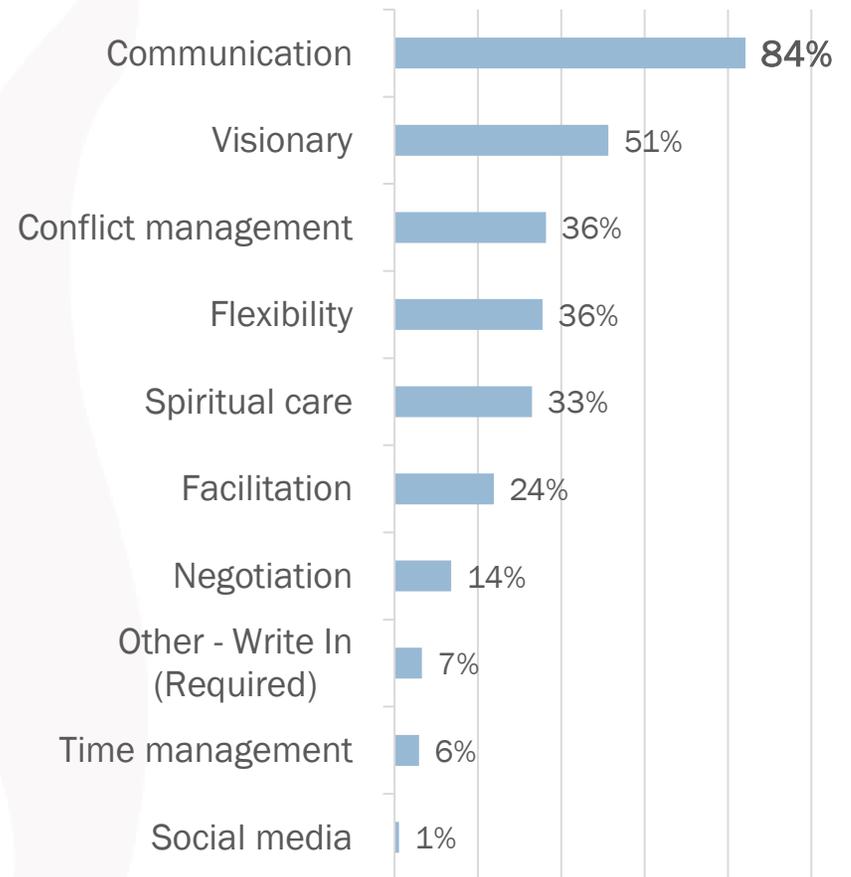
Perspectives

Essential Skills

Respondents were asked to rank a series of skills that the General Presbyter needs in order to succeed in this position. Respondents were asked to only move those skills they thought **are** or **would be** essential. They could move as many or few options as they chose.

Communication, a communicator, is the essential skill. Comments support the need for an open, transparent, and frequent communicator.

Visionary. From the comments, to both have a vision and to lead the presbytery in developing a vision that unites the diverse congregations: large and small; rural and suburban.

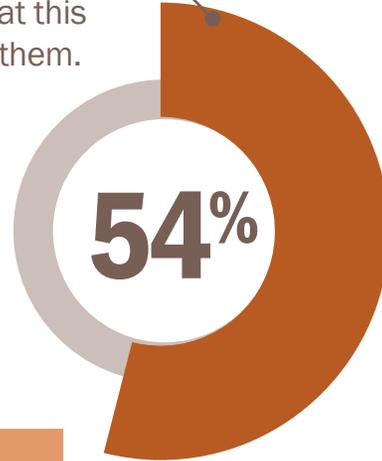


Perspectives

Preferences

Presbytery Executive Experience

Nearly 30% said that this is not important to them.

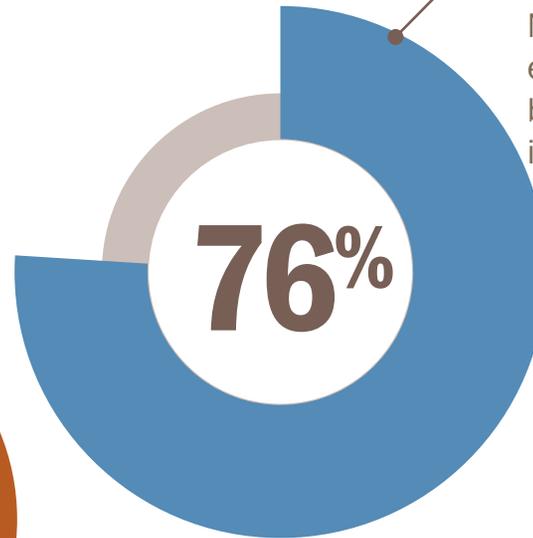


Other preferences

Having served as a pastor is important but the church's size is not.

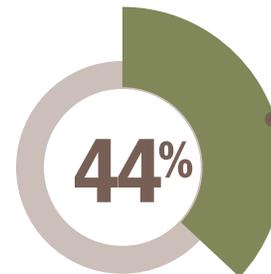
Seminary Education

Most want a seminary educated presbyter, but it was not important to everyone.



Bilingual

With the number of Spanish-speaking families in the presbytery, being able to speak Spanish would help church growth.



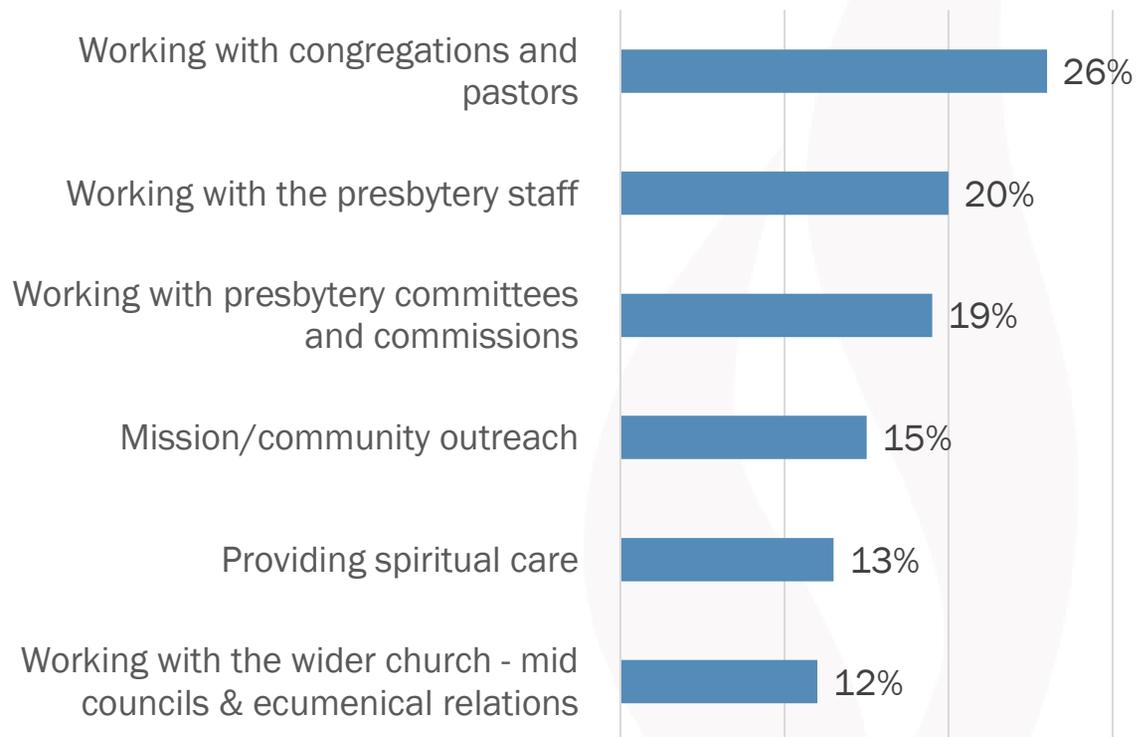
Perspectives

Time Allocation

How should this person divide their time?

Respondents were asked to assign values to these tasks. When finished, it should total 100%*.

% of time allocated to each task



30%
is the amount of time
that the General
Presbyter should spend
traveling to visit local
congregations and
pastors once the
pandemic has passed.

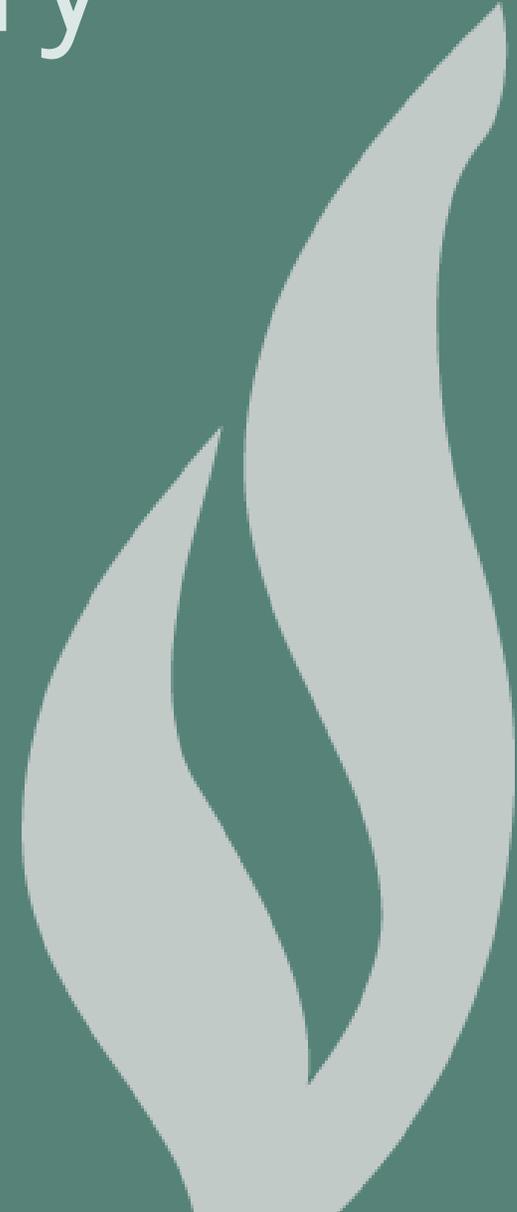
* This chart totals 105 due to rounding of the individual responses.

Getting to Know Grace Presbytery

Two questions were asked what should the General Presbyter know about:

- Your congregation
- Your community

The purpose in asking these questions is to provide the comments to the General Presbyter so that the General Presbyter can hear the joy, pain, excitement, and hope in the membership's own words and to learn about their communities.



Getting to know ...

Our congregation & community...

- has adults who cannot physically attend in-person worship during non-pandemic times who appreciate their new opportunities of virtual worship and want them to continue
- is small, aging, dying, hanging on, loving, and faithful
- wants to work with the presbytery, to be Presbyterian
- is beginning to recognize the impact of systemic racism and for some to acknowledge that their church “is racist” and are afraid to admit it
- is vibrant, financially sound, vital
- “has been hurt by the presbytery... our relationship is broken”
- is struggling
- is missional
- needs help in pastoral transition.

The comments do not provide an image of the “average church” in Grace Presbytery. Congregations vary greatly in size, financial resources, vitality, hope, and interest in the presbytery.

When asked to describe their community setting, some respondents repeated their church descriptions. The churches are both rural and urban. Few described the community surrounding their church. For that reason, the responses are combined and presented here/.

These statements summarize, represent many of comments.

Getting to know ...

Our prayers

229 respondents shared their prayers for Grace Presbytery and the incoming General Presbyter.

In general, the prayers are for a renewed spirit, peace and compassion, unity of purpose, to heal the divisions and hurts, to increase connectively, to be fiscally responsible, to regroup following the pandemic, peace, to find balance, bringing the gospel to the world, and for the new General Presbyter.

The purpose in asking this question is to provide these comments to the General Presbyter so they person can hear the members' prayers for the presbytery.

From the staff

Staff were invited to participate, to share their thoughts, concerns, hopes, and prayers for Grace Presbytery and the incoming General Presbyter..



Inside the presbytery office

Staff...

Recognize that all new staff are compared to those who came before them. This may keep the presbytery from moving forward and re-envisioning itself.

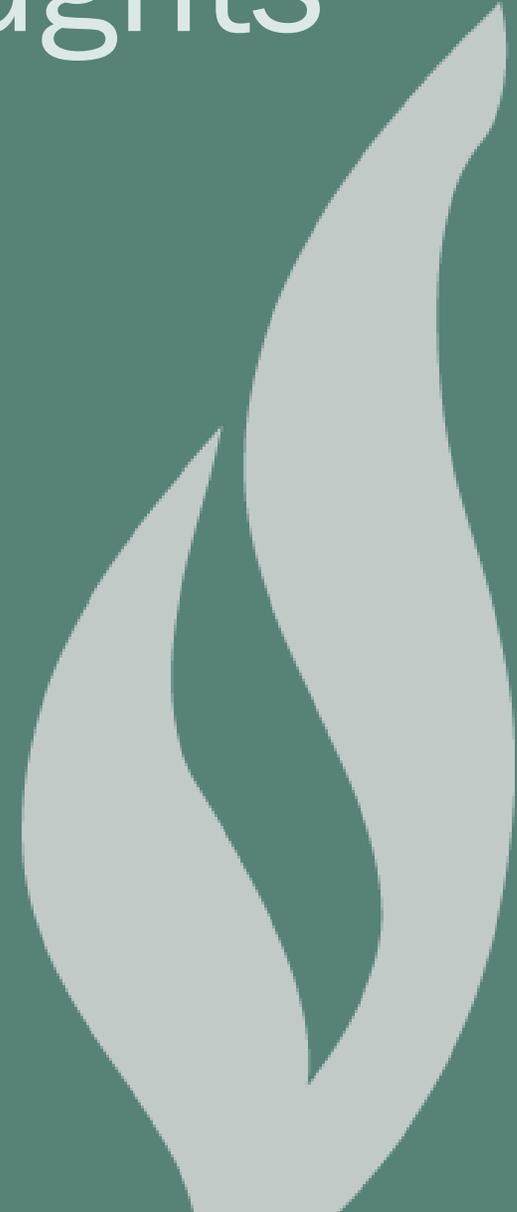
Agree with both survey respondents and focus group participants that communication is the primary skill that is needed in the General Presbyter. Communication is followed by vision, finance, and technology abilities. These three were valued equally

See the offices as needing technological upgrades, job descriptions, and clear performance expectations.

Are hopeful.

Responding staff are generally satisfied with their jobs and have worked at the presbytery for two or more years.

Concerns & Thoughts



Conflict

Unfinished business

At the request of the presbytery, three focus groups were conducted. In two of the focus groups, three participants said something that seem to suggest an undercurrent or underlying issue in the presbytery. In the first group, two individuals made similar comments, they are looking forward to having “a safe environment”. In the last group, another asked said “when are we going to discuss what happened?”

Several respondents wrote in their comments about being hurt by the previous presbyter, that they do not want “things” to be that way again.

“we've been terribly wounded by the past presbyter; no Christian apology was ever given,...”

“The former General Presbyter was abusive to staff and others.”

It may not be the responsibility of this committee to address these comments; however, it is your responsibility to share them with those who can. There are three individuals who felt confident, safe and sufficiently secure to voice their concerns in the focus groups. Many more wrote about in their survey response. Whatever this issue is or was, the incoming General Presbyter would be better served if they were made aware of the concern, to know what measures had been taken to address it, and to know what had been done to assure the members and pastors that this will not recur.

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions using surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, presbyteries and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a ministry of the Administrative Services Group, A Corporation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or research@pcusa.org.



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