

Summary of Responses to March 2026 Survey

As a general comment, throughout the survey responses presbyteries consistently describe declining ministerial capacity, challenges regarding local resources, and growing dependence on lay leadership. In addition, they also want to preserve local flexibility. There seems to be openness to change, but caution about one-size-fits-all structures or centrally imposed solutions.

Lay leadership:

Presbyteries report that many congregations already rely heavily on lay people for worship leadership, pastoral support, and practical ministry functions, and hence some hesitation around extending lay leadership into ministering roles without further discussion. The dominant tone is one of caution versus resistance: respondents want lay leadership to be strengthened in a way that is well guided.

Alternate models of ministry:

While many presbyteries report no formal experiments, there are some that have or are experimenting. Examples include ecumenical shared ministries, shared or part-time ministers, house or campus-style congregations, worship rotations among small churches, digital participation, hybrid meetings, informal services, and lay-led worship. While several respondents note that these arrangements have been successful in their local contexts, especially where they reduce pressure on clergy or foster collaboration, many also stress that success is highly situation-dependent, and that rural, remote, and urban settings require different models.

Leadership development:

Camps, youth conferences, bursaries, mentorship, campus ministry, and local workshops are the most common initiatives for developing future leaders. However, many responses mention weak succession pipelines, low youth engagement in some regions, and limited analysis of what is actually producing leaders. Also important are active participation in worship, shared ministry, and relational encouragement.

Training needs for current and potential leaders:

A strong theme is the need for accessible, practical training for elders and lay leaders, predominantly in worship planning, preaching, prayer leadership, pastoral care, public speaking, conflict management, church polity, strategic planning, finance, and technology for worship. Respondents repeatedly favour short-term, affordable and stronger visibility for resources that already exist. There is also a recurring desire for support systems that do not depend entirely on local clergy to design or deliver training.

Pressures on ministry structures:

The survey reflects a strain across presbyteries driven by the need to function with part-time, shared, interim, or otherwise improvised leadership arrangements. Very few have multiple called ministers. Respondents recognize this as a sign of broader denominational contraction, volunteer fatigue, and uneven access to skilled support. At the same time, several answers highlight that lay service in administration, governance, and stewardship is itself a form of ministry and should not automatically be viewed as a distraction from mission.

Regional support and geography:

Responses about regional leadership are varied, with some favouring provincial or synod-based regions, while others favour smaller areas shaped by travel, demographics, and local ministry culture. The strongest consensus is that support must be geographically practical and sensitive to differences between congregations (rural, urban, northern, immigrant, multilingual, etc.). Many respondents prefer stronger partnership and relational support over additional layers of oversight or bureaucracy.

Resource centres and centralized services:

Reactions to HR, IT, finance, and legal resource centres are mixed. Many respondents welcome practical help with payroll, bookkeeping, CRA matters, livestreaming, legal templates, contracts, and property issues. Others caution that these services may duplicate support already available, undermine local expertise, or create costs that smaller congregations cannot bear. A recurring recommendation is that the church should improve access to existing national resources, offer clearer toolkits and help desks, and strengthen training and coordination rather than assume that centralization will automatically free people for ministry.

Overall

Presbyteries appear to be asking for better support, clearer pathways, and alignment with local realities. There is openness to innovation, particularly where it evolves from existing practice and considers context. The strongest themes are the need to equip lay leaders, support congregations under strain, avoid unnecessary duplication, and build from what is already working rather than replacing it with untested systems.