

**SURVEY OF TENTMAKERS  
AND  
CONGREGATIONS SERVED BY TENTMAKERS**

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**RESEARCH SERVICES**  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
100 Witherspoon Street  
Louisville, KY 40202

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Deborah Bruce, Associate Research Manager, wrote this report, assisted by the following staff members of the office of Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Keith Wulff, Jack Marcum, Ida Smith-Williams, Vittoria Conn, Dorothy Dietrich, and Louella Aker.

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## **Background**

Early in 1996, The Reverend Ross Blount contacted the Research Services office on behalf of the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers (APT). APT was interested in conducting a survey of tentmakers within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). APT leaders wanted to learn more about the individuals who have chosen this unique type of ministry—serving a congregation, usually part-time, while at the same time pursuing a secular career. They were also interested in respondents' evaluations of their experiences as tentmakers. Research Services staff worked with APT to construct a questionnaire for these purposes. In addition, a parallel questionnaire to be completed by members of congregations currently served by tentmakers was also constructed. This second questionnaire was developed to gather information about the perceptions of members in congregations served by tentmakers to this distinct ministry.

The Executive Committee of APT provided a mailing list of 195 individuals believed to be (or have been) tentmakers within the denomination. Each person received two questionnaires—one to be completed by the tentmaker and one to be completed by members of his or her congregation (the cover letter suggested that the session or some other group of members work together to complete this second questionnaire). Two separate postage-paid reply envelopes were provided. A postcard reminder was sent to non-respondents about two weeks after the original mailing, and after two more weeks another reminder with a second copy of each questionnaire was mailed to tentmakers who still had not returned a completed questionnaire. Finally, efforts were made at the annual meeting of APT (held about two months after the second reminder) to encourage tentmakers to participate in the study.

Completed questionnaires were received from 109 or 56% of the 195 individuals believed to be tentmakers. Another 15 questionnaires were returned blank with indications that the recipients were not tentmakers (raising the overall response rate to 63%). Only 27% of congregations served by tentmakers returned completed questionnaires. The low response rate for congregations is not surprising for several reasons. The cover letter suggested that the session or another group of members complete that questionnaire. Any response that requires input from more than one person is usually more difficult to complete. In addition, the original mailing occurred during the summer when many sessions do not meet or meet less frequently.

The appendices present the completed text of all questions and the percentage distribution of responses to each item on the questionnaires: Appendix A for tentmakers and Appendix B for congregations served by tentmakers.

## **Results For Tentmakers**

### **Respondents**

We asked several questions to help determine the demographic characteristics of tentmakers. The majority of respondents (86%) were male (Q-27). This percentage is similar to that for ministers across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 83% of whom are male.<sup>1</sup>

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed among three age groups (Q-28): 41 to 50 (27%), 51 to 60 (36%), and over 60 (26%). Another 11% reported that they are between 31 and 40 years old. About half (52%)

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<sup>1</sup>From *Comparative Statistics 1995*, Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY.

reported that they were ordained between 1960 and 1979 (Q-26). Nonetheless, 12% were ordained in the last six years (during the 1990s), and at the other extreme, 16% were ordained before 1960.

Respondents currently serve in 68 different presbyteries (Q-25). Grouping these by synod reveals that certain regions have greater concentrations of tentmakers, as Table 1 shows. However, comparing the percentage of tentmakers to the percentage of all ministers in each synod (last column to the right) shows that the percentages are fairly close in most areas. There are only five synods in which the percentages differ by four percentage points or more: Lakes and Prairies, Mid-Atlantic, and Rocky Mountains, where the percentage of tentmakers exceeds the percentage of all ministers; and Lincoln Trails and Pacific, where tentmakers are somewhat under-represented.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Tentmakers by Synod**

Synod	<u>Tentmakers</u>		<u>All Ministers</u> *		Difference in Percentages
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Lakes and Prairies .....	18	17%	1,350	6%	11
Mid-Atlantic .....	20	19%	2,555	12%	7
Rocky Mountains .....	6	6%	519	2%	4
Northeast .....	14	13%	2,359	11%	2
Southwest .....	3	3%	452	2%	1
Alaska Northwest .....	3	3%	628	3%	0
Covenant.....	7	7%	1,459	7%	0
Living Waters.....	6	6%	1,210	6%	0
Puerto Rico.....	0	0%	95	1%	-1
Mid-America .....	2	2%	753	4%	-2
South Atlantic.....	8	8%	2,000	10%	-2
Southern California and Hawaii .....	3	3%	1,022	5%	-2
Trinity.....	8	8%	2,040	10%	-2
Sun.....	5	5%	1,562	8%	-3
Pacific.....	2	2%	1,361	7%	-5
Lincoln Trails .....	0	0%	1,275	6%	-6
Total .....	105	100%	20,640	100%	—

\* Source: *Comparative Statistics 1995*, Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY.

Given the perception that tentmakers tend to serve smaller-membership congregations (which tend to be located in rural areas and small towns), the pattern of responses to Q-23, which asked respondent to indicate where they currently serve, is not surprising. The largest percentage of respondents (39%) reported that they are currently serving in towns with populations of under 5,000. Another 17% serve in areas they described as “open country,” 12% serve in small cities (with populations of 5,000 to 50,000), and 14% serve in medium-size cities (50,000 to 250,000 population). Few serve in large cities (10%) or in suburbs (9%). This distribution of pastors differs from that of PCUSA pastors as a whole,<sup>2</sup> as Table 2 shows. (Note that the categories used were slightly different on the two surveys.) Tentmakers are more likely to be serving in small towns and cities and in rural

<sup>2</sup> Source: *1994-1996 Presbyterian Panel*. Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY.

areas. In contrast, the random sample of PCUSA pastors include a much larger percentage who are serving in suburban areas.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Tentmakers by Size of City/Town**

Size of Town	Tentmakers	All Pastors *	Difference in Percentages
open country/farm .....	17%	11%	6
towns/small cities .....	51%	36%	15
medium cities (under 250,000).....	14%	13%	1
large cities (over 250,000).....	10%	11%	1
suburbs .....	9%	28%	-19

Note: The categories used on the two surveys were slightly different. Here, tentmakers’ responses of “town under 5,000 population” and “small city under 50,000 population” have been combined and are compared to the random sample of pastors’ responses of “small city or town of under 50,000 population.”

\* Source: 1994-1996 Presbyterian Panel. Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY.

About four in ten tentmakers (39%) described the economic situation in the area where they are in ministry as “stable” (Q-24). The remainder were fairly evenly split, with 30% indicating the local economy is “declining,” and 27% describing the economic situation as “improving.” (The final 5% indicated they were “not sure” about the local economy.)

Most respondents (70%) have been in tentmaking ministry for 15 years or less (Q-7)—in fact, almost one-third (30%) have been tentmakers for five years or less. At the other extreme, two in ten (21%) have been serving as tentmakers for more than 20 years. A majority (58%) reported that they have had other ministry/“tent” combinations in the past (Q-6).

We were interested in how these ministers entered tentmaking and asked in Q-9 which came first—the ministry or their secular job. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they were ministers before they became involved in their “tent” (Q-9). One-quarter (23%) started work in their “tent” first, and the remaining 9% reported they started both fields at the same time.

### Current Call

When asked about their current call (Q-1), the largest group of respondents (43%) reported that they are currently serving as solo pastors. Only 4% are serving on multiple-parish staff, 5% are in specialized ministry (non-pastoral) positions, and 2% serve in a cooperative parish. Another 29% indicated they are serving in some “other” pastoral position (such as interim ministry, stated supply, new church development, or associate pastor), and 21% reported that they are *not* currently serving as tentmakers, although they had in the past. (Note that subsequent analyses that focused on current tentmaking positions were restricted to the 87 respondents who reported they are *currently* serving in some type of tentmaking ministry.)

Almost all respondents who are currently in tentmaking positions are working in part-time calls (Q-2), typically one-quarter to half-time—only 5% have calls that are more than 75% of a full-time position. One-third reported that they work less than 15 hours per week. On average, these tentmakers work 20 hours per week in their current calls.

When asked to indicate how they are classified by the stated clerk in their presbytery (Q-18), 13% reported that they “don’t know.” One-quarter (26%) reported that they are classified as pastor or co-pastor (101) and another quarter (24%) as some type of tentmaker (including pastor/co-pastor, associate pastor, stated supply, or temporary supply). The rest reported being classified in a variety of other non-tentmaking positions (see Appendix A).

## **Current Tent**

When asked to specify their current “tent” or secular position (Q-4), respondents provided a wide variety of responses, from teacher’s aide to home inspector to computer consultant to truck driver to “mom.” We categorized these into eight broad categories. Professional/managerial positions were mentioned most often as current “tent” positions—fully 43% reported such jobs. The category with the second largest number of respondents (17%) was “other ministry positions,” primarily in pastoral counseling or as chaplains. Another 15% reported that they are self-employed, 10% are in construction or other labor positions, 6% are in farming, 5% work in community agencies or government positions, and 4% reported that they are homemakers or parents. Finally, another 10% listed some other occupation that could not be classified in one of the above categories (e.g., actor, radio talk show host, student). While a few of these positions are unpaid (e.g., student, homemaker) and therefore might not be viewed as a “tent” by some, all were included in subsequent analyses if respondents indicated in response to Q-1 that they were currently serving as “tentmakers.” We chose to rely on their self-identification in this role in classifying them as such.

In contrast to the part-time nature of most tentmakers’ current calls, most “tents” are closer to full-time (Q-5). Six in ten work more than 30 hours a week in their secular position(s), with the average (median) being 35 hours per week. (Note that about half reported working in more than one secular position in addition to their ministry position.) Combined with the hours they devote to their ministry positions, the average workweek of tentmakers is about 55 hours. Only 12% reported combined work hours of 40 hours or less. On average, tentmakers devote about 60% of their total working hours to their secular position and the remaining 40% to their position in ministry.

## **Medical/Pension Benefits**

To determine the medical and pension coverage of tentmakers, we asked in Q-16 how they cover their medical/pension needs. Fully 62% are currently covered by the PCUSA Board of Pensions. In addition, one-third (33%) reported that *medical* coverage is provided by their tent position, and 23% receive a *pension* through their tent position. (Note that many respondents indicated they receive coverage from more than one source.) Only 3% of tentmakers reported that they have no pension benefits and fewer than 1% have no medical benefits.

## **Deciding on Tentmaking**

As previously mentioned, most tentmakers reported that they were ministers before they were tentmakers. A subsequent question asked about their reasons for entering the tentmaking field (Q-8). Of the seven possible reasons for getting involved in tentmaking that we offered, three stand out as “very important” to tentmakers (see Table 3)—two reasons that indicate it was an intentional choice and one reason that indicates more coincidence than intent: “it allows me to pursue other interest or career opportunities” (reported as “very important” by 53% of respondents), “I like the idea and intentionally pursued a tentmaking position” (48%), and “the opportunity presented itself/it just happened” (42%).

In contrast, far fewer cited family or financial situations that pushed them into tentmaking. Slightly fewer than one-third reported “financial reasons” or “family needs” as “very important” reasons for entering this field. Likewise, few got into tentmaking due to relocation or emotional burnout from previous ministry positions.

**Table 3**  
**Importance of Reasons for Entering Tentmaking (Q-8)**

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
it allows me to pursue other interest or career opportunities .....	53%	24%	6%	16%
I like the idea and intentionally pursued a tentmaking position.....	48%	25%	14%	14%
the opportunity presented itself/it just happened.....	42%	23%	18%	17%
financial reasons .....	31%	26%	18%	26%
family needs .....	30%	20%	14%	36%
emotional burnout in previous ministry position .....	21%	16%	14%	49%
relocation .....	17%	15%	6%	62%

Interestingly, when we examined the relationship between responses to this set of items and whether tentmakers were ministers first or in their other career first, we found no significant relationships. That is, both tentmakers who started in ministry first and those who started in a secular career first rated the same three reasons listed above as “most important.” (There were minor variations in the order of the top three.)

We also developed several categories to examine these reasons in more depth. The seven items in Q-8 were submitted to factor analysis (varimax rotation). Factor analysis is a technique used to group together survey items that are similar in terms of patterns of responses. Three factors emerged. The first two reasons listed in Table 3 (“allows me to pursue other interests” and “intentionally pursued the idea”) loaded on the first factor. This factor was labeled “intent.” Three variables loaded on the second factor: “financial reasons,” “family needs,” and “relocation.” This factor was labeled “need.” Only one variable loaded on the final factor (“emotional burnout”), and this factor was labeled “burnout.” The final variable (“it just happened”) did not load clearly on any one factor and thus was omitted from further study. (This serendipity variable loaded slightly on the “need” factor” and loaded slightly in the negative direction on the “intent” factor.)

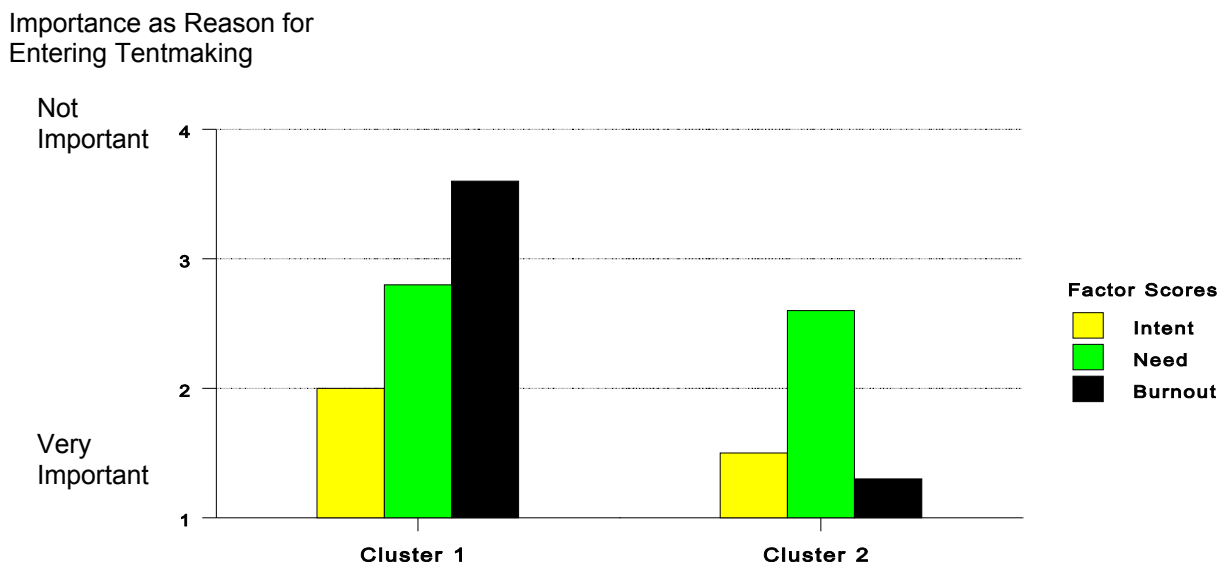
Scale scores were then created for each respondent for each of the three factors that emerged by calculating mean scores for the variables that loaded on each factor. These scale scores ranged from 1 to 4 where *low* scores indicate that the factor *is important* and *high* scores indicate the factor *is relatively not important* in choosing to become a tentmaker. Individuals with low scores on the intent factor appear to have made an intentional choice to enter the field. Respondents who scored low on the need factor appear to have entered the field out of necessity, while those with low scores on the burnout factor entered tentmaking at least in part due to burnout in their previous ministry positions.

Among all respondents the mean scores on these scales were: intent, 1.9; need, 2.6; and burnout, 2.9. Thus, in general, intent is a “more important” reason for entering tentmaking than either need or burnout. It appears that tentmakers who participated in this study felt called to this unique ministry style and sought it out, more so than they entered the field out of reaction to situational factors.

When we compared mean scores on these three scales for different sub-groups of tentmakers few differences emerged. There was no difference in the importance of any of these three factors among the reasons male and female tentmakers gave for deciding to enter the field (although the small number of female respondents makes this finding tentative). Only burnout showed a difference by age. Specifically, the youngest and oldest groups of respondents (those 40 or younger and those over 60, respectively) were *less likely* to report that burnout was a factor in their entry into the tentmaking field. No difference by age group was found for intent or need.

As a second step in this analysis, we attempted to “cluster” respondents based on their scores on the three factors. Cluster analysis groups individuals based on how “similar” their responses are to the variables used. (Hierarchical cluster analysis using the squared Euclidean measure of similarity was used.) Two clusters emerged, with 59 respondents in the first cluster and 24 in the second. Figure 1 shows the mean scores on the three factors for each of the two groups. As can be seen, need is only moderately important and intent is most important as reasons for entering tentmaking among respondents in both clusters. The biggest distinction between the two clusters, however, is in their responses regarding burnout. Tentmakers in the first (and larger) cluster reported that burnout is a fairly *un*important in their pursuit of a tentmaking ministry. For this group, intent to pursue tentmaking is not predicated on burnout. In contrast, those in the second cluster indicated that burnout in previous ministry positions was the most important reason for entering the field, perhaps contributing to the fact that they also indicated intent was an important reason.

**Figure 1**  
**Mean Factor Scale Scores for Two Clusters of Tentmakers**

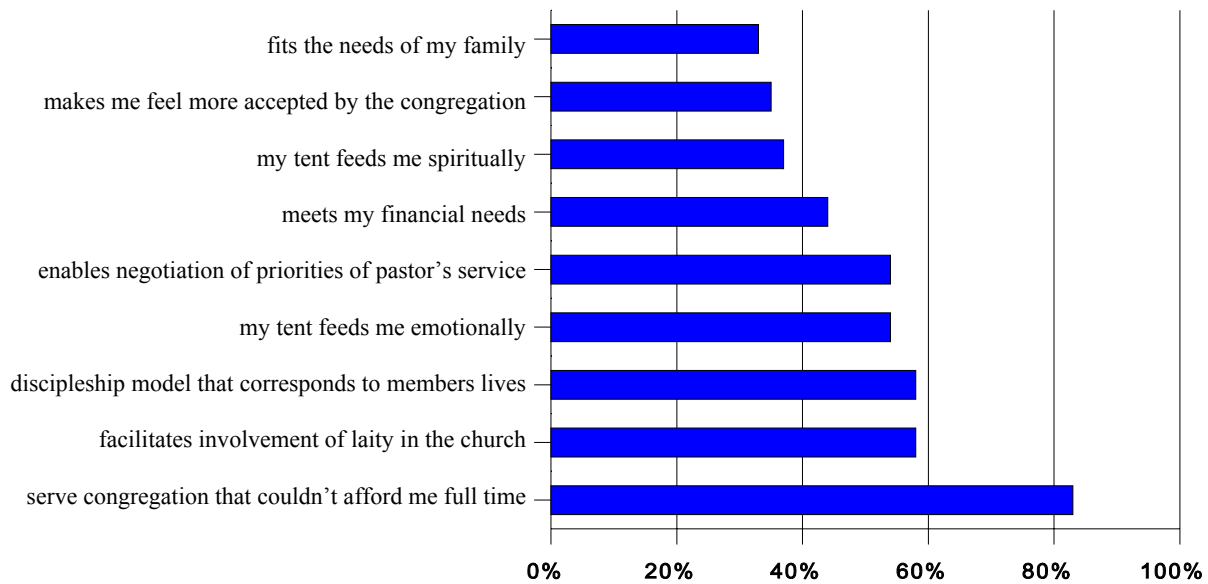


### Advantages and Disadvantages of Tentmaking

To identify what tentmakers see as the *advantages* of tentmaking, we provided a list of nine possible advantages and asked respondents to identify which were the major advantages for themselves (Q-10). A majority of respondents indicated that five were important to them: “serving congregations that could not afford a full-time pastor,” “providing a model of discipleship that fits the lives of members,” “facilitating more meaningful involvement of laity in the church,” “obtaining emotional support from their secular careers,” and “the ability to set limits on demands for pastor’s service.” Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who reported that they considered each an advantage to tentmaking ministry.

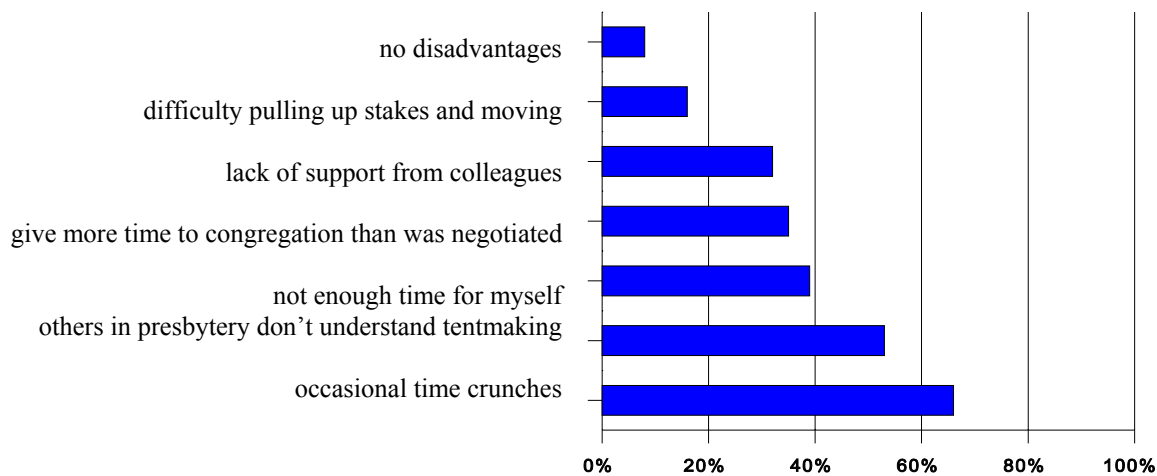
We were also interested in the *disadvantages* that respondents experienced in tentmaking. We presented a list of seven possible disadvantages of tentmaking (Q-11) and asked respondents to indicate which they felt were the major disadvantages. Only two of the seven were cited by a majority of respondents: occasional time crunches when tent and ministry demands conflict and a lack of understanding of tentmaking among others in presbytery. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents who noted each disadvantage.

**Figure 2**  
**Percentage of Tentmakers Citing Each Advantage of Tentmaking Ministry (Q-10)**



Note. Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents were asked to “circle all that apply.”

**Figure 3**  
**Percentage of Tentmakers Citing Each Disadvantage of Tentmaking Ministry (Q-11)**



Note. Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents were asked to “circle all that apply.”

To examine the importance of a discipleship or laity involvement model of ministry in tentmakers' lives, we identified two subgroups of tentmakers based on responses to Q-10. Respondents who indicated that both of the following two items were advantages of tentmaking comprised one group: “facilitates involvement of laity in ministry” and “discipleship model that corresponds to members' lives.” These laity-focused tentmakers (n=47) were compared with tentmakers who did not see either of the two items as advantages of tentmaking (n=32). (Note that respondents who indicated that one, but not the other, was an advantage were not included in these comparisons.)

Compared to non-laity-focused tentmakers, those who were laity-focused had more experience as tentmakers—40% of laity-focused tentmaker, but only 16% of the others had served 16 or more years as tentmakers. There

was no difference between the two groups in terms of the type of current ministry position, the percentage of the total work hours devoted to their ministry position, or the reasons they gave for getting involved in tentmaking.

## **Congregational Changes**

When respondents were asked to describe the changes that have occurred in their congregations in eight areas since the congregation became involved in tentmaking (Q-14), a majority of tentmakers reported improvement in five areas: the number attending Sunday worship (62% reported an increase), the number of members involved in the ministry of the congregation (62%), the number of lay people involved in worship leadership (51%), the involvement of elders in the congregation's ministries (50%), and members' sense of "ownership" of the congregation (50%). Keep in mind that we did *not* ask what sorts of changes were occurring *before* the tentmaker came to the congregation. These increases may be part of a long-term pattern among these churches that is independent of the move to tentmaking. By way of comparison, although 62% of tentmakers reported an increase in worship attendance, across the denomination, average worship attendance among congregations has remained relatively stable over the last few years.

Not surprisingly, the percent of budget allocated to local staff was the area in which the largest percentage of tentmakers (26%) reported a *decrease* since their congregations became involved in tentmaking. Although we did not ask specifically, it is likely that some congregations changed from fully-funding a pastor (a full-time position) to supporting a part-time pastor when they changed to tentmaking. Such a change would represent a substantial shift in the congregation's budget allocations.

A large majority of tentmakers (93%) indicated that the percent of budget going to mission either increased or did not change when the congregation became involved with tentmaking—45% reported an increase and 48% reported no change. A decrease in mission funding occurred in very few congregations (only 1%).

These results, together with congregational members' responses to be discussed later, indicate that tentmaking is not viewed as a "second-choice" method of congregational ministry. It does not appear to detract from the vitality of the vast majority of participating congregations and rarely has negative outcomes for various measures of congregational life.

In fact, when the laity-focused tentmakers identified previously (those who believe laity involvement is an advantage of tentmaking) are compared to the non-laity-focused respondents, interesting differences emerged in the changes reported. Laity-focused tentmakers were more likely than those who do not have such a focus to report an increase in: the number of members involved in the ministry of the congregation (81% of laity-focused tentmakers and 48% of the others reported an increase in this area), the involvement of elders in the congregation's ministries (62% vs. 38%), and members' sense of ownership of the congregation (75% vs. 29%).

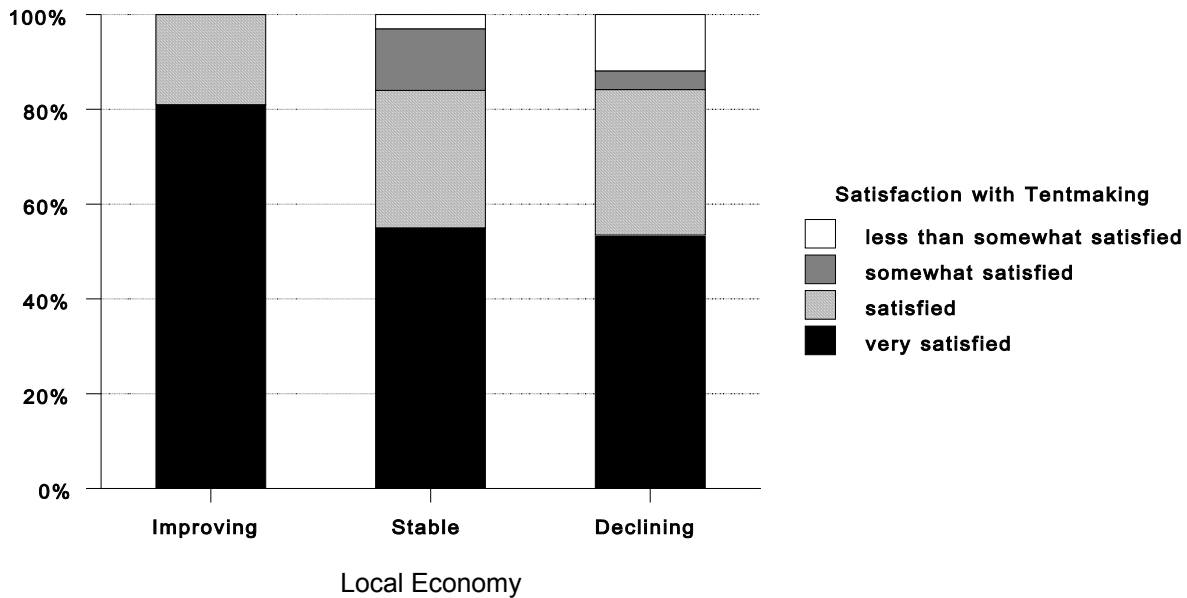
## **Satisfaction with Tentmaking**

A large majority of respondents (84%) reported that they are satisfied (either "very satisfied" or "satisfied") with their lives as tentmakers, with fully half indicating they are "very satisfied" (Q-19). Likewise, 85% are satisfied with the compatibility between their ministry and their "tent" (Q-20); 59% chose the "very satisfied" option for this question.

We sought to examine the relationship between satisfaction and other variables to help understand what contributes to a "happy tentmaker." A strong relationship emerged between the economic situation in the local community (Q-24) and satisfaction with the compatibility of one's ministry and one's tent (Q-20). (See Figure 4). Tentmakers serving in communities in which the economy is improving were more satisfied with that compatibility than were tentmakers in communities with stable or declining economies. A strong or stable local

economy may make finding an appropriate “tent” easier for tentmakers and may increase the likelihood that such a tent will pay an adequate salary.

**Figure 4**  
**Relationship Between Local Economy and Tentmakers’ Satisfaction with the Compatibility of Their Ministry and Their Secular Position**



The number of hours per week worked by tentmakers in their two (or more) positions is also related to their satisfaction with life as a tentmaker (Q-19). That is, 63% of those who worked 50 hours per week or less in their combined positions reported being “very satisfied” as tentmakers, while only 49% of those who worked more hours per week were similarly satisfied.

While not statistically significant, male tentmakers were somewhat more likely than female tentmakers to indicate they were satisfied with tentmaking—55% of men and only 38% of women reported they were “very satisfied” with tentmaking. (The lack of statistical significance may be due to the small number of female tentmakers who completed questionnaires.)

When we compared the satisfaction levels of tentmakers in different age groups, we found that satisfaction with tentmaking was not related to age.

It is interesting to examine the relationship between scores on the three factors that reflect why tentmakers entered the field and their satisfaction with tentmaking. Scores on one factor, burnout, were not correlated with satisfaction. Thus, whether one entered the tentmaking field due to burnout in a previous ministry position or not is unrelated to his or her current satisfaction with that field. Statistically-significant correlations were found between satisfaction and the other two factor scores (intent and need), although the patterns were strikingly different. Tentmakers whose responses indicated that intent was an important reason for their start in tentmaking were more satisfied with tentmaking than were those who indicated intent was a relatively unimportant reason for entering the field. Conversely, tentmakers whose responses indicated that need was an important reason for entering the field were less satisfied with tentmaking than were those for whom need was a less important reason.

These results suggest that becoming a tentmaker due to financial or family needs does not bode well for the long-term satisfaction of such tentmakers. This may be due to resentment about being “forced” into a type of

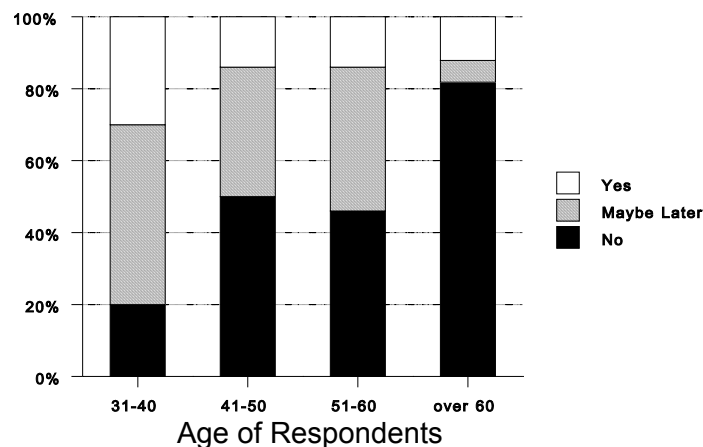
ministry one did not seek or to the stress related to the situation that caused such needs. Tentmakers who have chosen this unique ministry are more likely to be satisfied with their current ministry.

When the satisfaction of laity-focused tentmakers was compared to that of others, we found that laity-focused respondents expressed greater satisfaction with their lives as tentmakers. In fact, 66% of laity-focused tentmakers, but only 32% of others, indicated they are “very satisfied.” Similarly, 70% of laity-focused tentmakers and 32% of others reported being “very satisfied” with the compatibility between their tent and ministry. Thus, in addition to the importance of intent mentioned above, a view of tentmaking that seeks to optimize the involvement of laity in the whole of congregational life appears important to one’s satisfaction with this type of ministry.

When asked to indicate the extent to which they feel “cared for” by their congregations (Q-21), three-quarters (75%) reported that they feel “cared for” or “very cared for.” Only 4% indicated that they do not feel cared for by their congregations.

If given the opportunity, a majority of tentmakers (51%) would *not* return to full-time ministry (Q-22). Nonetheless, one-third (34%) reported that they might do so later. Only 16% indicated that they would return to full-time ministry if given the opportunity. Interestingly, the youngest group of respondents (those 31 to 40 years old) were more likely than older respondents to indicate they would return to full-time ministry either now or in the future (see Figure 5), this despite the previously noted lack of relationship between age and satisfaction with life as a tentmaker. Because younger ministers have more of their careers ahead of them, it seems plausible that they might envision a time when something other than tentmaking will appeal to them.

**Figure 5**  
**If Given the Opportunity, Would You Return to Full-Time Ministry? (Q-22)**



### **Involvement In and Assistance From APT**

When asked about the nature of their relationship with APT (Q-13), only 41% of tentmakers indicated that they are members of APT. About as many (43%) have attended an APT conference. APT members, however, were much more likely than non-members to have attended an APT conference—81% of members, but only 15% of non-members, have done so.

Despite the overall lack of active involvement in APT, a majority (59%) reported that they are on the organization’s mailing list. Nonetheless, one-third (38%) admitted they “don’t know much about APT.” (Note that respondents could choose more than one response to Q-13, so these percentages add to more than 100%.)

When presented in Q-12 with a list of four activities that APT could undertake to “help enhance the advantages or alleviate the disadvantages” noted in responses to Q-10 and Q-11, majorities of APT members, but not of

non-members, indicated that all four should be pursued: coordinating tentmaking workshops in middle governing bodies (supported by 84% of APT members, but only 50% of non-members), sponsoring the Annual Meeting of Tentmakers (88% vs. 29%), helping ministers obtain training and entry into tentmaking ministries (65% vs. 38%), and providing opportunities for tentmakers to share their experiences with others (63% vs. 32%).

Finally, it was interesting to find that APT members were much more likely than non-members to report that they would *not* return to full-time ministry if given the opportunity. While 72% of members would not return to full-time ministry, only 38% of non-members gave the same response. This despite the fact that there was no difference between the two groups in terms of their satisfaction with tentmaking ministry.

## **Results For Congregations Served by Tentmakers**

### **Respondents**

A total of 52 congregations returned completed questionnaires, for a response rate of 27%. (A number of congregational questionnaires were also returned with an indication that they are not currently served by a tentmaker.)

### **Deciding on Tentmaking**

To assess the ways in which congregations first became involved in tentmaking ministry, we presented a list of four possible options and asked respondents to indicate all that applied to their congregations (Q-1). Of the four, “financial necessity” was the reason selected most often (69%) to explain why congregations first got involved in tentmaking. Two in ten (21%) indicated that they called a minister who guided them. Even fewer reported that either their presbytery suggested it (17%) or a member of the congregation was aware of tentmaking (10%). A number of respondents indicated that there were “other” reasons, as well. Many of these indicated that the pastor (either a former pastor or the current tentmaker) initiated the process.

### **Calling a Tentmaker**

When asked about difficulties encountered in calling a tentmaker once the decision had been made to do so (Q-2), a large majority of congregations reported that it was not difficult. Approximately 35% reported it was “not difficult at all” and another 35% indicated it was “not difficult.”

To follow-up on this issue, we asked about the ways in which calling a tentmaker was different from calling a “full-time” pastor (Q-3), presenting a list of five possible differences. Few congregations cited negative ways in which calling a tentmaker was different from calling a “full-time pastor.” In fact, 28% reported it was “no different,” and 34% said it took *less* time. Of the negative factors listed, 17% reported it was difficult to find tentmakers, 13% said that more of the pastors they were interested in rejected the call, and 11% reported it took longer. Only 2% reported that there was more resistance from the congregation.

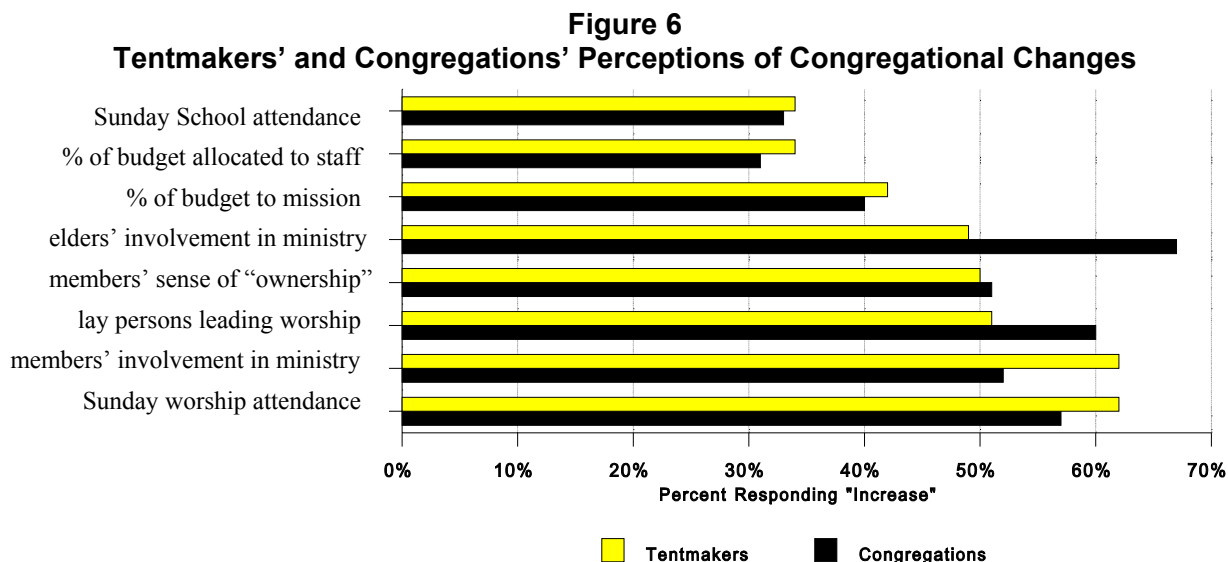
When asked in Q-4 about the things their congregations did differently to find a tentmaker, almost one-half of congregations (44%) reported that they “didn’t do anything different.” One-quarter indicated that they relied more heavily on the presbytery’s help. Even fewer reported that they provided assistance to someone they knew so that that person could serve as tentmaker (8%), offered to help the tentmaker find a full-time “tent” (6%), or provided a full-time salary until a secular position was found (2%).

## Congregational Change

When asked about the changes that had occurred in their congregations since calling a tentmaker (Q-6), a majority of congregations reported improvement in five areas. These are the same five areas in which tentmakers saw improvements: the number attending Sunday worship (57% reported an increase), the number of members involved in the ministry of the congregation (52%), the number of lay people involved in worship leadership (60%), the involvement of elders in the congregation’s ministries (67%), and members’ sense of “ownership” of the congregation (51%). As with tentmakers’ responses, we have no subjective or objective data to determine if these changes are due to tentmaking or a result of other factors in these congregations. Nonetheless, these congregational members perceive improvements, and such perceptions can play an important role in the strength and vitality of a congregation.

The area in which the largest percentage of congregations (still only 33%) reported a *decrease* since their congregations became involved in tentmaking was, not surprisingly, the percent of budget allocated to local staff—the same area in which tentmakers themselves reported a decrease.

Figure 6 compares tentmakers’ responses regarding congregational changes to those of congregational members. A very similar pattern can be seen.



## Satisfaction with Tentmaking

A large majority of congregations reported that they are satisfied with tentmaking ministry (Q-7). In fact, 57% reported they are “very satisfied,” and another 35% are “satisfied,” for a 92% overall satisfaction rate.

One-half of congregations (53%) indicated that they would probably seek another tentmaker when their current pastor leaves (Q-6). Nonetheless, 43% were unsure. Only 4% indicated their congregation would *not* seek another tentmaker. The reasons for this are unclear, though. While some may make such a change due to dissatisfaction with tentmaking or with the particular tentmaking pastor serving their congregation, it is also possible that tentmaking ministry strengthened the congregation, allowing a full-time minister to be called.

Fully 95% of congregations reported that their members are *more satisfied* with the tentmaking ministry than with the previous full-time pastor who served their congregation (Q-8). One-quarter (26%) are “much more satisfied,” 30% are “more satisfied,” and 9% are “somewhat more satisfied.” One-third (30%) reported “no difference” in satisfaction, and only 5% reported less satisfaction (in all cases “somewhat less satisfied”).

## **Relationship Between Responses of Tentmakers and Those of Their Congregations**

There were 46 congregations for which tentmaker and congregation questionnaires were both returned. We matched the responses of each tentmaker-congregation pair to examine the patterns among their responses.

### **Congregational Change**

As would be expected there was substantial agreement between tentmakers and their congregations regarding the changes that have occurred in their congregations since they became involved in tentmaking. To assess this, we calculated the percentage of cases in which tentmakers and congregations gave the same answer (e.g., they both said something had increased or they both said there had been no change) regarding in each of the eight areas we asked about. Over the eight areas, the percentage in agreement ranged from a low of 62% (for the number in attendance at Sunday School) to a high of 85% (for the percent of budget allocated to mission giving). Even the lowest percentage represents considerable agreement between pastors and congregations.<sup>3</sup> (We must acknowledge that we do not know if congregational members completed their questionnaires with or without the “help” of their pastors.)

### **Satisfaction with Tentmaking**

Likewise we found considerable agreement between a tentmaker’s satisfaction level and that of his or her congregation. In 59% of the cases, the tentmaker and congregation reported the exact same level of satisfaction (e.g., “very satisfied” for both). Overall, in 82% of cases both congregation and tentmaker reported that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied.”

## **Conclusions**

Responses from these samples of tentmakers and tentmaking congregations provide a rich picture of the background and life of ministers who pursue this bi-vocational ministry style and the congregations they serve. Most serve their congregations part-time while pursuing other employment full-time. In combination, these ministers give substantially to both, with a combined average work week of about 55 hours.

Many believe that tentmaking is a growing field, and survey responses provide some support for that belief. A large majority of respondents have been in the field for 15 years or less with fully 30% having begun tentmaking within the last five years. Responses also lend credence to another perception regarding tentmaking—that it provides a way for smaller, often rural congregations, to obtain pastoral services when they cannot afford a fully-funded pastor. Many respondents are serving congregations in rural areas or in small towns, and as mentioned above, most are serving in part-time positions. Eight in ten indicated that their congregations couldn’t afford them full time. Two-thirds of congregations indicated that financial need on their part made the move to tentmaking a necessity for the congregation.

A large majority of tentmakers entered the field by intent, not happenstance or burnout in previous ministry positions. They pursued this calling by choice. And, it appears that this choice plays a role in their remarkable

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<sup>3</sup> While it might be interesting to examine in more detail those tentmakers and congregations where there is substantial discrepancy in perceptions, the small number of cases in which discrepancies were found make this impossible.

satisfaction with the special ministry tentmaking entails. A majority indicated that they would not return to traditional, full-time ministry if given the opportunity. They are committed to tentmaking as their chosen call. Likewise, those with a view of tentmaking as a unique opportunity for laity involvement in the full ministry of the church also express greater satisfaction with tentmaking.

Many mentioned the positive impact tentmaking has had on their congregations, including increased attendance and laity involvement, and a greater sense of congregational ownership among members. Interestingly, fewer focused on what might be considered the personal advantages of tentmaking, such as meeting family or financial needs. Although not addressed by the questionnaire, in write-in comments some mentioned the ability to “do ministry” both in the congregation and in their non-pastoral positions and the wonderful “example” this provides their parishioners.

Members in tentmaking congregations saw similar positive changes with the move to tentmaking—increased worship attendance and participation of members in congregational life—and most expressed satisfaction with this style of ministry.

Many tentmakers are not currently members of the Association of Presbyterian Tentmakers; some are not even aware of the organization. This indicates considerable opportunity for APT to enlarge its constituency. Respondents would welcome APT’s involvement in coordinating tentmaking workshops, helping ministers enter the field and find such positions, and sponsoring networking opportunities for tentmakers including the Annual Meeting of Tentmakers.

Given that 42% of the denomination’s congregations have 100 or fewer members, tentmaking is not likely to be a passing trend. These congregations are exploring novel ways to fill the pulpit on Sunday morning and to minister to members’ needs throughout the week, and tentmaking offers one option. These results indicate that it is not only a viable option, but often an effective and rewarding one.