

GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM

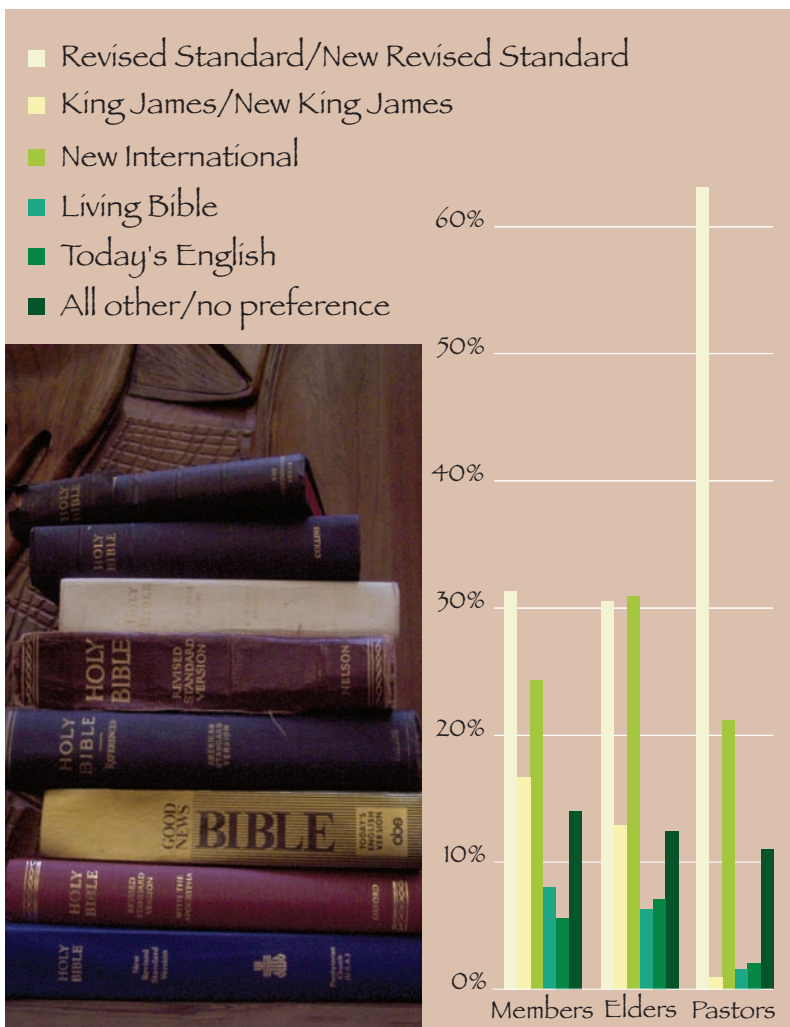


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Presbyterians prefer several translations

Few of us are so knowledgeable in Greek and Hebrew that we routinely read the Bible in the original languages. Fortunately, there are many English translations to meet our needs. Several are especially popular among Presbyterians, as we learned in a 2006 survey.

■ **A third of members** list the Revised Standard or New Revised Standard Version (RSV/NRSV) as their “most preferred translation” (31 percent, combined), followed by the New International Version (NIV) (24 percent) and the King James or New King James Version (KJV/NKJV) (17 percent). Next are the Living Bible (8 percent) and Today’s English Version/Good News Bible (6 percent). The results for elders are similar.

■ **Pastors reveal a different profile**, with two-thirds preferring the Revised Standard or New Revised Standard Version (63 percent). A majority of the rest select the New International Version (21 percent overall). No more than 2 percent prefer any other translation.

■ **In congregations where the RSV/NRSV is typically used** in worship, 44 percent individually prefer the RSV/NRSV, compared to 14 percent in congregations where other translations are typically used.

■ **Among members 55 years or older**, 20 percent prefer the KJV/NKJV, compared to 11 percent among younger members.

What the research shows

Most Presbyterians prefer to read the Revised Standard/New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the King James/New King James Version or the Living Bible. Why these four, given the dozen or more readily available English-language Bibles?

For pastors, theological education likely plays a focusing role. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the RSV/NRSV in particular is widely used, if not promoted, in many PCUSA seminaries. But other factors, such as theology, are also important. For example, 85 percent of theological liberals prefer the RSV/NRSV, compared to 24 percent of theological conservatives.

Preference for the RSV/NRSV among laity, while considerable, is probably higher than it would otherwise be because of the influence and example of pastors. Other factors are also influential, such as the reader’s age, as already noted.

The RSV/NRSV, already preferred by most pastors, may become preferred by even more laity as younger members replace those who grew up with the King James Version.

In short, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may not have designated a single English-language Bible as official, but in practice various other forces have and continue to influence individual Presbyterians in ways that lead most to prefer one of only a very small number of translations. □

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