

DESCRIPTION OF PRESBYTERY OF WEST JERSEY

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Précis

The Presbytery of West Jersey (WJP) covers the southern third of the state of New Jersey, and this area has a population of about 1.68 million people. About 0.8 percent of the people living in this area are members of WJP churches. The statistics available indicate that WJP has a membership that is predominantly White, Non-Hispanic, and that females make up more than half of the total. Over the past ten years, WJP has seen a slight decline in the number of congregations and a more noticeable decline in total membership that parallels national trends in PC(USA). Ten-year trends suggest that WJP membership is becoming more balanced between men and women and more racially diverse, with the absolute number of racial/ethnic minorities actually rising as White, Non-Hispanic membership declines. The evidence also suggests that the average size of congregations is falling. Finally, some statistics suggest that the membership of WJP is aging, but the evidence is not conclusive on this issue.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a description of the geographical extent of the Presbytery of West Jersey (WJP), the population of that part of the state, and the membership of WJP.

¹ Many thanks to Richard Craft and other members of WJP's Executive Presbyter Search Committee for their helpful comments on this product.

Geographical Extent of Presbytery of West Jersey

The Presbytery of West Jersey (WJP) covers the southern third of the state of New Jersey, extending from just south of the city of Mt. Holly in Burlington County west to the Delaware River, east to the Atlantic Ocean, and south to Cape May at the extreme southern end of the state.

Population of the WJP Area

The population of the WJP area has been described in detail in a Percept study² prepared in 2006. The total population of WJP stood at 1,681,000 in 2006 (4.2 percent above the level in 2000) and was expected to increase by 4.2 percent by the year 2011. In 2006, the White, Non-Hispanic population was estimated to be 70.5 percent of the total (vs. 72.6 percent in 2000) and was projected to fall to 68.3 percent of the total by 2011. The largest minority group – African-American (Non-Hispanic) – stood at 15.4 percent in 2006 (vs. 14.7 percent in 2000) and was projected to rise to 16.0 percent in 2011. The second largest minority was Hispanic/Latino, amounting to 9.1 percent in 2006 (vs. 7.9 percent in 2000); by 2011 it was expected to make up 10.3 percent of the total. The final minority was Asian/Other (Non-Hispanic), and it is expected to increase from 4.8 percent of the total in 2000 to 5.0 percent in 2006 and 5.4 percent in 2011. In 2000, Puerto Ricans constituted 61.6 percent of the Hispanic total, far above the national share. Among Asians, Indians were the largest group in 2000, accounting for 27.0 percent of the Asian total, well above the nation share.

WJP has an aging population, with the median age expected to rise from 37.2 years in 2000 to 38.2 in 2006 and 39.5 in 2011. Average household income in WJP in 2006 is estimated at \$70,300, well above the U.S. average of \$64,800.

The education picture in the population in WJP focuses on highest level of education attained and is harder to characterize. In 2000, among people age 25 and over, a smaller

² Percept Group, Inc., “Ministry Area Profile 2006: Presbytery of West Jersey,” June 4, 2006.

percentage of the WJP population had less than 9 years of schooling than in the U.S. as a whole (5.6 percent vs. 7.5 percent). But it is also true that a smaller share had higher education (47.3 percent vs. 51.7 percent). Where WJP shines is in the middle years of schooling, with 13.3 percent having attained some high school (vs. 12.1 percent of the U.S.) or a complete high-school education (33.7 percent vs. 28.6 percent for the U.S.)

In terms of occupations, WJP workers are slightly more likely to be in white-collar occupations than are workers in the U.S. as a whole. The biggest difference comes in “Farming, Forestry and Fishing” where the WJP share (0.4 percent) stands far below the U.S. share (0.7 percent).

In 2000, WJP households were less likely to be below the poverty line than those in the U.S. as a whole.

In 2000, WJP households were more likely to be in homes they owned (72.7 percent) than were U.S. households (66.2 percent). But the median value of owner-occupied properties was lower in WJP in 2000 (\$140,000) than for the U.S. as a whole (\$159,000). Perhaps this was, in part, because housing in WJP was older than in the U.S. as a whole.

In 2000, 91.0 percent of the population of WJP was urban, vs. 79.0 percent in the U.S. The converse, of course, was that only 9.0 percent of WJP’s population was rural – a big difference from the U.S. rate of 21.0 percent.

Religious Aspects of the WJP Area Population

The “Ethos” section of the Percept Study relates to 2006 and indicates that the population of WJP was slightly more likely to be “involved with their faith” than were people in the U.S. as a whole. One-third of the WJP households (33.6 percent) were judged likely to prefer the Catholic religion in 2006, well above the national estimate of 23.7 percent. The second largest preference was the Methodist denomination, at 11.0 percent, slightly above the national rate of

10.1 percent. Third was Baptist at 9.2 percent, well below the national rate of 16.1 percent. Presbyterian/Reformed came in fifth (behind Lutheran) with 6.6 percent of households (vs. 4.6 percent for the U.S. as a whole).³

The Percept study estimates that 84.7 percent of households are likely to agree with the statement, “I believe there is a God,” slightly above the U.S. average of 84.5 percent. In the case of nine other statements about values the WJP population was judged to be quite close to the national averages.

As to giving potential, the Percept study estimated that in 2006, WJP households were somewhat more likely to contribute to churches and other religious organizations than the national average.

Finally, Percept had some 2006 estimate of preferences for what goes on in churches. In comparison to U.S. households, Percept estimates that WJP households:

lean away from “Bible Study Discussion and Prayer Groups”
favor “Emotionally Uplifting” as opposed to “Intellectually Challenging” church worship
prefer “Traditional” worship services and music
prefer “Traditional” church architecture, and
prefer “Local Mission” as opposed to “Global Mission.”

A Snapshot of West Jersey Presbytery

Having examined the geographical extent of the WJP area and the population of that part of New Jersey, let us now turn to a description of the churches and members of WJP itself. As of December 31, 2006, WJP had 65 churches with a total of 13,607 members, or an average of 209

³ However, as will be noted later in this report, the membership of the churches in the Presbytery of West Jersey is less than one percent of the population of WJP.

members per church.⁴ Some 57 percent of members were females. Including active and retired ministers, WJP had 134 ministers on its rolls. Average attendance in 2006 was 6,044 or 44 percent of membership.

Total financial receipts for the member churches amounted to \$22.4 million, and “per capita expenditures” (used to support the presbytery, synod, and General Assembly) amounted to \$437,000.

During 2006, some 219 infants were baptized, along with 26 adults. Sunday church school membership amounted to 5,568, equal to 41 percent of total membership.

As of January 1, 2007, WJP had 80 clergy who were active (i.e., not classified as retired) and resident in WJP. Of these, 41 entered the presbytery after 1999.

More measures of WJP are available for other years, and these follow. A report issued in November of 2006⁵ indicates that 95 percent of members were White, Non-Hispanics, with a detailed racial/ethnic breakdown as follows:

<u>Group</u>	<u>Percent</u>
White, Non-Hispanic	94.9
African-American	2.7
Hispanic	1.3
Asian	0.8
Native American	0.1
Other	<u>0.2</u>
Total	100.0

⁴ “Report of the Stated Clerk – Presbytery of West Jersey,” March 20, 2007.

⁵ “Committee on Representation: Report to the Presbytery,” November 2006. (Report to WJP)

As noted earlier, only 70.5 percent of the population of the region is White, Non-Hispanic, so this group is overrepresented in the membership of WJP, and all minority groups are correspondingly underrepresented.

Also available for December 31, 2005, is a distribution of WJP members by age. This shows that 41 percent of the membership of WJP is age 56 or older. The detailed breakdown is as follows.

<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Percent</u>
25 and under	14.9
26 to 35	23.2
36 to 55	20.9
56 to 64	14.6
65 and over	<u>26.4</u>
Total	100.0

Finally, we have available selected statistics for 2004.⁶ These show that in 2004, the average congregation had 217 members. Of the 65 churches in WJP, five had more than 500 members, accounting for 8 percent of the congregations. On the low end, 19 congregations had 100 or fewer members, amounting to 29 percent of all congregations. Moving further out on the tails of the distribution, eight congregations (12 percent of all congregations) had 50 or fewer members, while only one (1.5 percent) had 1201 or more members.

Contributions per member in 2004 were \$802.58 or about \$15.43 per week.

West Jersey Presbytery Trends

The last 10-11 years have seen a number of changes in WJP. The number of congregations has fallen from 66 to 65, and the total membership of these congregations has

⁶ “Presbytery Ten-Year Trend Report: Presbytery of West Jersey,” Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

fallen by almost 16 percent, from 16,110 in 1995 to 13,607 in 2006. As a result of these two trends, the average congregation size has declined from 244 members to 209 members. As a percent of PC(USA) membership, WJP finished the decade where it began, at 0.60 percent (1995 to 2004). But as a percent of the population of southern New Jersey it showed a decline from 0.9 percent in 1995 to 0.8 percent in 2004.

As to the composition of members, WJP has become more balanced by gender in recent years, with females falling from 59 percent in 2001 to 57 percent in 2006. Over the past ten years, the number of racial/ethnic members has risen by 22 percent, from 571 in 1995 to 699 in 2004, increasing their share of total membership from 3.5 percent in 1995 to 5.0 percent in 2004. Trends for individual groups follow. These show that while White, Non-Hispanics remain over-represented in WJP in comparison to the population of southern New Jersey, WJP is becoming more racially/ethnically diverse.

<u>Racial/Ethnic Group</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
African-American	284	380	+34
Hispanic	158	176	+11
Asian	108	105	- 3
Native American	8	10	+25
Other	<u>13</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>+115</u>
Total	571	699	+22

It also is evident that several aging processes are going on in WJP. The statistic “Number of congregations chartered five years or less” shows zero for 2004, vs. one for 1995.⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, the statistic “Number of congregations chartered 41 years or more” has risen from 55 in 1995 to 62 in 2004.

There is also inconclusive evidence that the average age of congregants is rising in WJP.

⁷ However, it needs to be noted that as this is being written plans are under way to establish a new congregation in WJP.

We do not have figures on the average or median age of congregants, but death statistics suggest that they are rising. For one thing, the number of deaths per 100 members rose from an average of 1.25 for the two years 1995 and 1996 to an average of 1.50 for the two years 2003 and 2004.⁸

As another test for aging, we have compared the ratio of deaths to infant/child baptisms. The latter is an indication of flow into the stock of congregants at low ages, while the former is a measure of flow out of the stock at older ages.⁹ In 1995, there were 0.51 deaths per infant/child baptism, but by 2004 this ratio had risen to 0.83, suggesting that the death flow out of WJP was rising relative to the flow in as a result of infant/child baptisms.¹⁰ The ratio for each year is shown below:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Deaths/Infant and Child Baptisms</u>
1995	0.51
1996	0.61
1997	0.62
1998	0.64
1999	0.68
2000	0.78
2001	0.86
2002	0.77
2003	0.92
2004	0.83

While there is some volatility in the statistic the trend seems very strong; note that all three of the final figures are well above the first three figures.

⁸ The reported death statistics for WJP fluctuate a lot from year to year, and this is why we used a two-year average in this comparison – to try to damp some of this volatility.

⁹ Of course, these are not perfect proxies for the age phenomena we are trying to measure because not everyone who dies is elderly.

¹⁰ Lest there be any confusion, let us emphasize that the deaths referred to here are deaths at *all* ages, only a few of which we would expect to be among infants or children.

So, we have several statistics which suggest that the membership of WJP is aging. However, analysis of the distributions of members by age – shown in the Appendix to this paper – indicate that the processes are more complex. These show an increase in the percent who are 65 and over, which agrees with the death statistics shown above. On the other hand, the age distribution statistics also show increases in the percentages of members who are under age 36. This all suggests a “hollowing out” of the age distribution wherein membership is being lost in the middle ages (36-64) in favor of those who are younger and older. Those who are interested are referred to the Appendix for a more detailed analysis of the age-distribution statistics.

APPENDIX ON RECENT AGE TRENDS

As noted in the body of this report, we do not have statistics on the average or median age of members of WJP. However, we do have compilations of the number of members in various age categories. It is evident from inspecting these statistics that not all churches provide this information, so the absolute numbers cannot be easily analyzed. However, we have turned these into percentage distributions, and it is hope that these distributions will be meaningful.

Using the available data, which relate to end-of-the-year totals for 2000, 2004, and 2005, we have calculated the following percentage age distributions for WJP:

<u>Age Range</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>Trend</u>
25 and under	12.9	14.2	14.9	+
26 to 35	16.5	22.8	23.2	+
36 to 55	29.5	21.1	20.9	-
56 to 64	16.1	15.9	14.6	-
65 and over	<u>25.1</u>	<u>26.0</u>	<u>26.4</u>	+
Total	100.1a	100.0	100.0	

Notes:

a - does not sum to 100.0, due to rounding.

The columns labeled 2000, 2004, and 2005 show the percent distribution of WJP members by age for the corresponding years (as of December 31), while the column labeled “Trend” shows the qualitative trend. As can be seen, the percent of WJP members who are 65 and over has risen over the five-year period shown, so there has been aging in this sense. However, the two youngest age groups shown also have shown percentage increases, and these trends move us in the direction of becoming younger. Since the percentages must add up to 100.0 percent (except in the case of rounding errors), if some categories show increases others must show decreases. In this case, this has occurred in the third and fourth categories, ages 36 to

55 and 56 to 64.

What we most clearly see in these categories is a “hollowing out” of the age distribution, with percentage losses among those 36 to 64 in favor of those under 36 and over 64. The loss in this middle group is fairly dramatic, with those 36 to 64 dropping from 45.6 percent of the total at the end of 2000 to 35.5 percent at the end of 2005.