

GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



GRAPHIC BY JEFFREY LAWRENCE

What the research shows

With 605 hymns and only 52 Sundays, a congregation using the *Presbyterian Hymnal*—and only that hymnal—would have to sing almost a dozen hymns from it per week—without repeats—to sing every one over a year’s time. It’s inevitable that some hymns are never or rarely sung.

Neglected hymns include many based on the Psalms, and some—but not all—of those from other cultures. Closer inspection reveals a broader commonality among all of the infrequently sung hymns: they were written relatively recently. Of the 100 hymns sung by the fewest congregations (sung in less than one in eight congregations), 76 percent had words or music—usually both—written after 1959. In sharp contrast, of the 100 most widely sung hymns, only five appeared after 1959.

In sum, there are many beloved hymns from the church’s tradition that are widely and frequently sung. Occasionally newer hymns may be accepted into this “musical canon.”

A challenge facing the Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song* will be discerning which recent compositions are likely to gain widespread use and which, after several years, are sung in only a small fraction of congregations. □

*For more information about the committee and its work, visit www.presbyterianhymnal.org

Hymns we like to sing

To help the recently appointed Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song as it works toward the possible development of a new hymnal, Research Services surveyed a sample of pastors, music leaders, and members in congregations using the current denominational hymnal. Findings include the following:

- **One-third of the 605 hymns and songs in the *Presbyterian Hymnal* (1990) were sung** in a majority of congregations in the year prior to the survey; 41 of these hymns (7 percent) were sung at least once in 90 percent or more of the congregations.
- **The five most widely sung hymns are related to Advent, Christmas, or Easter;** “Joy to the World!” tops the list, sung in 98 percent of congregations.
- **The most widely sung hymn not tied to the liturgical year is “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,”** reported sung in 97 percent of congregations; **the most frequently sung hymn is “Amazing Grace,”** which 66 percent of congregations report singing more than twice during the year.
- **Eighty hymns (13 percent) were sung in 10 percent or fewer congregations.**
- **The frequency of singing most hymns was low:** half of hymns were sung three or more times in less than 8 percent of congregations.

OTHER FINDINGS www.pcusa.org/research

Jack Marcum is coordinator of Research Services for the General Assembly Council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).