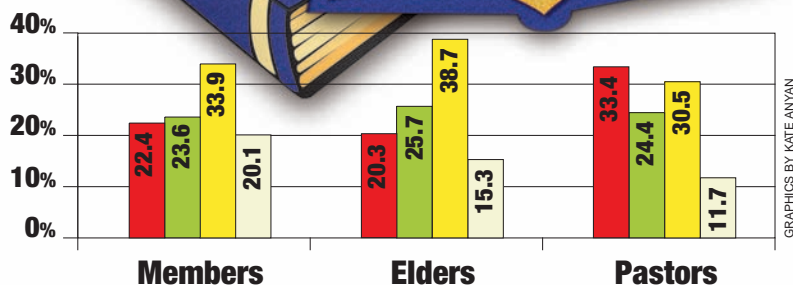


# GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM

- Very likely
- Generally likely
- Not too likely
- Not likely at all



GRAPHICS BY KATE ANYAN

## Time for a new hymnal?

The 2004 General Assembly initiated a process to explore the need for a new denominational hymnal. One important step so far was an August 2005 survey of Presbyterian opinions on the issue. Three questions asked about the possibility of a new hymnal in different but complementary ways. Let's take a look at the results.

*Will the PCUSA need a new hymnal by 2013?*

Responses are split on the first of these questions. A few more pastors indicate it is "very likely" or "generally likely" (58 percent) than "not too likely" or "not likely at all" (42 percent). The reverse is true among laity: 46 percent of members and elders respond "very likely" or "generally likely," and 54 percent of both, "not too likely" or "not likely at all."

Where the previous question is abstract, the second question is more personal and direct: *How interested are you, personally, in the PCUSA developing a new hymnal to be published in the year 2013?*

Again, responses are split, with more pastors showing interest than laity. While only a minority in all three categories are "very interested" or "generally interested" (members, 31 percent; elders, 34 percent; pastors, 48 percent), a sizable additional number are "a little interested" (25 percent; 26 percent; 24 percent). The rest are "not interested" (43 percent; 40 percent; 28 percent).

It's worth noting that more younger than older members are interested in the possibility of a new hymnal. For example, 26 percent of members less than 40 years of age are "very interested," compared to only 6 percent of members aged 70 or older.

The third question approaches the issue indirectly, putting it in historical context: *The Presbyterian Church has published a new hymnal approximately every 20 years. In general, do you think this interval is too frequent, not frequent enough, about the right length, or are you not sure?*

Most responses say "about the right length": members, 49 percent; elders, 53 percent; pastors, 51

## What the research shows

The current hymnal plays a central role in the PCUSA. Two in three Presbyterians worship in congregations that use it. We have no other denominational publication or document that comes close to being used regularly by a majority of Presbyterians, especially laity. Hence it's probably better, despite the lack of a consensus in opinion, to move cautiously ahead than to stop the process toward a new hymnal.

The much greater interest in a new hymnal among younger members seems particularly persuasive.

Although sales of the current hymnal continue, and majorities who use it are "satisfied" (members and elders, 64 percent; pastors, 55 percent), there is no guarantee that such a pattern will persist. Given that half of members (50 percent) and majorities of elders (57 percent) and pastors (74 percent) "agree" that "a denominational hymnal is an important resource for the formation of denominational identity," can we run the risk that congregations may turn elsewhere to find it?

percent. Of the rest, twice as many laity think the 20-year interval is "too frequent" (21 percent; 19 percent) than "not frequent enough" (11 percent; 8 percent), while pastors are evenly split (14 percent; 15 percent). Twenty percent were "not sure." □