

Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America

**Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America: a Parish Life
Study.**

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"As Christians we are here to affirm the supreme value of direct sharing, of immediate encounter – not machine to machine, but person to person, face to face."

-Bishop Kallistos (Ware) "The Mystery of Human Person"

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Introduction: What Is This Study About and How It Was Conducted.

American¹ religious life has a number of features that distinguish the United States from other First World nations. First, despite ongoing discourse about growing secularization, the percentage of Americans who participate in local religious communities (e.g. Christian congregations, Muslim mosques, Jewish synagogues, Baha'i temples, etc.) remains quite high. The 2010 "Religious Congregations Membership Study" (also known as "U.S. Religion Census²") indicated that 48.8% of Americans are the adherents³ of various local faith communities. That is, nearly half of Americans do not simply say that they are "religious persons" or "believers," but that they are actually affiliated with and involved in some local religious organization. Further, during the past decades, the percentage of the U.S. population participating in local religious organizations remains fairly stable. According to earlier Religious Congregations Membership Studies, the percentage of religious adherents in U.S. total population was 49% in 1952, 48.7% in 1971, 49.7% in 1980, 55.1% in 1990 and 50.2% in 2000.

The second distinct feature of religious life in the United States is that it is a uniquely diverse and "mosaic." The right of religious freedom has always been one of the corner-stones of American society. This has created a fertile soil for the flourishing of myriads Christian groups and other faith communities. The subsequent waves of immigration contributed to the continuing increase in American religious diversity. One of the recent developments that supports this trend is the proliferation and fast growth of various non-denominational churches (including the so-called "Megachurches"). According to the study by Hartford Institute for Religion Research: "If the nation's all independent and nondenominational churches were combined into a single 'denomination' they would represent today the third largest cluster of congregations in the country, following the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention."⁴ One can surely say that today's America is a country where people have an abundance of "religious choices."

Third, it is fully socially acceptable and, in fact, increasingly common in America to change one's religion or one's affiliation with a particular religious organization. The 2015 US Religious Landscape Study by the Pew Research Center revealed a remarkable degree of religious switching in America. Even if Protestantism is

¹ Throughout this report, unless specifically noted or otherwise required by the context, the terms "America" and "American" refer to the United States of America. The terms "U.S." and "American" are used interchangeably.

² See at: <http://www.rcms2010.org/>

³ The term "adherents" is meant to describe all people affiliated with and participating in local religious communities regardless of the frequency of their participation or their formal "membership status." In effect, "adherents" allow for the most comparable count of religiously involved people across different Christian denominations and other faith groups.

⁴ See at: <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/cong/nondenom.html>

treated as a single religious group (i.e., not counting switching between various Protestant denominations), then 34% of American adults currently have a religious identity different from the one in which they were raised (in 2007, this figure was only 28%). If the three major Protestant traditions (Evangelical Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, and Historically Black Protestantism) are analyzed as separate categories, then the share of Americans who have switched religions in the course of their lives rises to 42%.⁵

In a nutshell and using "marketing" terminology, America is a country with a fairly stable "capacity of religious market" (measuring by the percentage of people who are part of locally-organized religious communities), but with a growing number of "vendors" who share, divide, and compete in this religious market. The growing number of "religious offers" results in a growing number of people who abandon one religious community in order to join another. The U.S. Orthodox Churches and their local parish communities are part of this American religious reality.

The key question that needs to be answered is: "How are Orthodox Christian parishes faring today among the many other American local religious communities?" The results of the study "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America" should help to address this crucial question. The study's main goal was to obtain an accurate and comprehensive picture of Orthodox parish life in today's America, including such aspects as membership, worship, programs, religious education, finances, usage of electronic technologies, and much more.

It should be noted that the study "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America" was part of a much larger national study of American religious congregations titled "Faith Communities Today" (FACT). The FACT national survey and study was undertaken by the "Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership" (CCSP), an interfaith coalition of religious researchers representing a broad spectrum of American faith communities. Originally, the "Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas" (SCOBA) and presently the "Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America" has been and remains one of the founding partners in CCSP cooperative project. More about CCSP research partnership and numerous reports from CCSP various study projects can be found at: www.faithcommunitiestoday.org.

⁵ See the full report at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/>

The national report on 2015 FACT study⁶ ("American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving") is available at: <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>

The study "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America" was conducted via an online survey of local Orthodox parishes. In each parish, the questionnaire was completed by the key informant: typically, the parish priest. 580 parishes (that is, 30% of all US Orthodox parishes) participated in the "Orthodox Parish Life Study." The following five Orthodox jurisdictions had a sufficient number of participating parishes to allow for statistically reliable analysis and sound conclusions:

- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA): 162 participating parishes (or 31% of all GOA churches)
- Orthodox Church in America (OCA): 168 participating parishes (or 30% of all OCA churches)
- Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (AOCA): 99 participating parishes (or 40% of all AOCA churches)
- Serbian Orthodox Church: 43 participating parishes (or 35% of all Serbian Orthodox churches)
- American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese (ACROD): 37 participating parishes (or 46% of all Carpatho-Russian churches)

On the following pages, when examining various aspects of U.S. Orthodox parishes, we will also discuss what is similar and what is distinct in the lives of Antiochian, GOA, OCA, Carpatho-Russian, and Serbian Orthodox churches.

A separate chapter is devoted to comparisons of Orthodox Christian parishes and Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations.⁷ This chapter will provide a glimpse into what are most remarkable differences (besides liturgical life and theology, of course) between Orthodox Christian parishes and the Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations.

⁶ The 2015 FACT study report is based on the surveys completed by 4,436 US religious congregations. The survey covers the characteristics, programs and vital signs of congregations as reported by a key informant in the congregation, typically the senior clergy.

⁷ Unlike national FACT studies conducted in 2000, 2005, 2008 and 2010, the Roman Catholic Church did not have sufficient number of parishes participating in 2015 study. Therefore, we were unable to include in this chapter the discussion on similarities and differences between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox parishes.

I. (Some) Characteristics of the Orthodox Parishes Participating in the Study

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ Dominant majority (59%) of U.S. Orthodox parishes are urban churches: they are located in or near cities with a population of 50,000 or more. Only one in eight parishes (13%) are "rural" or "small town" churches. The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese has the greatest percentage of "rural" and "small town" churches (26%), whereas the parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese are the most "urban:" 71% of them are in or near cities with a population of 50,000 or more;
- ❖ 40% of currently existing U.S. Orthodox parishes are "old" churches that were founded prior to World War II. "Young" churches (founded in 2000 or later) comprise 15% of U.S. Orthodox parishes. The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese has the greatest share of "old" (founded prior to WWII) churches: 53%. On the contrary, the Antiochian Archdiocese has highest percentage of recently formed parishes: more than a quarter (26%) of AOCA parishes were founded in or after 2000;
- ❖ 83% of U.S. Orthodox parishes are served by the full-time clergy, but there are significant variations in this respect among different jurisdictions. Nearly all (95%) of GOA priests are full-time, compared to only 78% in the case of OCA clergy;
- ❖ Nationwide and for all jurisdictions combined, the median age of American Orthodox clergy is 57 years old (i.e. half of parish clergy are older and half of them are younger than 57). Among individual jurisdictions, Serbian parishes have more younger priests (median age of Serbian clergy is only 45 years old), while AOCA parishes have more older clergy (median age of AOCA clergy is 60 years old).

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DISCUSSION:

580 U.S. Orthodox parishes participated in the study "Orthodox Christian Churches in the 21st Century America." This equals to 30% of all American Orthodox parishes - a participation rate that allows for statistically sound conclusions and observations. Tab. 1 shows the number of parishes of various Orthodox jurisdictions that participated in the study.

Tab. 1 Number of Parishes of Various Jurisdictions Participating in the Study

Orthodox Jurisdiction	Number of Parishes	% in the total of Parishes
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese (ACROD)	37	6%
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (AOCA)	99	17%
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA)	162	28%
Orthodox Church in America (OCA)	168	29%
Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA (SRB)	43	7%
Other jurisdictions	71	13%
TOTAL	580	100%

It should be noted that among all parishes participating in the study, the parishes of three major jurisdictions - Antiochian Archdiocese (hereafter "AOCA"), Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA), and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) - were present proportionally to their actual share in the total of U.S. Orthodox parishes. That is, the sample of participating parishes is reflective of the actual proportions (measured by number of parishes) among the three major U.S. Orthodox jurisdictions. The same can be said about the geographic distribution of participating parishes. Tab. 2 provides information on the number of parishes participating in the study in each state. The percentages of participating parishes in each state are very close to the percentages of each state in the total of U.S. Orthodox parishes.

Tab. 2 Geographic Distribution of Participating Parishes by the State:

"In what state is your parish's place of worship physically located?"

State	Number of Participating Parishes	% of all Parishes	State	Number of Participating Parishes	% of all Parishes
Alabama	1	0.2%	Missouri	8	1.6%
Alaska	12	2.4%	Montana	2	0.4%
Arizona	7	1.4%	Nebraska	3	0.6%
California	41	8.0%	Nevada	4	0.8%
Colorado	13	2.5%	New Hampshire	3	0.6%
Connecticut	13	2.5%	New Jersey	37	7.3%
Delaware	1	0.2%	New Mexico	12	2.4%
District of Columbia	2	0.4%	New York	40	7.8%
Florida	17	3.3%	North Carolina	10	2.0%
Georgia	14	2.7%	Ohio	28	5.5%
Illinois	27	5.3%	Oklahoma	3	0.6%
Indiana	13	2.5%	Oregon	5	1.0%
Iowa	5	1.0%	Pennsylvania	57	11.2%
Kansas	4	0.8%	Rhode Island	2	0.4%
Kentucky	2	0.4%	South Carolina	5	1.0%
Louisiana	6	1.2%	South Dakota	1	0.2%
Maine	0	0.0%	Tennessee	5	1.0%
Maryland	6	1.2%	Texas	22	4.3%
Massachusetts	15	2.9%	Virginia	11	2.2%
Michigan	13	2.5%	Washington	14	2.7%
Minnesota	4	0.8%	West Virginia	6	1.2%
Mississippi	5	1.0%	Wisconsin	4	0.8%
			TOTAL	510 (*)	100%

(*) - 70 parishes have chosen not to answer the question about their location

In summary, the sample of the parishes participating in the study "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America" reflects accurately the geographic distribution and jurisdictional affiliation of US Orthodox parishes. Therefore, the following report assumes that the study's findings are reflective of all U.S. Orthodox parishes. The same applies to findings for five individual jurisdictions with significant presence of parishes in the study: the Antiochian Archdiocese (AOCA), the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese (ACROD), the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA), the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Tab. 3a shows location of the parishes by the type of settlement.

Tab. 3a Type of Location where the Parishes are Situated:
 "How would you describe the location of your church?" (%)

Type of Location	% of Parishes
Rural area or open country	4%
Village or town with a population of less than 10,000	9%
Small city or large town with a population of 10,000 to 50,000	28%
Downtown, central area or old residential area of a city with a population of 50,000 or more	33%
Suburb area around a city with a population of 50,000 or more	26%

Tab. 3a indicates that a strong majority (59%) of U.S. Orthodox parishes can be described as urban: they are either in or near cities with a population of 50,000 or more. Only one in eight parishes (13%) are "rural or small town" churches. However, there are significant variations among five jurisdictions in how urban or rural their parishes are. In short, the Carpatho-Russian Diocese has the greatest percentage of "rural and small town" churches (26%), whereas the parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese are the most "urban:" 71% of them are in or near cities with the population of 50,000 or more See Tab. 3b.

Tab. 3b Type of Location where the Parishes are Situated:
 "How would you describe the location of your church?" (%)

Type of Location	% of parishes in each category				
	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian Orthodox parishes
Rural area or open country	6%	1%	1%	8%	7%
Village or town with a population of less than 10,000	20%	7%	1%	13%	17%
Small city or large town with a population of 10,000 to 50,000	34%	30%	27%	24%	17%
Downtown, central area or old residential area of a city with a population of 50,000 or more	20%	33%	40%	33%	33%
Suburb area around a city with a population of 50,000 or more	20%	29%	31%	22%	26%

Different Orthodox jurisdictions have significantly different proportions of "young" (i.e. recently established), "middle-aged" and "old" churches. Tab. 4a shows that 40% of currently existing US Orthodox churches are "old" churches that trace their origins to prior to WWII. On the other end, "young" churches (founded in 2000 or later) comprise 15% of US Orthodox parishes. Tab. 4 also indicates that of the five jurisdictions the Carpatho-Russian Diocese has greatest share of "old" (founded prior to WWII) churches: 53%. In contrast, the Antiochian Archdiocese has the highest percentage of "young" parishes: more than a quarter (26%) of AOCA parishes were established in or after 2000.

Tab. 4a The Age of the Parishes: "In what year was your parish officially founded?" (%)

Year	All parishes	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian Orthodox Parishes
Before 1940	40%	53%	29%	51%	41%	37%
1940-1969	17%	20%	4%	27%	14%	27%
1970-1999	27%	17%	41%	18%	28%	34%
2000 and later	15%	9%	26%	4%	17%	2%

The parishes of different jurisdictions have somewhat different characteristics of priesthood. The questionnaire asked about employment status of the clergy (full-time, part-time or unpaid) and about their age. Tab. 4b-c present these data for all US Orthodox parishes combined and for the parishes of five individual jurisdictions. 83% of US parishes are served by the full-time clergy, but there are significant variations in this respect among individual jurisdictions. Nearly all (95%) of GOA priests are full-time paid compared to only 78% of OCA clergy.

Tab. 4b Employment Status of the Senior Parish Priest (% , percentages in each column add to 100%)

	All parishes	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian parishes
Full-time paid	83	82	86	95	78	90
Unpaid	4	6	1	0	4	0
Part-time paid	13	12	13	5	18	10

Nationwide and for all jurisdictions combined, the median age of the clergy is 57 years old (i.e. half of parish clergy are older and half of them are younger than 57). At the same time, Serbian parishes have more younger priests (median age of Serbian clergy is only 45 years old), while AOCA parishes have more older clergy (median age of AOCA clergy is 60 years old).

Tab. 4c Median Age of the Clergy (years old):

	All parishes	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian parishes
Median age of the clergy: years old	57	58	60	57	56	45

II. Membership of American Orthodox Parishes

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ The total number of *adherents* of all American Orthodox Churches (i.e. all persons associated, however loosely, with the lives of local parishes) is 798,000;
- ❖ If measured by the number of *regularly participating church members*, the total membership of all American Orthodox Churches is about 326,000; For five individual jurisdictions, the number of *regularly participating church members is*: AOCA - 35,400; ACROD - 5,700; GOA - 179,500; OCA - 58,100; Serbian Orthodox Church - 22,900;
- ❖ For all American Orthodox Churches combined, the percentage of active and regularly participating church members in the total of adherents is 41%. But this percentage varies considerably among five jurisdictions participating in the study: 34% in Serbian Orthodox Church; 38% in GOA; 48% in Antiochian Archdiocese; 54% in Carpatho-Russian Diocese; 69% in OCA;
- ❖ Between 2010 and 2015, the GOA and OCA grew in the number of regularly participating church members, whereas the Antiochian Archdiocese declined in the number of parishioners who are actively involved in the lives of their parishes;
- ❖ Senior citizens (age 65+) constitute about one quarter (24%) of all regularly participating American Orthodox church members. Young people (children, preteen, youth) and young adults up to 35 years old comprise 35% of those who regularly participate in American Orthodox church life. Among the five jurisdictions covered in the study, the most "grey-haired" are the parishes of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese: 41% of their regularly participating members are senior citizens and only 25% are youth and young adults. The parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese have the most "youthful" demography: only 19% of their regularly participating members are persons 65+, whereas 40% are children and young people under 35 years old;
- ❖ When asked "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in parish's various programs, committees and projects outside of worship?" nearly half (45%) of American Orthodox parishes responded: "quite a bit/a lot." Only 16% of churches reported that their parishioners are involved only "a little/not at all." Among the five jurisdictions, the parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese and Carpatho-Russian Diocese have the highest involvement of their members into various areas of parish life. In both jurisdictions, 53% of the parishes reported that their members are involved "quite a bit/a lot."

- ❖ When it comes to finding volunteers who are willing to take responsibilities for various leadership positions (governing boards, committees, Sunday School, etc.), only about one quarter (27%) of American Orthodox parishes "have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders." Among the five jurisdictions, the Antiochian Archdiocese is in a somewhat better situation: more than one-third of its churches reported that they "have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders." On the opposite end are GOA parishes: only one-fifth of them (21%) "have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders;"
- ❖ In only 18% of American Orthodox parishes, the parishioners pay serious attention to bringing new members into their parishes. In nearly half (46%) of the parishes, current members are involved in finding and bringing new members only "a little/not at all;"
- ❖ About one-third (34%) of American Orthodox parishes reported that they have some system of mutual control and accountability among parishioners for active participation and faithful living. Out of the five jurisdictions, the Antiochian Archdiocese has the highest percentage of such parishes (43%);
- ❖ The churches that pay attention to mutual control and accountability among parishioners differ in several ways from the other parishes, namely:
 - they have much higher degree of parishioners' involvement in the parish's various programs and services;
 - they are much more successful in finding people willing to volunteer in various leadership positions;
 - their parishioners are much more involved in bringing new members into a parish.

DISCUSSION:

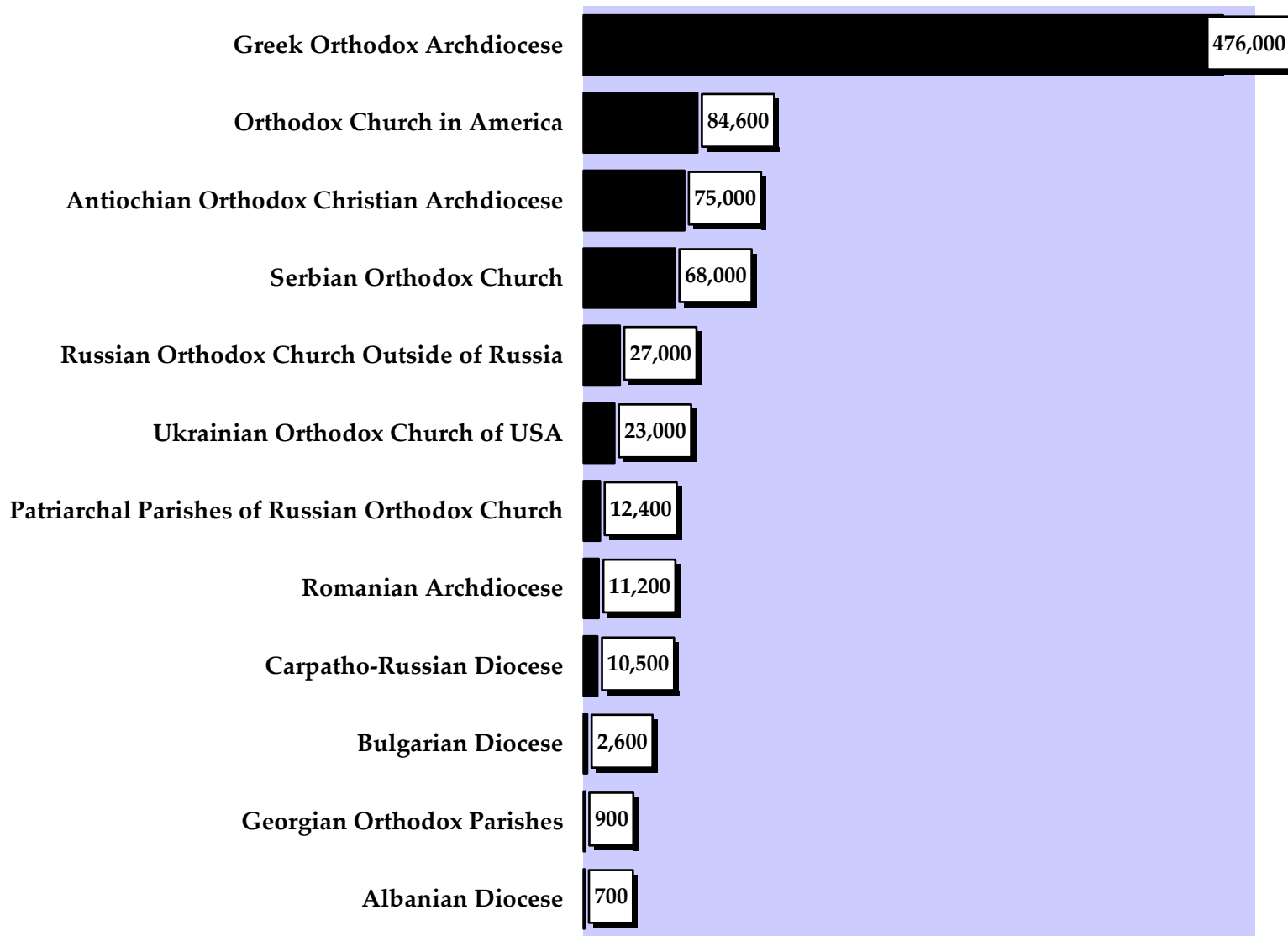
The membership of a parish is the key factor with the strong influence on the scope and scale of various parish-based activities. Overall, the size of a parish combined with the demographic and socio-economic composition of its members determines the financial and human resources available to the local church community. The parishes with different types of membership also have different priorities in terms of which ministries and programs are relevant and most needed for them.

The question about the size of a parish community is difficult to answer precisely. The major problem in determining the size of American Orthodox parishes is the absence of clear and uniform (for all Orthodox jurisdictions) criteria for measuring membership. Indeed, the total number of persons associated with a parish is typically greater than the number of those who are formally listed in parish records as "full members," "regularly contributing families or units," etc. In turn, the core group of parishioners who attend regularly and

are actively involved in various parish' activities is normally smaller than the formal full membership of a parish.

The 2010 national census of American Orthodox Christian churches asked each parish: "How many individual persons total are associated with the life of your parish: including adults and children, regular and occasional attendees, paid stewards, and persons who do not contribute financially?" The answer to this question gives information on the number of *adherents* in each parish: that is, the total of persons associated – however loosely – with the life of a parish community. The results of the 2010 national census of American Orthodox Christian churches indicated that for all jurisdictions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops combined, the number of Orthodox Church adherents in the U.S. is 798,100. Fig. 1 on the next page shows total membership (measured by number of adherents) for all Orthodox jurisdictions that are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops.

Fig. 1 Membership in U.S. Orthodox Churches (based on 2010 census of US Orthodox Christian Churches): Total Number of Adherents (including children and occasional participants)



The question about parish membership used in the 2015 study "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America" was different: "How many persons (including children) *regularly participate* in the life of your parish?" That is, unlike the 2010 census of American Orthodox Churches, the 2015 study asked about the number of regularly participating parishioners rather than about the total of "adherents" (i.e. everyone who is - at least loosely - affiliated with a parish).

Information obtained from this question is presented in Tab. 5. It allows for three major observations.

Tab. 5 Size of Membership: "How many persons (including children) regularly participate in the life of your parish?"

	All U.S. parishes	AOCA parishes	ACROD Parishes	GOA Parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian parishes
Average (mean) size of a single parish	171	144	71	321	104	183
Median size of a single parish	100	100	55	200	70	120
Estimate of U.S. total regularly participating membership	325,780	35,424	5,680	179,439	58,136	22,875

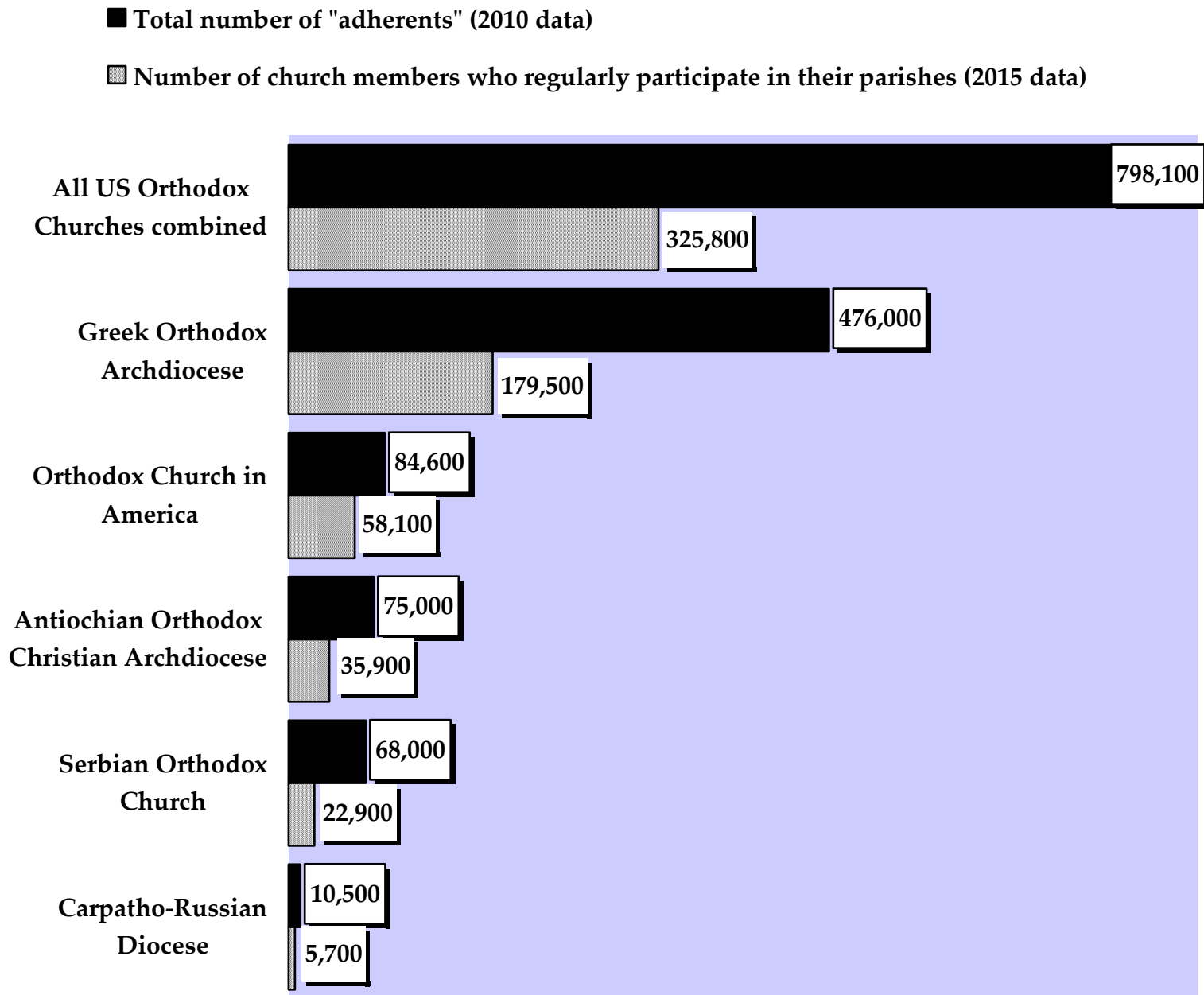
First, the upper line in the table shows the size of an "average" parish for all U.S. parishes combined (171 persons per "average" parish) and for the five individual jurisdictions. This average (also known as "mean") figure was obtained by summing up the responses from individual parishes and dividing the obtained figure by the number of parishes. One can see that the "average" GOA parish (321 regularly participating parishioners) is 4.5 times larger than the typical Carpatho-Russian parish (71 regularly participating parishioners).

Second, in reality, however, the "typical" American Orthodox parishes are smaller than it may appear from the "mean" figures. The second line in the table provides the data on the so-called "median" size of a single parish. The median is a figure that separates the sample of the parishes "in the middle," that is, the median size of the parishes means that half of the parishes are smaller than the median figure and half of them are larger than the median figure. Tab. 5 shows that half of American Orthodox parishes have fewer than 100 regular participants. Even in the GOA that, compared to other jurisdictions, has larger parishes, half of the parishes have less than 200 persons participating regularly in the life of a parish.

Third, based on the average parish size in the upper row of the Tab. 5 and extrapolating them nationally we estimated the national membership for all American Orthodox Churches combined and the five jurisdictions studied individually. These estimates are provided in the last (bottom) row of Tab. 5. They reflect the number of church members who are regularly involved in their parishes. For all U.S. Orthodox Churches combined, the total number of persons (children included) who regularly participate in the life of their parishes is 325,780.

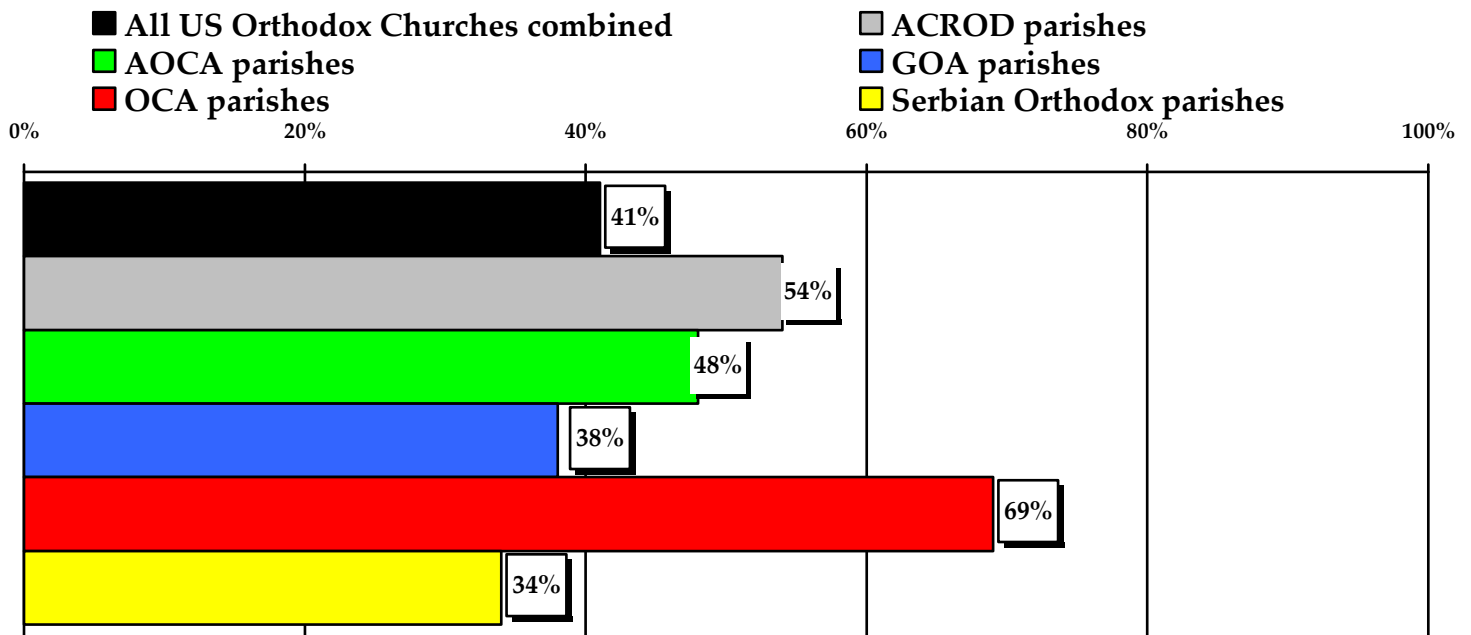
Fig. 2a shows church membership for all US Orthodox Churches and the five individual jurisdictions measured by two different criteria: the total of adherents and the number of regularly participating parishioners.

**Fig. 2a Membership in U.S. Orthodox Churches:
Total Number of Adherents Versus Number of Regularly Participating Persons
(both figures include children)**



One can compare the number of the regularly participating church members with the total of adherents and calculate the percentage of "truly involved" parishioners. Fig 2b shows that for all U.S. Orthodox Churches combined, the share of the truly involved church members in the total of adherents is 41%. However, this percentage varies greatly among various jurisdictions: from as low as 34% in the Serbian Orthodox parishes to as high as 69% in the OCA.

Fig. 2b Percentage of Regularly Participating Church Members in the Total of Adherents



The question "How many persons - including children - regularly participate in the life of your parish?" was also asked in the 2010 national study of U.S. Orthodox parishes.⁸ Unfortunately, unlike the 2015 study, only three jurisdictions participated in the 2010 study: the Antiochian Archdiocese, the GOA and the OCA. While we cannot judge the 2010-2015 changes in active church membership for all jurisdictions, we can make such estimates for the Antiochian Archdiocese, the GOA, and the OCA. See Fig. 2c.

⁸ This study was different from, and should not be confused with the 2010 Census of US Orthodox Churches to which we referred earlier in this chapter.

Fig. 2c Change in the Number of Regularly Participating Church Members from 2010-2015

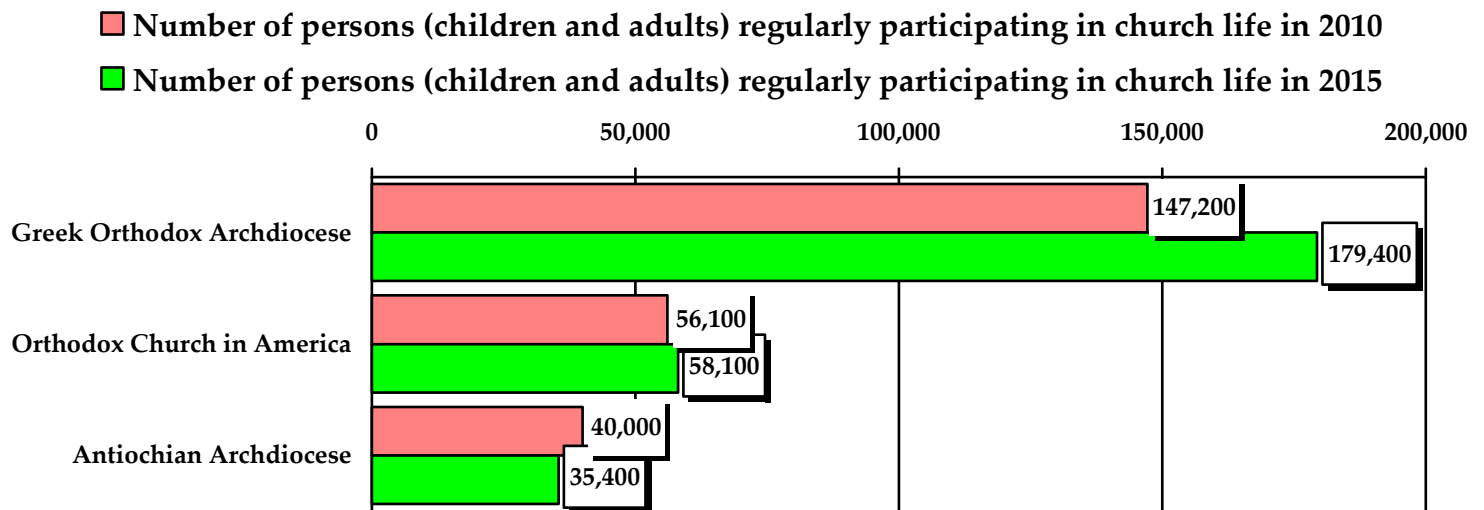
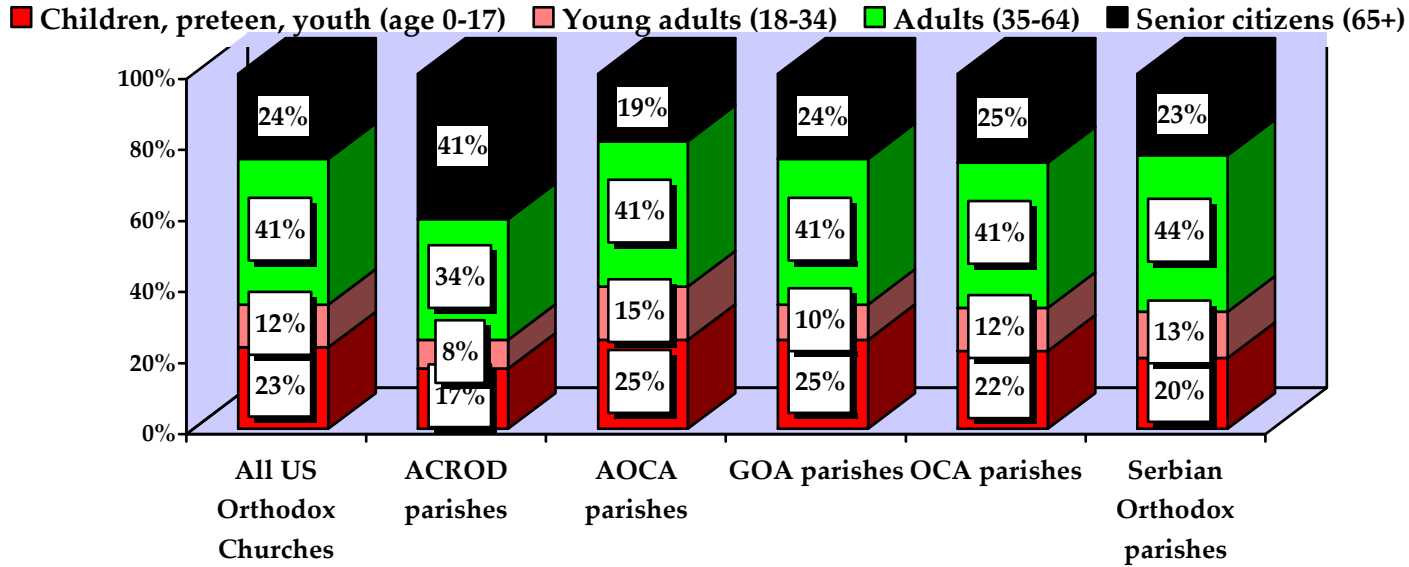


Fig. 2c shows that between 2010 and 2015, the GOA and OCA grew in the number of regularly participating church members, whereas in the Antiochian Archdiocese the number of parishioners who are actively involved in the lives of their parishes has declined. It should be noted that these changes in active church membership (i.e. number of regularly participating church members) do not necessarily reflect the changes in the overall church membership (the total of adherents). That is, it is possible that either growth or decline in the number of active church members can be simply explained by the fact that some of relatively passive adherents switched to the category of "regularly participating church members," whereas some previously "active church participants" have become merely adherents.

The U.S. Orthodox jurisdictions differ considerably from one another in the age composition of their members. Fig. 3 shows that for all U.S. Orthodox Churches combined senior citizens (age 65+) constitute about one quarter (24%) of all regularly participating Orthodox Church members. Young people (children, preteens, youth and young adults) comprise 35% of those who regularly participate in American Orthodox church life. Among the five individual jurisdictions, the most "grey-haired" are the parishes in Carpatho-Russian diocese: 41% of their regularly participating members are senior citizens and only 25% are young people. To the contrary, the churches of the Antiochian Archdiocese have the most "youthful" demography: only 19% of their regularly participating members are persons 65+, while 40% are children, youth and young adults under 35 years old.

Fig. 3 Age Composition of the Church Membership

"Of your regular participants, please estimate the percentage of the following age categories:"



There is little doubt that regular attendance of liturgical services is the major criteria for judging church involvement of parishioners. Yet, an Orthodox parish is not simply place of worship. It is a living Orthodox Christian community with diverse activities, ministries, and programs.

Therefore, the next question to be examined is: how actively do Orthodox Church members participate in the lives of their parishes outside of worship? It should be noted that this question is crucial for all American Christian denominations. In his book, "The other 80 percent⁹," the renowned American sociologist of religion, Prof. Scott Thumma, argued that in most religious congregations - regardless of particular denomination - only 20% of members are actively involved in the lives of their congregations beyond worship.

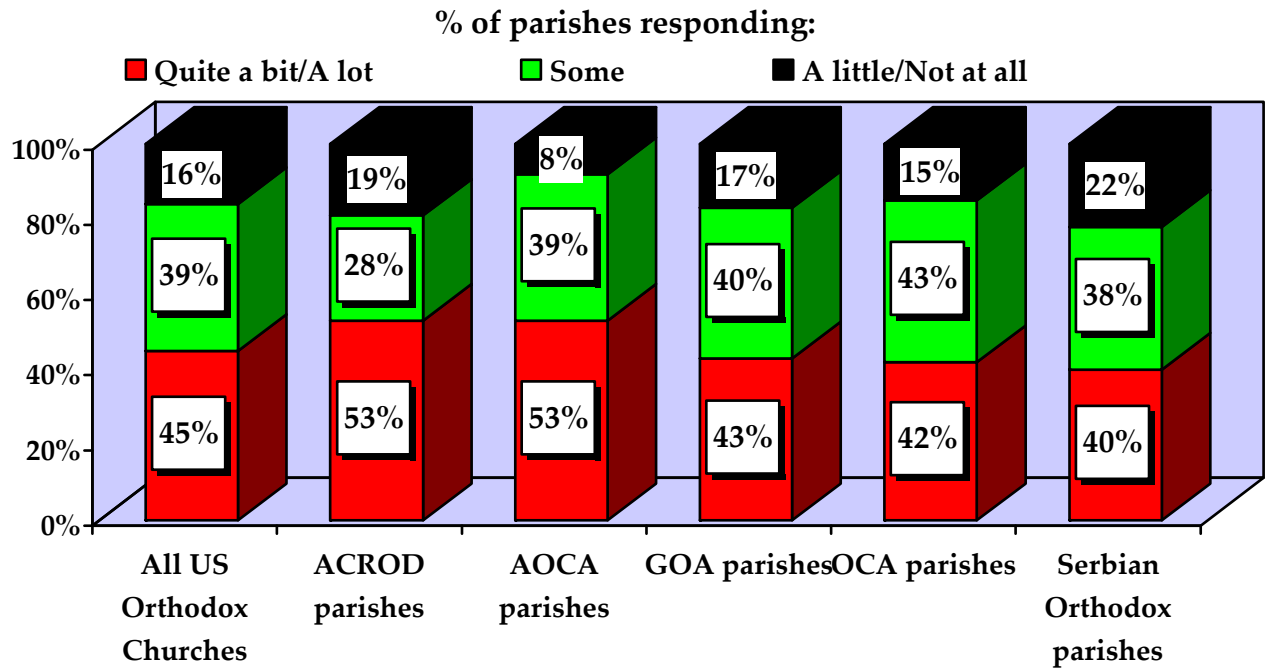
The survey asked three questions about various forms of involvement of parishioners in the lives of their parishes:

- ❖ "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in the parish' various programs, committees and projects outside of worship?"
- ❖ "How easy or difficult is it for your parish to recruit people for volunteer leadership roles: for example, serving on governing boards or committees, or teaching Sunday School?"
- ❖ "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this parish?"

⁹ Thumma, S., and Bird, W. *The Other 80 Percent*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass

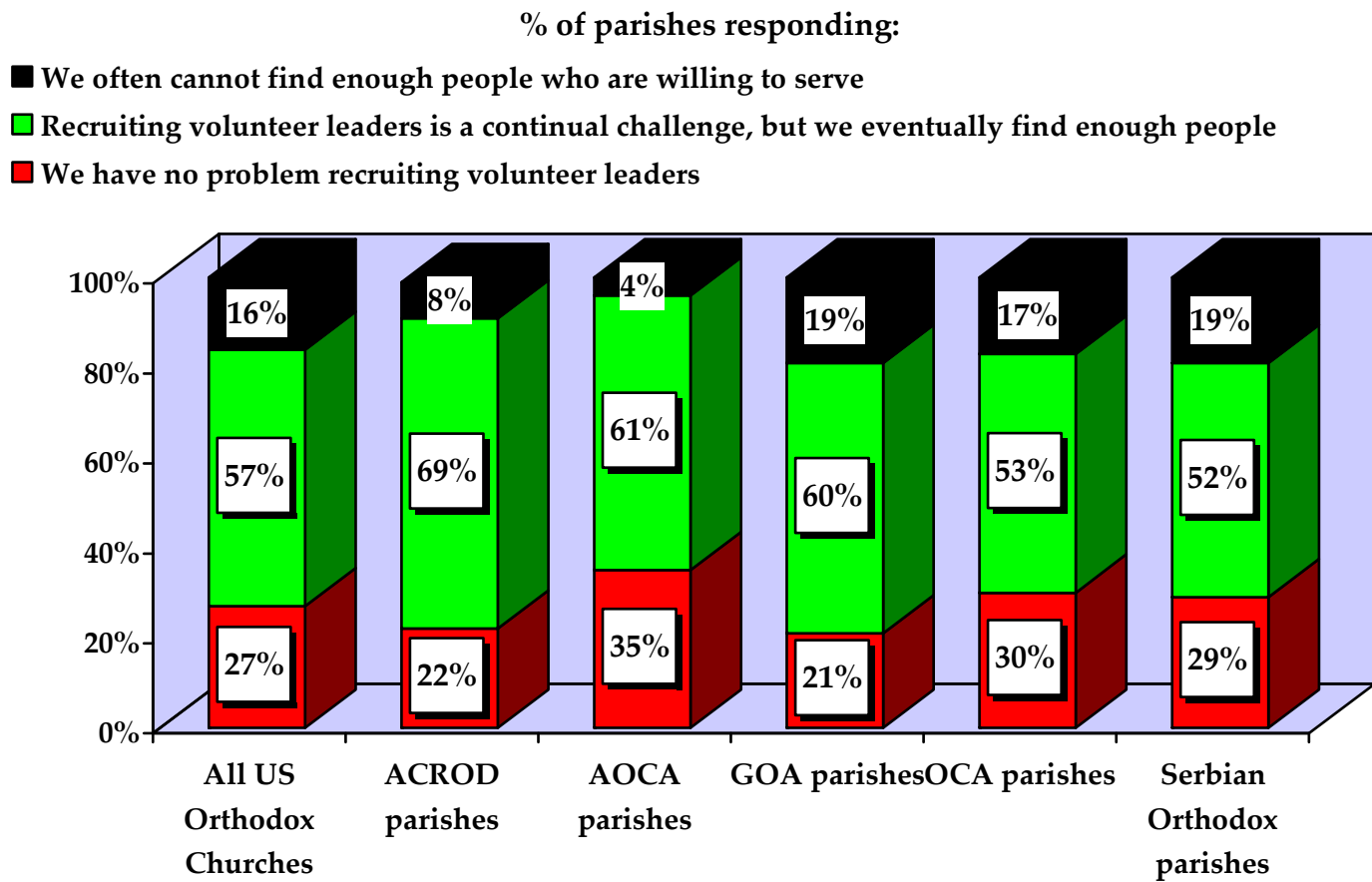
Fig. 4 shows that when answering the first and more general question, "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in parish's various programs, committees and projects outside of worship?" nearly half (45%) of U.S. Orthodox parishes felt "optimistic" and responded: "quite a bit/a lot." Only one in six churches (16%) indicated that their parishioners are involved only "a little/not at all." Among five individual jurisdictions, the parishes of Antiochian Archdiocese and Carpatho-Russian Diocese reported the highest involvement of their members in various areas of the parish life. In both jurisdictions, 53% of the parishes reported that their members are involved "quite a bit/a lot."

Fig. 4 Overall Involvement of Parishioners in the Life of a Parish: "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in parish's various programs, committees and projects outside of worship?"



However, when it comes to a more specific question about availability of volunteers who are willing to take responsibilities for various leadership positions (governing boards, committees, Sunday School), the responses from the parishes are less enthusiastic. Fig. 5 indicates that only quarter (27%) of American Orthodox parishes "have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders." Among five jurisdictions, the best situation is in the Antiochian Archdiocese: more than one-third of its churches (35%) feel that they "have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders." On the opposite end are GOA parishes: only one-fifth of them (21%) "have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders."

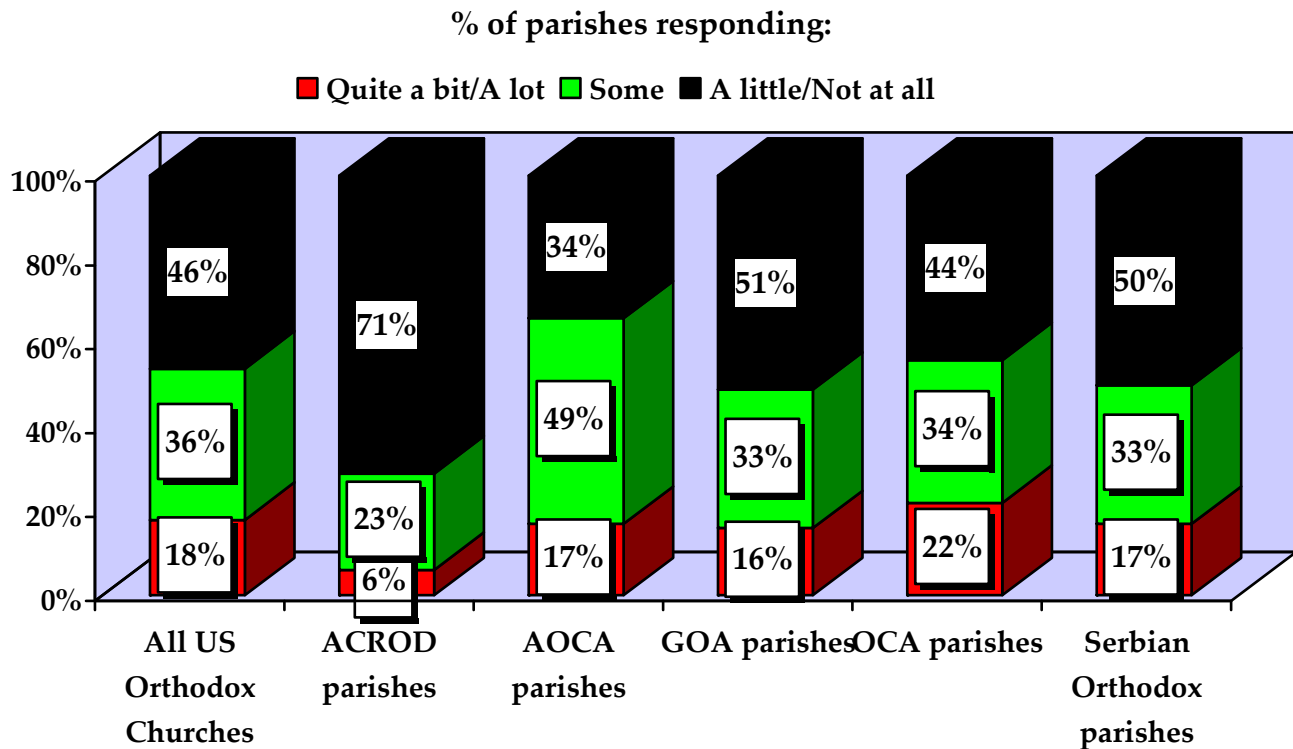
Fig. 5 Availability of the Volunteers: "How easy or difficult is it for your parish to recruit people for volunteer leadership roles: for example, serving on governing boards or committees, or teaching Sunday School?"



Answering the question about the involvement of church members in finding and bringing new members into their parishes, less than one in five (18%) of US Orthodox parishes indicated that their parishioners are involved "quite a bit/a lot." In nearly half (46%) of the parishes, current members are involved "a little/not at all." Among the five jurisdictions, the parishes of Carpatho-Russian Diocese are especially passive about "bringing new members into their parishes." See Fig. 6.

Fig. 6 Members Involvement in Recruiting New Church Members:

"Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this parish?"



Granted, the involvement of church members in their parishes beyond worship depends on many factors: e.g. how engaging parish clergy and lay-leaders are, how good is the match between the parish's various ministries and programs and particular categories of parishioners, how far members live from their churches, etc. The results of our study however, revealed one particular factor that has a powerful influence on how many parishioners participate actively in the lives of their churches. This factor is the system of mutual control and accountability among parishioners that certain parishes developed and implemented, either formally or informally. The survey asked: "Which of the following best describes your parish's approach to how members hold each other accountable for active participation and faithful living?" The parishes had four choices to respond:

- ❖ "This is not really something we emphasize;"
- ❖ "We have no formal way of monitoring and doing this, but members occasionally do it informally;"
- ❖ "We have no formal way of monitoring and doing this, but it regularly happens informally;"
- ❖ "It is important and a regular practice of our parish."

For simplification of further analysis, we combined the first two options of answers into one category, because in both cases these are the parishes where little attention is being paid to holding members accountable for active participation and faithful living. Fig. 7 shows that only about one-third (34%) U.S. Orthodox parishes pay attention to mutual control and accountability among parishioners, either as informal "monitoring" by members (26%) or as an established practice (8%). Out of five jurisdictions, the Antiochian Archdiocese has a significantly higher percentage of the churches (43%) that have some system of mutual control and accountability among parishioners.

Fig. 7 Mutual Accountability and Control Among Parishioners:

"Which of the following best describes your parish's approach to how members hold each other accountable for active participation and faithful living?"

% of parishes responding:

- It is important and regular practice of our parish
- We have no formal way of monitoring and doing this, but it regularly happens informally
- This is not really something we emphasize

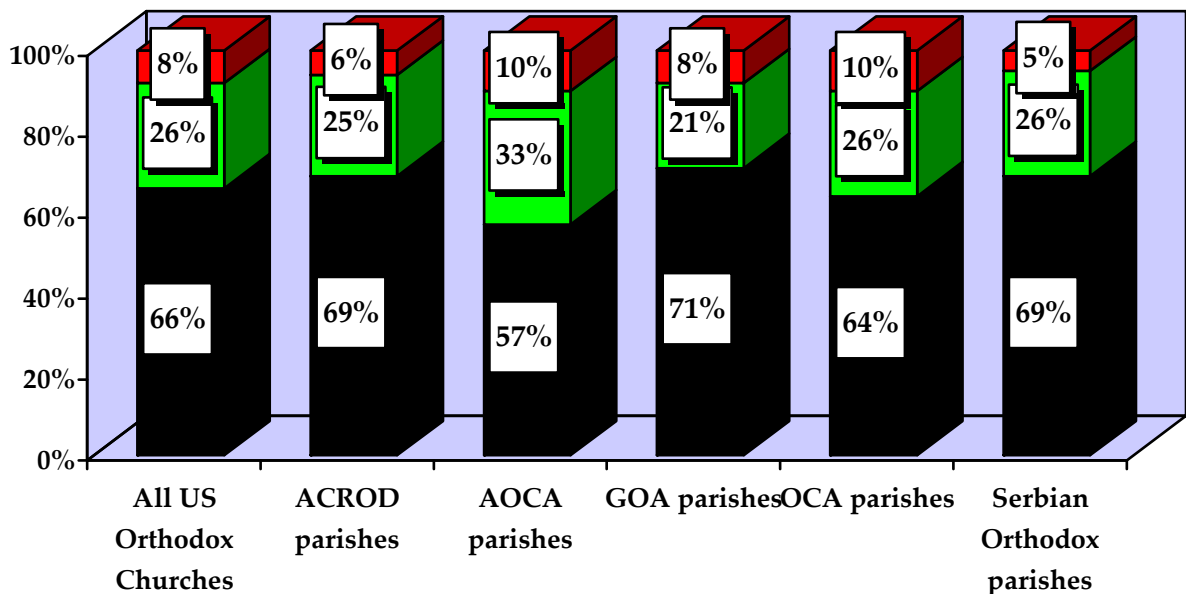


Fig. 8a-c shows why the practice of mutual accountability and control among church members is important for Orthodox parishes. Indeed, compared to the parishes which do NOT pay attention to mutual control and accountability, the churches where mutual control among parishioners is an established practice:

- ❖ have a higher degree of parishioners' involvement in the parish's various programs and services (Fig. 8a)
- ❖ have fewer problems with finding people willing to volunteer in various leadership positions (Fig. 8b);
- ❖ have much greater involvement of parishioners in bringing new members into a parish (Fig. 8c).

Fig. 8a Mutual Accountability and Control among Parishioners Versus Their Involvement in the Life of the Parishes beyond Worship: "Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in the parish's various programs and service projects outside of worship?"

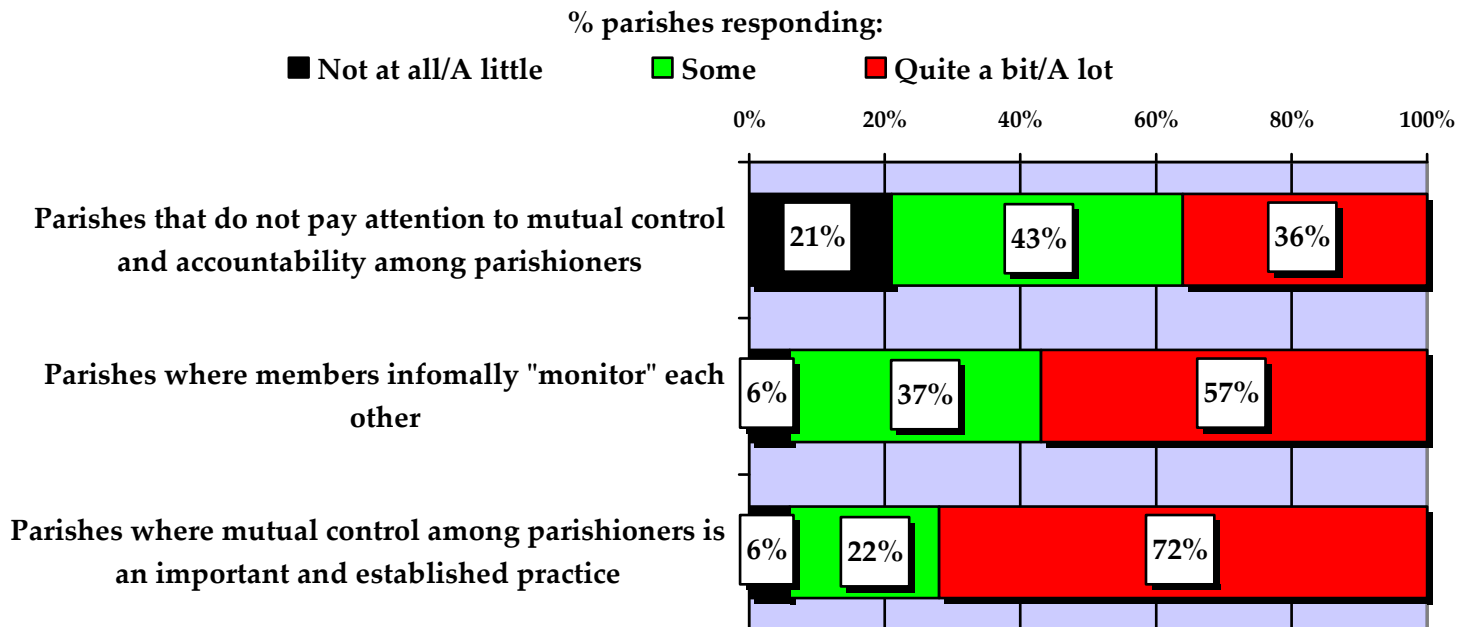


Fig. 8b Mutual Accountability and Control among Parishioners Versus Availability of Volunteers in a Parish: "How easy or difficult is it for your parish to recruit people for volunteer leadership roles (e.g. serving on governing boards or committees, teaching Sunday School)"

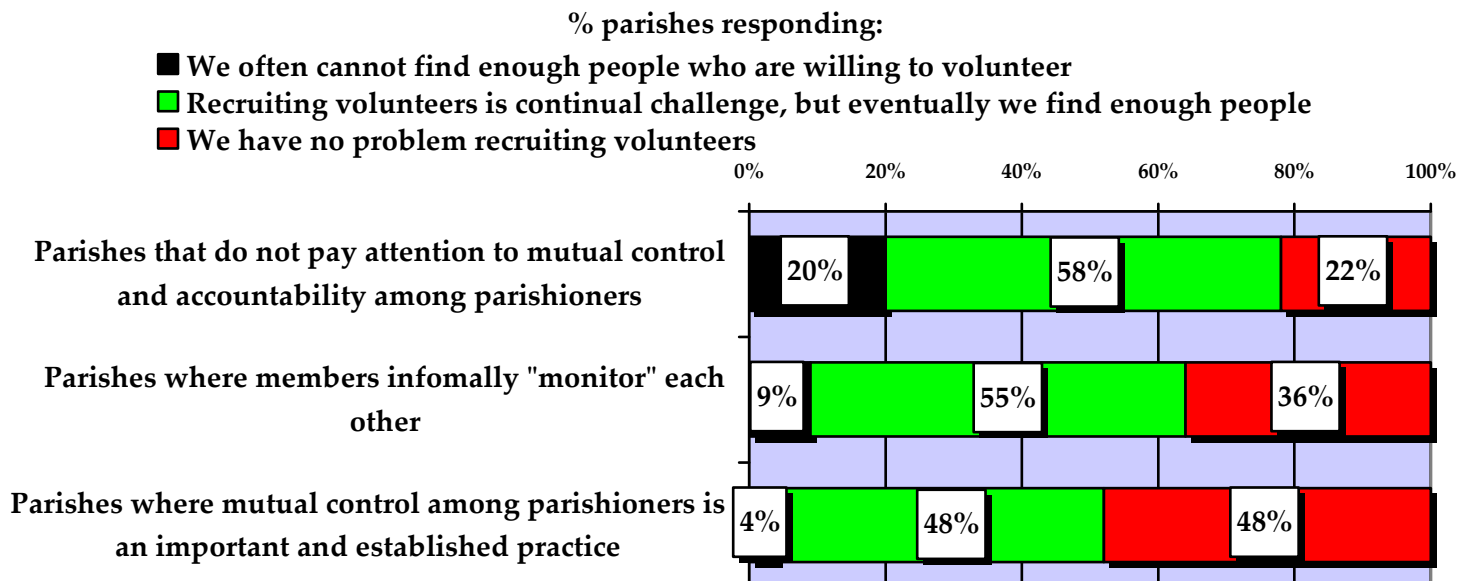
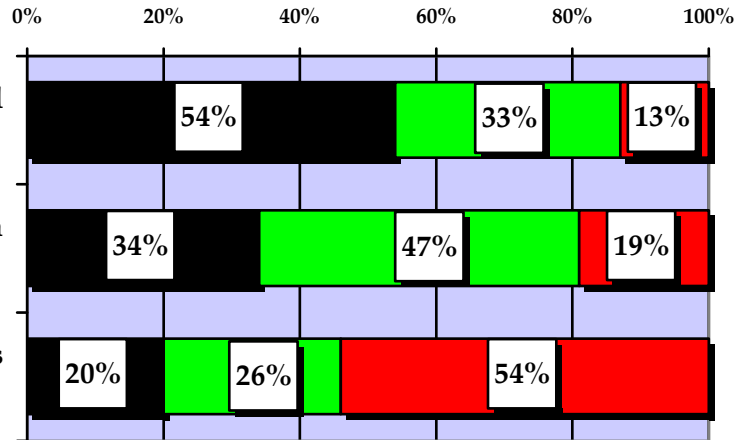


Fig. 8c Mutual Accountability and Control among Parishioners Versus Involvement of Parishioners in Finding New Members

"Overall, to what extent are your parishioners involved in bringing new members into this parish?"

% parishes responding:

■ Not at all/A little ■ Some ■ Quite a bit/A lot



III. The Identity of a Parish, the Need for Change and Parish's Vision for the Future.

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS

- ❖ More than three-quarters of American Orthodox parishes agree with the statements: "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have financial and personal needs," "Our parish is spiritually vibrant and alive," "Our parish is quite different from other congregations in our local community," and "Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into parish;"
- ❖ A significant number of American Orthodox parishes (44%) have the problem of being bound by established routines and are unwilling to change and explore "new ways of doing things." Only slightly more than half of the parishes (56%) agreed with the statement "Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges;"
- ❖ Unlike many Christian denominations, the practice of having a variety of small "interest groups" within the local church community is not very common in American Orthodox churches. Only 31% of the parishes participating in the study agreed that "our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer;"
- ❖ There are many *significant* differences between the parishes of Antiochian Archdiocese, Carpatho-Russian Diocese, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox Church. Here are some examples:
 - When it comes to having a "*clear vision for the parish's mission*," many more priests from the Antiochian parishes feel that this is true about their parish communities. The OCA has the lowest percentage of clergy who think that their parishes have "a clear mission and purpose;"
 - When it comes to "*being a spiritually vibrant Christian community*," the parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese are well ahead of other jurisdictions by the number of clergy who feel that their parishes are "spiritually vibrant and alive." Differently, among five jurisdictions, the GOA churches are least likely to be described by their pastors as being "spiritually vibrant and alive;"
 - When it comes to "*caring about fellow parishioners who have problems and needs*," the clergy of Antiochian Archdiocese are most likely, whereas Serbian Orthodox priests are least likely, to agree with the statement "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have financial and personal needs;"
 - When it comes to "*incorporating newcomers into a parish community*," the Antiochian parishes appear to be significantly more welcoming to new members, whereas GOA and Serbian churches tend to be more insular;
 - Compared to other Orthodox jurisdictions, the GOA has the highest percentage of parishes that are "intentional about *maximizing the number and variety of small groups* we offer."

- ❖ Overall, parish clergy have much more positive feelings about their churches, whereas parishioners are more critical about various aspects of life in their parishes. And this is true for all U.S. Orthodox jurisdictions;
- ❖ Fewer than half of the American Orthodox priests surveyed think that their church communities adjust successfully to changing circumstances. Indeed, only 46% of clergy reported that their churches are either "where they need to be and do not need to change" (7%) or that their parishes "are doing pretty well making the necessary changes" (39%). More than half of American Orthodox parishes (54%) report that they face a need for a change, but are either too slow and indecisive in implementing the changes (32%) or ignore this need altogether (22%). According to the survey, among the five jurisdictions, the Serbian Orthodox parishes are in the most difficult situation regarding addressing the need for a change. Survey data indicate that 40% of Serbian parishes simply disregard the need for change, while 29% of Serbian parishes do not cope with the implementation of changes and adjustments. The Antiochian Archdiocese is the only jurisdiction where more than half of the parishes are either "where they need to be" or successfully implement needed changes and adjustments;
- ❖ The lack of resources (in particular, human energy and finances) was mentioned especially often by the Serbian Orthodox clergy as the major impediment to implementing the changes that need to be made in their parish communities. The lack of a unifying direction for the future and the absence of a model to implement instead of just maintaining the present situation were reported to be the major obstacles to needed changes in Carpatho-Russian and GOA parishes. In addition, "strong resistance from some parishioners" also plays significant role as an impediment to a change in Carpatho-Russian and GOA churches;
- ❖ Based on the clergy's responses to the question "What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?", all American Orthodox parishes can be divided into three categories:
 - The "*vibrant and flourishing* parishes," the parishes that responded "We are thriving and this should continue." Less than one-quarter (23%) of American Orthodox parishes are in this category;
 - The "*normal*" parishes: the parishes that responded "We are doing okay and this should continue." Nearly half (47%) of American Orthodox parishes are in this category;
 - The "*struggling parishes*," whose future is uncertain, the parishes that responded "We are doing okay now, but the future is very uncertain" or "We are struggling, and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future." 30% of all American Orthodox parishes are in this category. Out of the five jurisdictions, the Carpatho-Russian and Serbian Churches have the greatest percentage of parishes

whose future is uncertain. More than half (51%) of Carpatho-Russian and 40% of Serbian churches belong to the category of “struggling parishes.”

- ❖ A strong positive correlation exists between the fact that a parish is in the "thriving" category and parish's agreement with the statements:
 - "Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into the parish;"
 - "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have health, financial and personal needs;"
 - "Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges;"
 - "Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer."
- ❖ The parishes that pay attention to mutual control and accountability among parishioners are much more likely to be "thriving" parishes than the parishes that did not practice mutual control and accountability among parishioners;
- ❖ The parishes that embrace changes are much more likely to be "thriving" parishes than the churches that either are satisfied with their current situation and do not see the need for a change or realize this need but are unable to change.

DISCUSSION

American Orthodox parishes organize their religious and social lives in very different ways. Some of them limit themselves to worship services, while others develop a wide range of social and educational activities. Some church communities embrace innovation and change, while others emphasize their adherence to established practices. Some cherish their ethnic identity and make a conscious effort to preserve their ethnic heritage, while the others strive to be "pan-Orthodox" and/or "all-American" parishes. Some parishes consider social and religious outreach to the local community among their top priorities, while others are more "insular" and have few relations with their neighborhoods and the "religious other." The governance models and how decisions about the life of a parish are made also vary greatly from parish to parish.

Fr. Nicholas Ferencz, Orthodox scholar and priest in the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese, describes this diversity in American Orthodox parishes as "'modified congregationalism', which typifies the structure of Orthodox parishes in America.¹⁰" Indeed, the significant autonomy of a local parish community, has always been present in American Orthodox Churches to a much greater extent than in the "Old World." This distinct feature of American Orthodoxy has its roots in the ways that American parishes have been and continue to be founded. Generally, most parishes in the U.S. were not and are not created "from the top" by

¹⁰ Nicholas Ferencz. *American Orthodoxy and Parish Congregationalism*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press. 2015. p. vii.

Church leadership. Rather it is typically a group of lay people who organize a local worshipping community and then approach a bishop or jurisdiction for reception. In many parts of the U.S., "congregationalism" and autonomy of Orthodox parishes are augmented by significant geographic distances between parishes together with infrequent communications with diocesan centers.

In other instances, however, the isolation of parishes from each other is not geographical, but mental, as many parishes remain "ethno centric," catering primarily to the spiritual needs of their own "ethnic flock." The result - in the words of Fr. Nicholas Ferencz - is that "pastors and laypeople alike live in little separate islands, with little inter-parish communication most of the time."¹¹ He contends "that Orthodox theology and practice in regard to the definition and structure of the Church are widely, perhaps, wildly, divergent in America."¹² In a nutshell, historically in U.S., individual parishes have always had a relative flexibility and freedom in making decisions about the patterns of their social and religious lives and about either embracing certain rules and traditions or avoiding them.

One should keep in mind that these variations in local parish life have a significant influence on the laity's perception of the Orthodox Church at large. Indeed, most of the ordinary parishioners experience church life only locally: that is, their overall perception of the Orthodox Church is primarily based on "how things are done" in their home parishes. A relatively small proportion of church members have exposure to either inter-Orthodox cooperation (thus, they are familiar with parishes of various jurisdictions) or to the work of the Orthodox Church on a diocesan or national level.

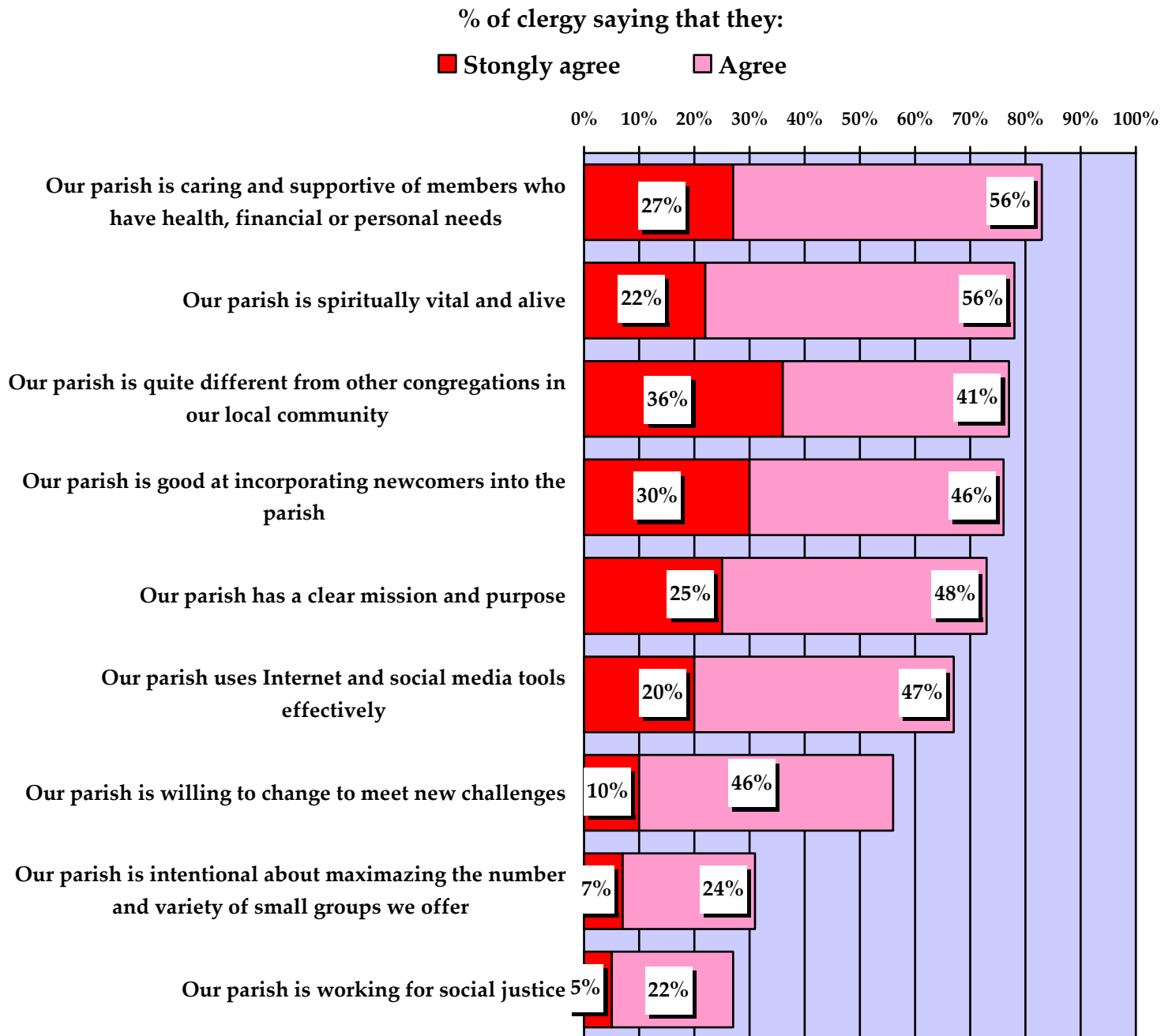
In this chapter, we will examine what we call "parish identity" - a number of various characteristics and features that, combined, create a unique local Orthodox Christian community.

The survey asked, "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parish?" The respondents were given nine statements describing various characteristics of parish life. With regard to each statement, the respondents could say: "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral/not sure," "disagree," or "strongly disagree." Fig. 9 offers a good picture of how clergy perceive their churches. It shows the percentage of the study participants who either "strongly agree" or "agree" with each statement

¹¹ Ibid., 206.

¹² Ibid., vii.

Fig. 9 “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parish?”



Three major observations can be made based on Fig. 9. First, overall American Orthodox priests have a fairly optimistic view on their parishes. This is especially true about four aspects of a local parish life, namely:

- ❖ being a loving community that cares about members who have personal problems and needs;
- ❖ being a spiritually vibrant Christian community;
- ❖ being a Christian congregation with clear and distinct religious identity;
- ❖ being a welcoming place that easily integrates new members into a parish community.

More than three-quarters of the respondents said that they either "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have financial and personal needs," "Our parish is spiritually vibrant and alive," "Our parish is quite different from other congregations in our local community," and "Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into parish."

Second, Fig. 9 indicates that a significant number of American Orthodox parishes are bound to established routines and are unwilling to change and explore "new ways of doing things." Indeed, only slightly more than half of the parishes (56%) agreed with the statement "Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges."

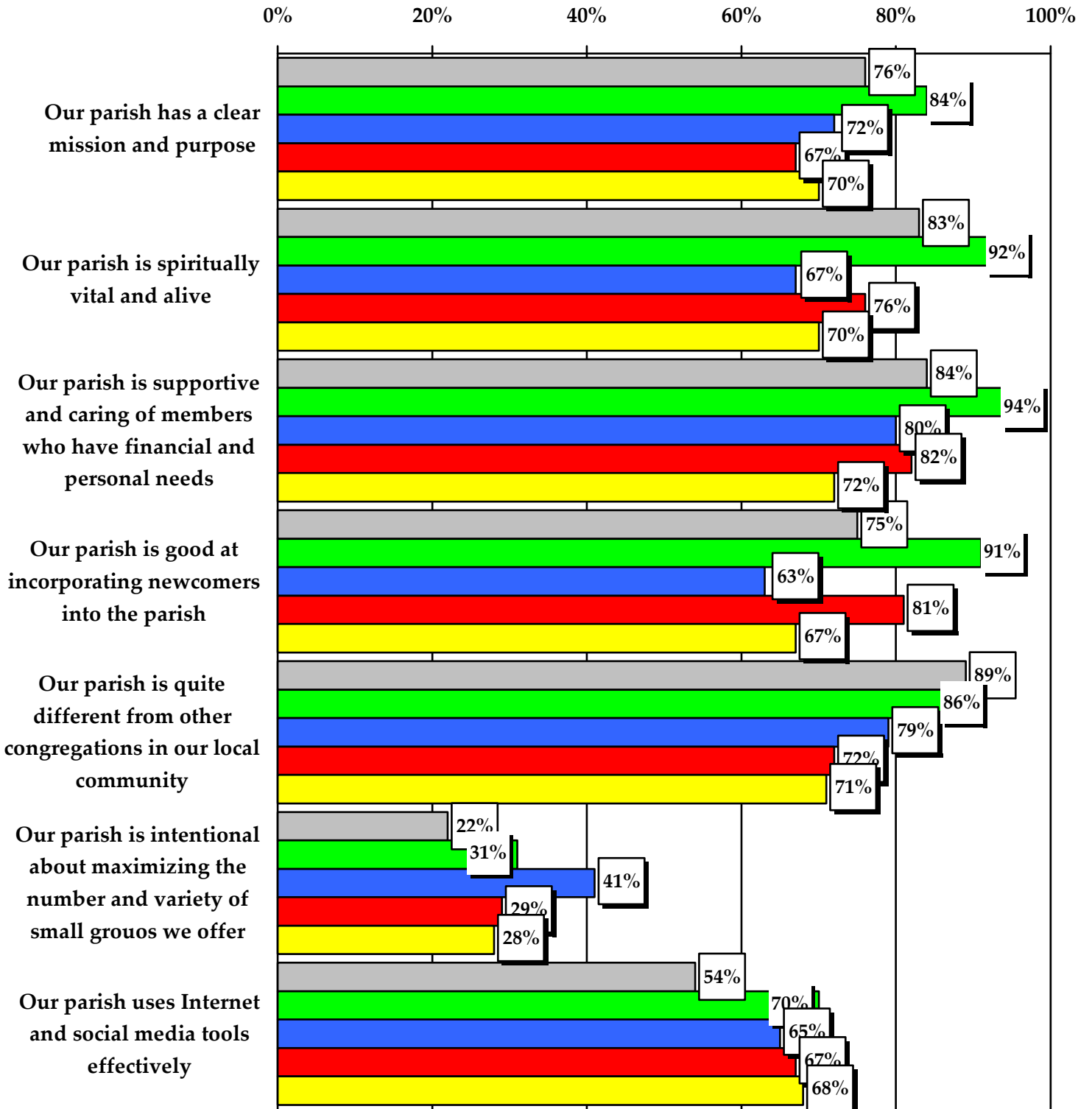
Third, Fig. 9 shows two areas that are absent in most Orthodox parishes: "social justice" work and the presence of small "interest groups" within the parish community. Less than one-third of the respondents agreed that "our parish is working for social justice" and "our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer." While social justice advocacy may not be a high priority for the Orthodox Church, having different small "interest groups" may help parishes - especially larger parishes - to better accommodate particular needs and interests of various categories of parishioners within the local church communities.

Are there any *significant* differences between priests from the Antiochian Archdiocese, Carpatho-Russian Diocese, GOA, OCA, and Serbian Orthodox Church in how they view and describe their parishes? The answer to this question is "yes." See Fig. 10.

Fig. 10 Seven Areas of Parish Life: the Differences between Antiochian, Carpatho-Russian, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox Churches.

% of respondents saying that they agree ("strongly agree" or "rather agree") with following statements about their parishes

■ ACROD parishes ■ AOCA parishes ■ GOA parishes ■ OCA parishes ■ Serbian Orthodox parishes



First, when it comes to having a “*clear vision for the parish's mission*” (in the survey statement "Our parish has a clear mission and purpose"), many more priests from Antiochian churches (84%) than the clergy of other jurisdictions feel that this is true about their parish communities. On the contrary, the OCA has the lowest percentage of clergy (67%) who think that their parishes have "a clear mission and purpose."

Second, when it comes to “*being a spiritually vibrant Christian community*” (in the survey statement "Our parish is spiritually vital and alive"), again Antiochian parishes are well ahead of other jurisdictions by the number of clergy who feel that their parishes are "spiritually vibrant and alive" (92%) In contrast, among all five jurisdictions, GOA churches are the least likely to be described by their pastors as being "spiritually vibrant and alive" (a combined 67% of clergy "agree" and "strongly agree").

Third, when it comes to “*caring about fellow parishioners who have problems and needs*” (in the survey statement "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have financial and personal needs"), the clergy of the Antiochian Archdiocese were most likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement, whereas the the Serbian Orthodox priests were least likely to agree (94% for Antiochian Orthodox parishes versus 72% for the Serbian Orthodox parishes).

Fourth, when it comes to “*incorporating newcomers into a parish community,*” the Antiochian parishes appear to be significantly more welcoming to new members, whereas GOA and Serbian churches tend to be more "insular." Indeed, significantly more priests from the Antiochian Archdiocese (91%) agreed with the statement: "Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into the parish." On the contrary, compared to other jurisdictions, GOA and Serbian clergy were significantly less likely to agree with this statement (63% of GOA and 67% of Serbian clergy agreed).

Fifth, among the parishes of the five jurisdictions, the Carpatho-Russian and Antiochian churches have the strongest sense of distinct religious identity. Compared to Serbian, GOA and OCA clergy, many more Antiochian and Carpatho-Russian priests feel that the statement, "Our parish is quite different from other congregations in our local community," properly describes their churches.

Sixth, we noted earlier that having a variety of small "interest groups" is not very common in American Orthodox parishes. Yet, compared to other Orthodox jurisdictions, the GOA has highest percentage of parishes (41%) that are "intentional about *maximizing the number and variety of small groups* we offer." The best

explanation for this fact is that the GOA churches tend to be significantly larger in membership and therefore have greater need to form small groups whose participants share common needs and interests. Similarly, GOA churches typically have greater material and financial resources available and, therefore, more possibilities for organizing and running these small groups.

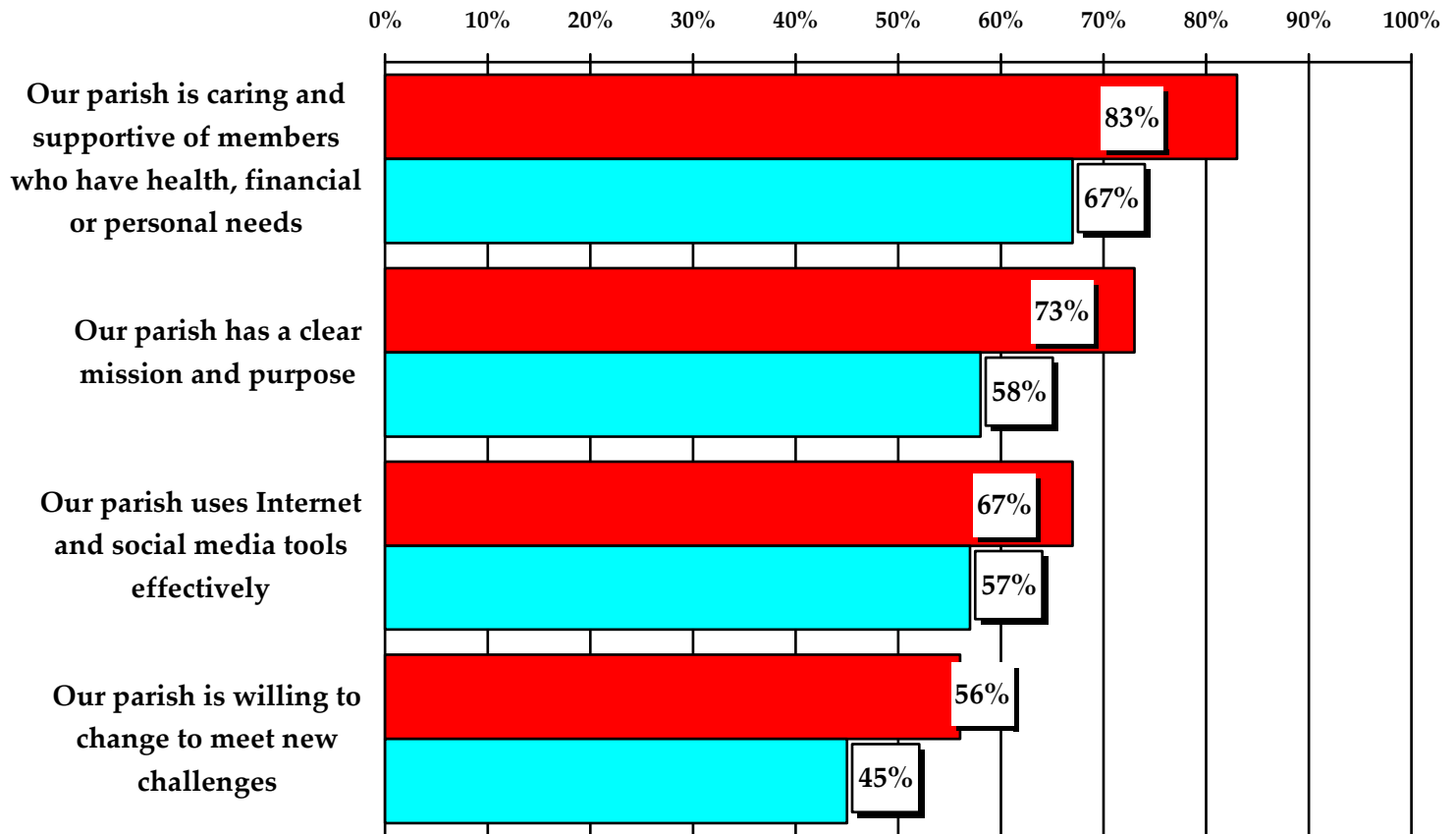
Finally, when it comes to effective usage of the Internet and social media, the parishes of the Carpatho-Russian diocese lag behind the churches of other jurisdictions. Indeed, significantly fewer Carpatho-Russian priests than Antiochian, GOA, OCA and Serbian clergy agreed "Our parish uses Internet and social media tools effectively."

A similar question - about agreement or disagreement with various statements about U.S. Orthodox parishes - was asked in the 2015 national study "Exploring Orthodox Generosity: Giving in U.S. Orthodox Parishes." While Orthodox parish clergy were the respondents in the "Parish Life Study," the participants of the "Exploring Orthodox Generosity" were *lay church members*. Four statements about parishes were identical in both studies. Thus, the question is: how similar or different are the opinions of clergy and lay church members about their parishes? See Fig. 11.

Fig. 11 Opinions of Clergy and Laity about their Parishes:

“Do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements about your parish?”

■ % of clergy who "Agree" and "Strongly agree" ■ % of laity who "Agree" and "Strongly agree"



The single most important conclusion from Fig. 11 is that parish clergy have more positive feelings, whereas parishioners are more "critical" about various aspects of their home churches. Indeed, significantly fewer lay church members than parish clergy agreed that:

- ❖ "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have financial or personal needs;"
- ❖ "Our parish has a clear mission and purpose;"
- ❖ "Our parish uses Internet and social media tools effectively;"
- ❖ "Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges."

Fig. 11 shows responses from Orthodox clergy and laity for all jurisdictions combined. When we looked at individual jurisdictions and compared opinions of their respective clergy and parishioners, the picture remained the same. That is, in all jurisdictions, clergy are more "optimistic" and lay church members are more "skeptical" about various aspects of the lives of their home parishes.

The next question is: "How strong is the need for change in the Orthodox parish life?" In other words, do clergy believe that their parish communities are "exactly where they need to be" or do they feel that changes are needed in order to increase parish's vitality and assure a bright future for a parish? The questionnaire asked: "Which of the following best describes your parish?" The respondents were given four options to respond:

- ❖ "We are where we need to be and do not need to change;"
- ❖ "We are doing pretty well making the necessary changes;"
- ❖ "We are changing slowly, but not fast enough nor significantly enough;"
- ❖ "We need to change to increase our vitality and viability, but the parish does not seem to realize it and/or does not want to make the necessary changes."

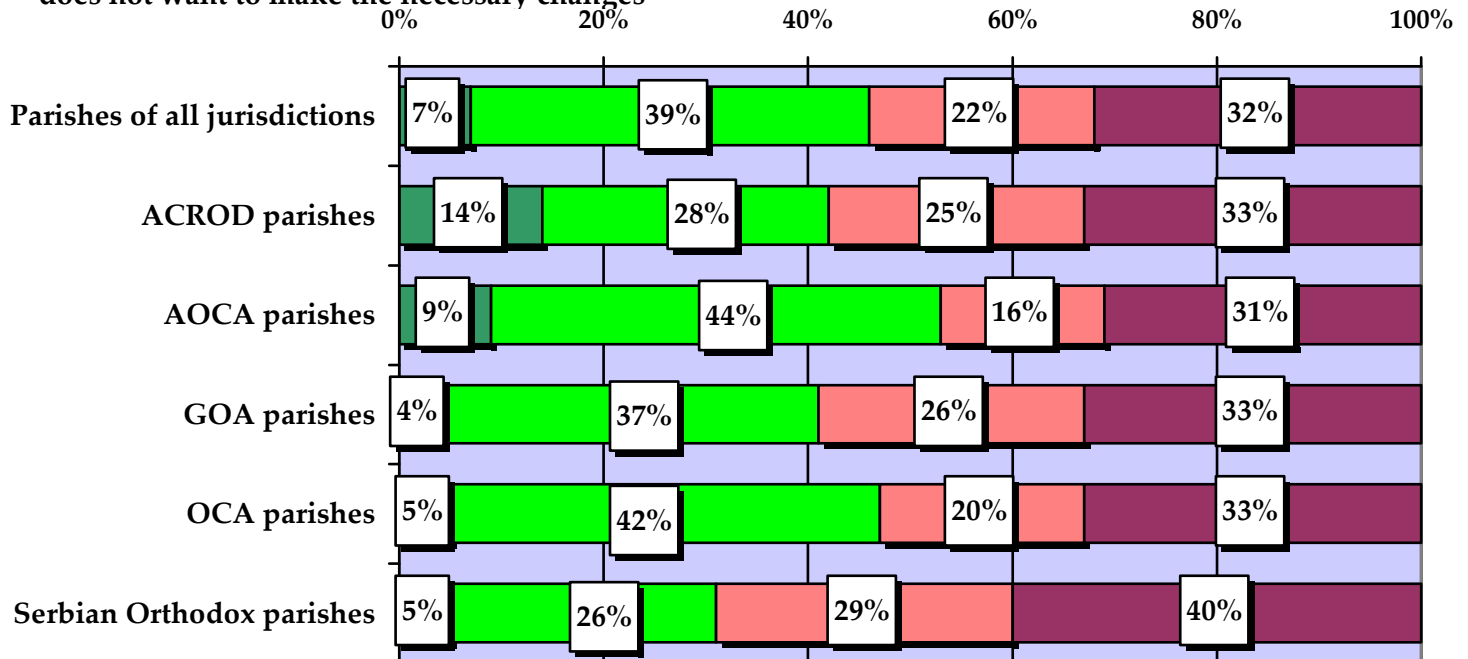
In essence, the first two answers describe a good/satisfactory situation, when a parish either functions well in its current form or is successful at making necessary changes and adjustments. The third and fourth answers, however, indicate an alarming situation, when change is needed, but the parish community either totally disregards this need or does not cope with implementation of innovations and adjustments. Fig. 12 shows the responses to this question by clergy from the five jurisdictions.

Fig. 12 The Need for Change in U.S. Orthodox Parishes:

"Which of the following best describes your parish?"

% parishes responding:

- We are where we need to be and do not need to change
- We are doing pretty well making the necessary changes
- We are slowly changing, but not fast enough nor significantly enough
- We need to change to increase our vitality and viability, but the parish does not seem to realize it and/or does not want to make the necessary changes



Two important conclusions can be drawn from Fig. 12. First, despite the fact that a strong majority of clergy described various aspects of the life of their parishes in a very positive manner (as observed earlier in Fig. 9), less than half of them are "happy" with the overall situation in their church communities. Indeed, only 46% of the priests think that their churches are either "where they need to be and do not need to change" (7%) or "are doing pretty well making the necessary changes" (39%). The situation in more than half of U.S. Orthodox parishes is rather alarming, because they face a need for a change, but are either too slow and indecisive in implementing the changes (32%) or simply ignore this need altogether (22%).

Second, among the five jurisdictions, the Serbian Orthodox Church appears to be in the most difficult situation. 40% of its parishes disregard the need for a change while 29% of its parishes do not cope well with implementing needed changes and adjustments. On the opposite end, the Antiochian Archdiocese is the only jurisdiction where more than half of the parishes are either "where they need to be" (9%) or successfully introduce the needed changes and adjustments (44%).

The question that arises from these observations is: "What are the major obstacles or reasons that prevent many parishes from so much needed changes?" To examine this question, the survey asked the parishes: "If your parish has difficulty changing, to what extent has each of the following made it more difficult for your parish to change?" See Fig. 13.

Fig. 13 Major Obstacles Preventing the Needed Changes in U.S. Orthodox Parishes:

"If your parish has difficulty changing, to what extent has each of the following made it more difficult for your parish to change?"

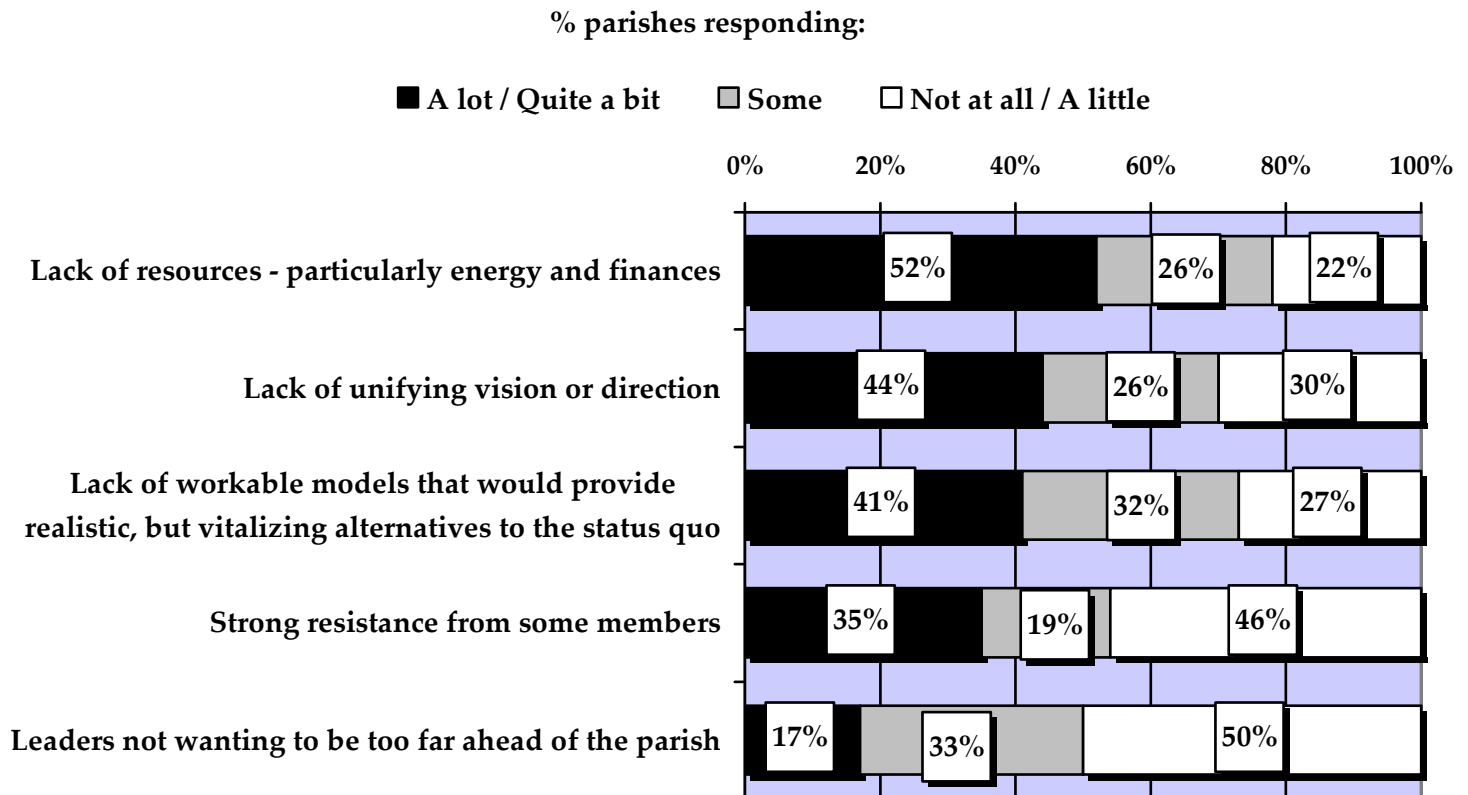


Fig. 13 shows that a lack of human energy and financial resources is by far the greatest obstacle for needed changes in the life of a local parish. More than half of the parishes reported that the "lack of resources - particularly energy and finances" makes it "quite a bit / a lot" more difficult for a parish to change.

The second and third important obstacles boil down to basically the same situation: the parish community realizes that there is a need for change, but does not know "where to go;" that is, there exists a "lack of unifying vision or direction" and/or a "lack of workable models that would provide realistic, but vitalizing alternatives to the status quo." More than 40% of parishes quoted these two reasons as the major obstacle to implementing the needed changes.

A relatively small number of parish clergy think that the major problem with implementing changes is related to resistance from church members (35%) or indecisiveness on the part of parish leaders (17%).

It should be noted that there are some telling variations among parishes of the five jurisdictions in how they describe the major obstacles to implementing the needed changes.

The lack of resources (in particular, human energy and finances) was especially often indicated by the Serbian Orthodox clergy as the major impediment to change in their parish communities. The lack of unifying direction for the future and/or the absence of a model that can be implemented instead of continuing the present situation are by far the major obstacles for change in Carpatho-Russian and GOA parishes. Finally, "strong resistance from some parishioners" also plays much greater role as an impediment to a change in Carpatho-Russian and GOA churches.

In order to better understand what else precludes the parishes from implementing the needed changes, the questionnaire asked respondents to describe and explain any "other major obstacles" to making the needed changes. Five consistent patterns emerged from the answers of the clergy. The first pattern was about "*apathy among church members.*" Here are some quotes exemplifying this pattern.

- ❖ "Lack of interest in changing. Some feel we are doing fine."
- ❖ "A complete (100%) lack of commitment to serve the church in any capacity. There needs to be at least one person other than the priest who can be a leader and show self-sacrificing love for the Church, and dedicate themselves much more than the level of dedication we have had thus far."
- ❖ "The vast majority of parishioners are convinced the parish will die and there is nothing they can do about it. They are assuming it will be around long enough to bury them."

The second pattern was about "*instability and constant 'turmoil' in parish membership*" caused by a variety of reasons. Here are some quotes exemplifying this pattern.

- ❖ "Excessive growth. Mother parish launching five new ones at light speed. Currently stretched to human capacity."
- ❖ "Parishioner turnover; people leave the city for work. Parish does a lot of evangelism but we can't grow due to the constant turnover."
- ❖ "A long-standing schism in the parish as the result of a priest leaving (15 years ago)."
- ❖ "Fluid membership environment."

The third pattern was about the perceived "*ethnocentrism*" of the *parish community*. Here are some quotes exemplifying this pattern.

- ❖ "Influx of new immigration slows down change."
- ❖ "Valuing ethnicity above the faith."
- ❖ "We still have a substantial 'ethnic' focus."

The fourth pattern was about the *lack of inter-Orthodox cooperation and Church unity*. Here are some quotes exemplifying this pattern:

- ❖ "Jurisdictionalism is killing us - we supposedly are 'the Church' in our area, but factionalism and lack of communication / forgiveness between clergy has effectively wiped out our thin witness."
- ❖ "Absence of jurisdictional unity (three small parishes within walking distance.)"

The last pattern was about *adverse economic or social environment* in the community where a parish is located. Here are some quotes exemplifying this pattern:

- ❖ "Poor economic area (9th poorest in the U.S.)."
- ❖ "We are in a depressed, declining community."
- ❖ "The city around us is dying, and Orthodox have moved away. In a Mormon environment it is hard to attract new members, and even after catechumens are baptized, they tend to move away for better work prospects."

The last question for examination in this chapter is: "How do American Orthodox parishes envision their future?" The questionnaire asked "What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?" Fig. 14 shows the responses to this question for all American Orthodox parishes combined and for the five individual jurisdictions.

**Fig. 14 The Vision for the Future of U.S. Orthodox Parishes:
"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"**

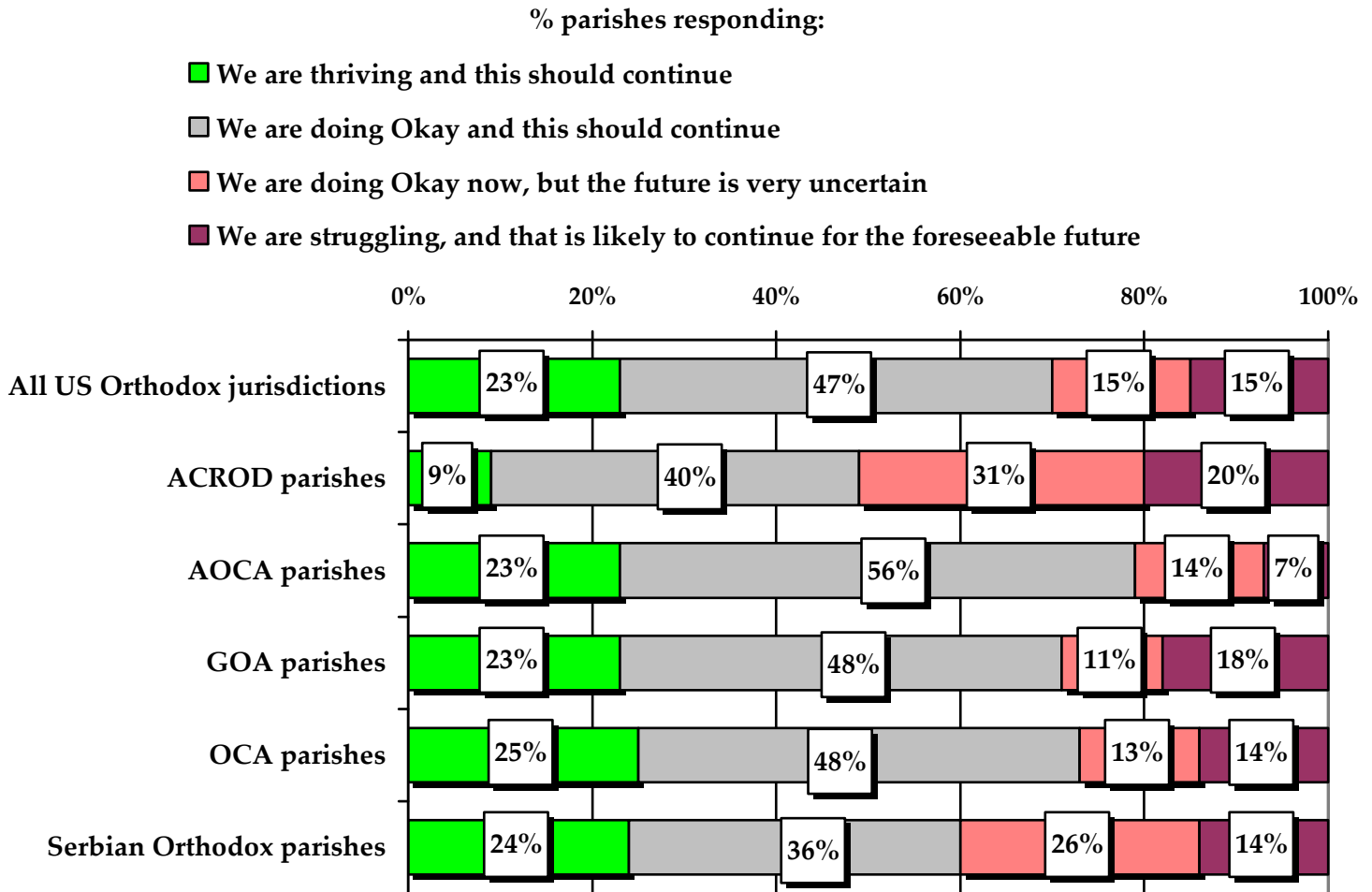


Fig. 14 allows for several important observations.

First, overall, the American Orthodox parishes we surveyed can be divided into three categories:

1. The truly *vibrant and flourishing and thriving* parishes, who responded: "We are thriving and this should continue." Fig. 14 shows that less than one-quarter (23%) of American Orthodox parishes are in this category.
2. The *"normal"* parishes, who responded: "We are doing okay and this should continue." Nearly half (47%) of American Orthodox parishes are in this category.
3. The *struggling* parishes. who responded "We are doing okay now, but the future is very uncertain" or "We are struggling, and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future." 30% of all American Orthodox parishes are in this category.

The picture presented in Fig. 14 should be alarming for American Orthodox Church leadership, not only because the number of thriving church communities is small (less than one in four), but also because the share of struggling parishes is significant: 30% of all parishes.

Second, regardless of the many differences between the Antiochian Archdiocese, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox Church, the share of the "thriving parishes" in these four major¹³ American Orthodox jurisdictions is remarkably similar: about one-quarter.

Third, out of the five jurisdictions, the Carpatho-Russian Diocese and Serbian Orthodox Church have the largest proportion of parishes whose future is uncertain. More than half (51%) of Carpatho-Russian and 40% of Serbian churches belong to category of struggling parishes.

Are there any distinct features and characteristics of the thriving parishes that distinguish them from the normal and the struggling parishes?"

The analysis of the survey data revealed several general characteristics of the thriving parishes that distinguish them from the normal and the struggling parishes. First, the previous chapter discussed the responses of parishes to the question, "Which of the following best describes your parish's approach to how members hold each other accountable for active participation and faithful living?" Recall that answering this question the parishes had three choices:

- ❖ "This is not really something we emphasize;"
- ❖ "We have no formal way of monitoring and doing this, but it regularly happens informally;"
- ❖ "It is important and regular practice of our parish."

We found that compared to the parishes which do not pay attention to mutual control and accountability among parishioners, the churches where mutual control and accountability is an established practice are much more likely to be in the category of the thriving parishes. See Fig. 15.

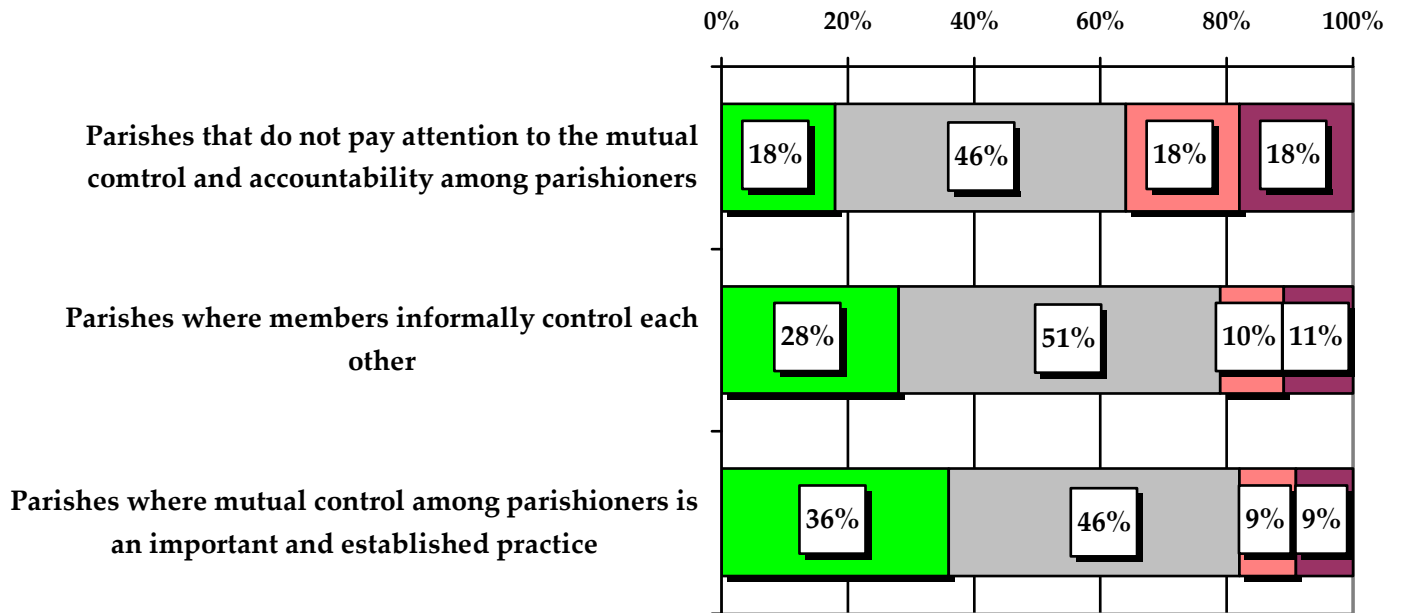
¹³ We use term "major jurisdictions" in reference to the size of church membership. Measuring by number of members, among all US Orthodox jurisdictions, the Antiochian Archdiocese, the GOA, the OCA and the Serbian Orthodox Church can be qualified as four major jurisdictions.

Fig. 15 Mutual Accountability and Control among Parishioners Versus Clergy Vision for the Future of their Parishes

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

% parishes responding:

- We are thriving and this should continue
- We are doing Okay and this should continue
- We are doing Okay now, but the future is very uncertain
- We are struggling, and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future



Second, we analyzed possible connections between nine areas of parish life that were discussed earlier in this chapter (see Fig. 9) and the fact that certain parishes are thriving parishes. A strong positive correlation emerged between the fact that a parish a thriving parish and parish's agreement with the statements:

- ❖ "Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into the parish;"
- ❖ "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have health, financial and personal needs;"
- ❖ "Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges;"
- ❖ "Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer."

Figures 16a-d demonstrate this finding.

Fig. 16a Agreement with Statement "Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into the parish" Versus Clergy Vision for the Future of their Parishes

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

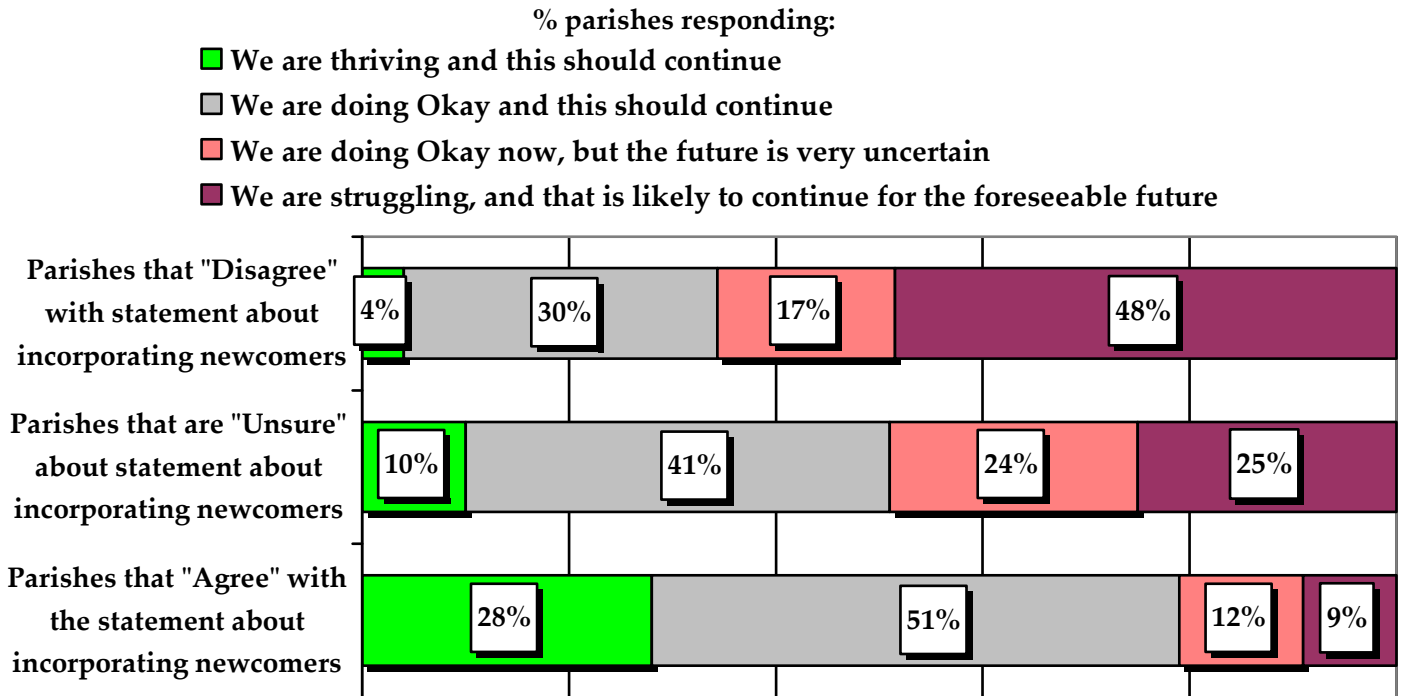


Fig. 16b Agreement with Statement "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have health, financial, and personal needs" Versus Clergy Vision for the Future of their Parishes

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

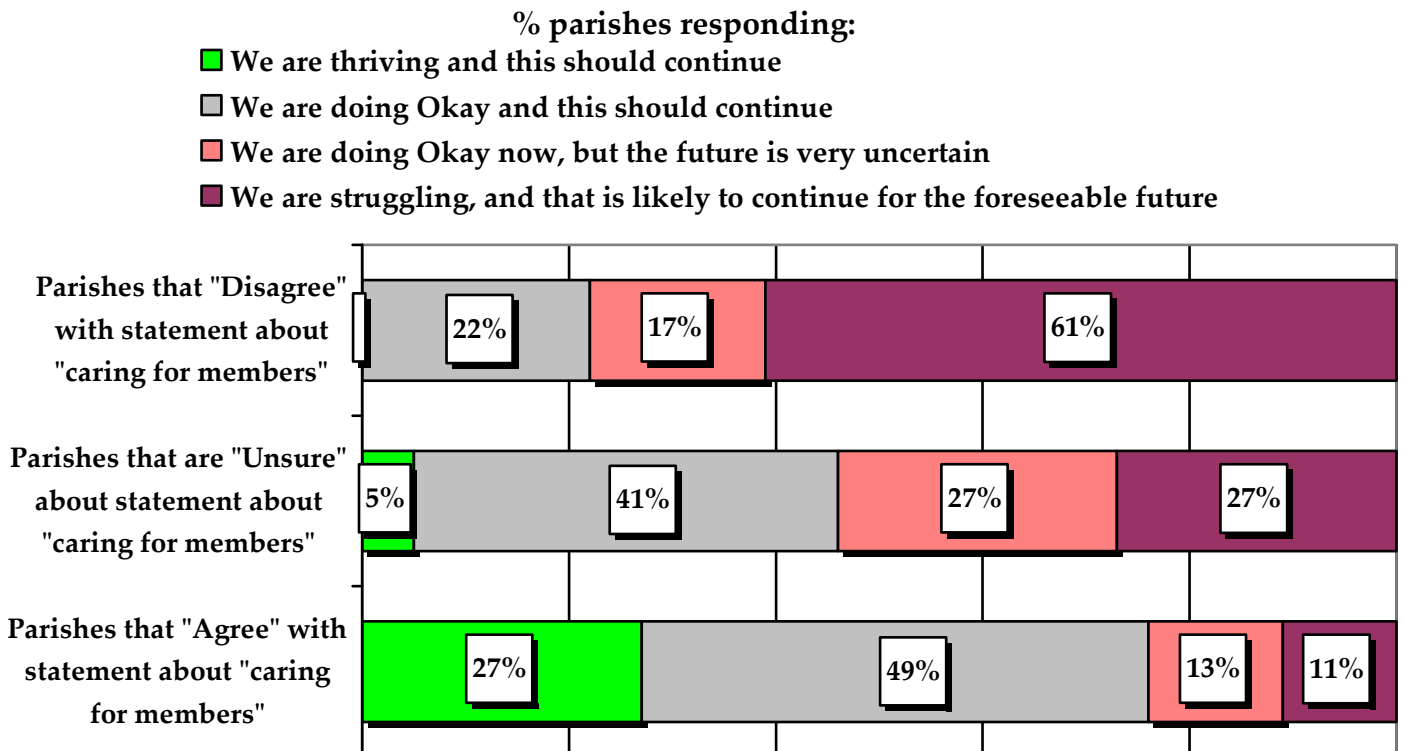


Fig. 16c Agreement with Statement "Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges" Versus Clergy Vision for the Future of their Parishes

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

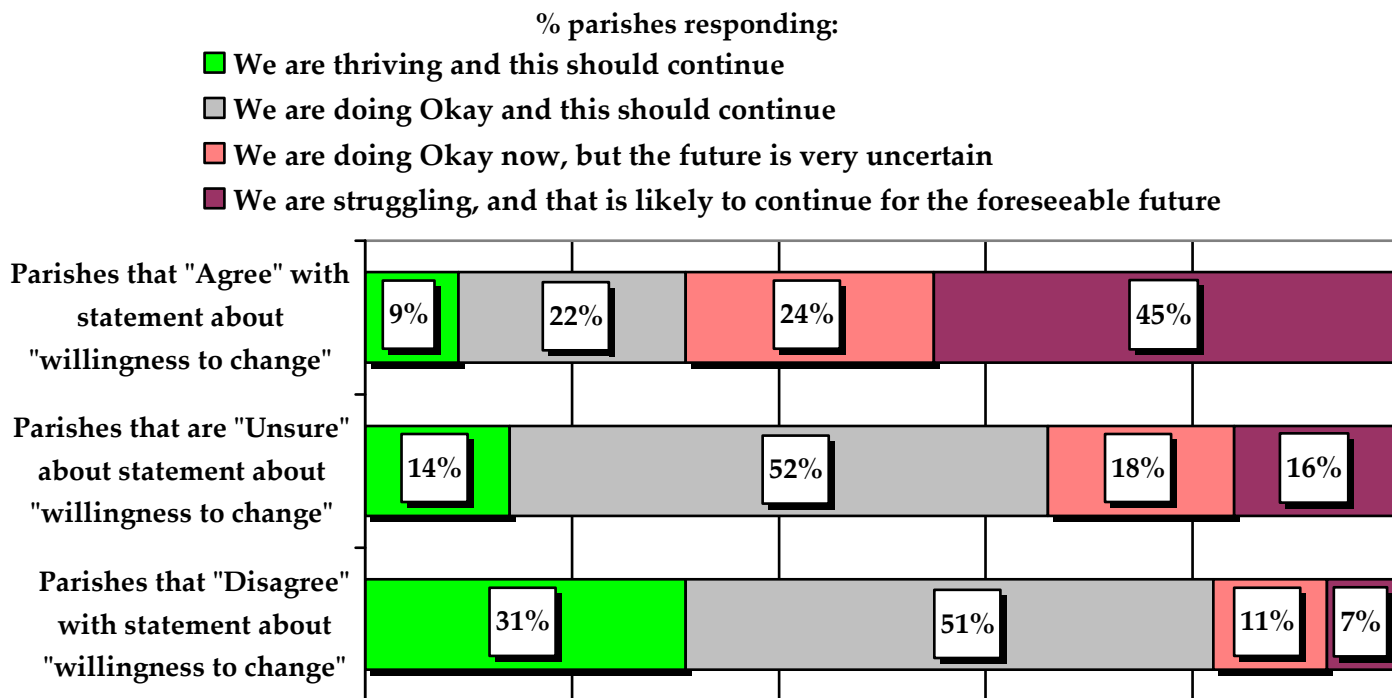
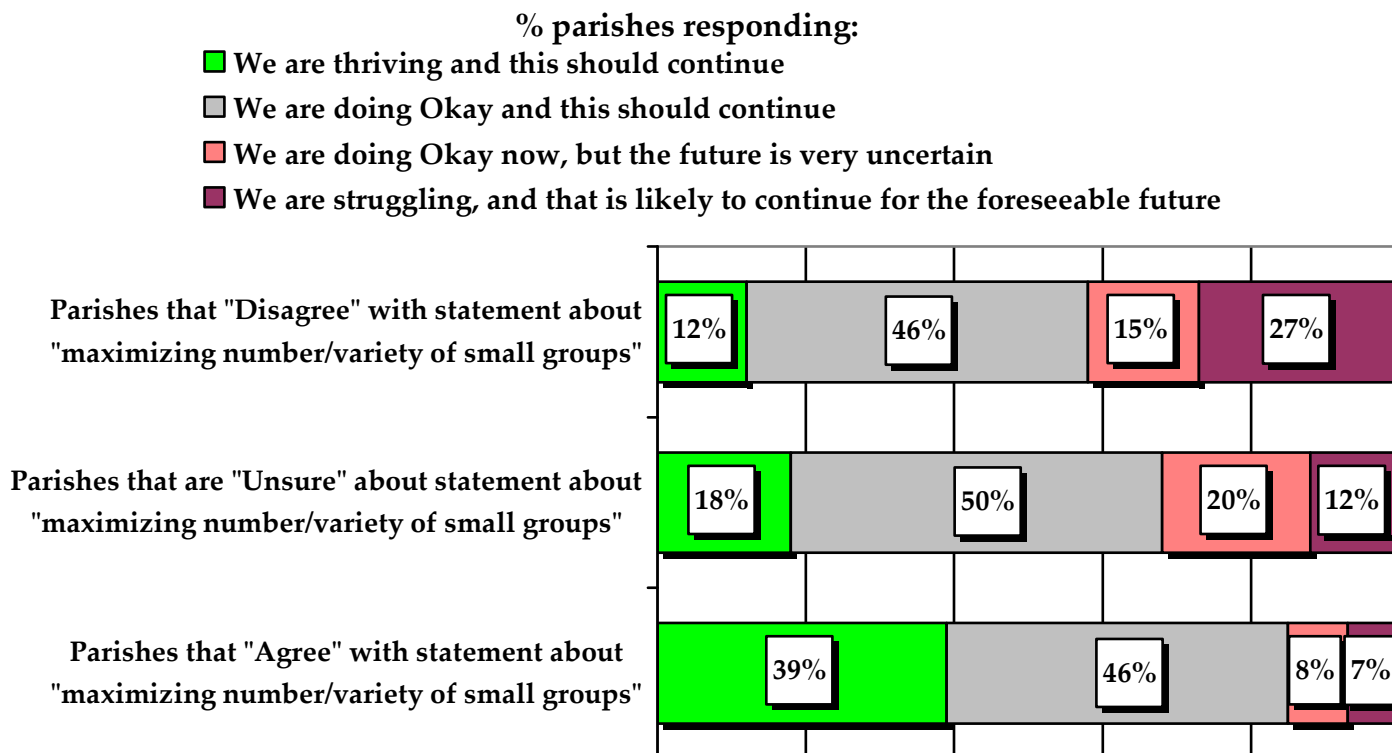


Fig. 16d Agreement with Statement "Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer" Versus Clergy Vision for the Future of their Parishes

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"



In a nutshell, the chances of a parish to be a "thriving" local church community are much higher if a parish is:

- ❖ a "welcoming" parish that easily incorporates newcomers;
- ❖ a "loving" parish that takes care of the needs of its members;
- ❖ an "experimental" parish that is willing to try new things;
- ❖ a parish offering variety of "interest groups" within a parish community.

Out of the four factors listed above, statistically the *strongest predictor* of being a thriving parish is parish's agreement with the statement: "Our parish is willing to change and to meet new challenges."

This finding was confirmed when we compared responses of the parishes to the question about the need for change (Fig. 12) and their answers to the question "What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?" See Fig. 17.

Fig. 17 Approaches of the Parishes towards Changes Versus Clergy Vision for the Future of their Parishes

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

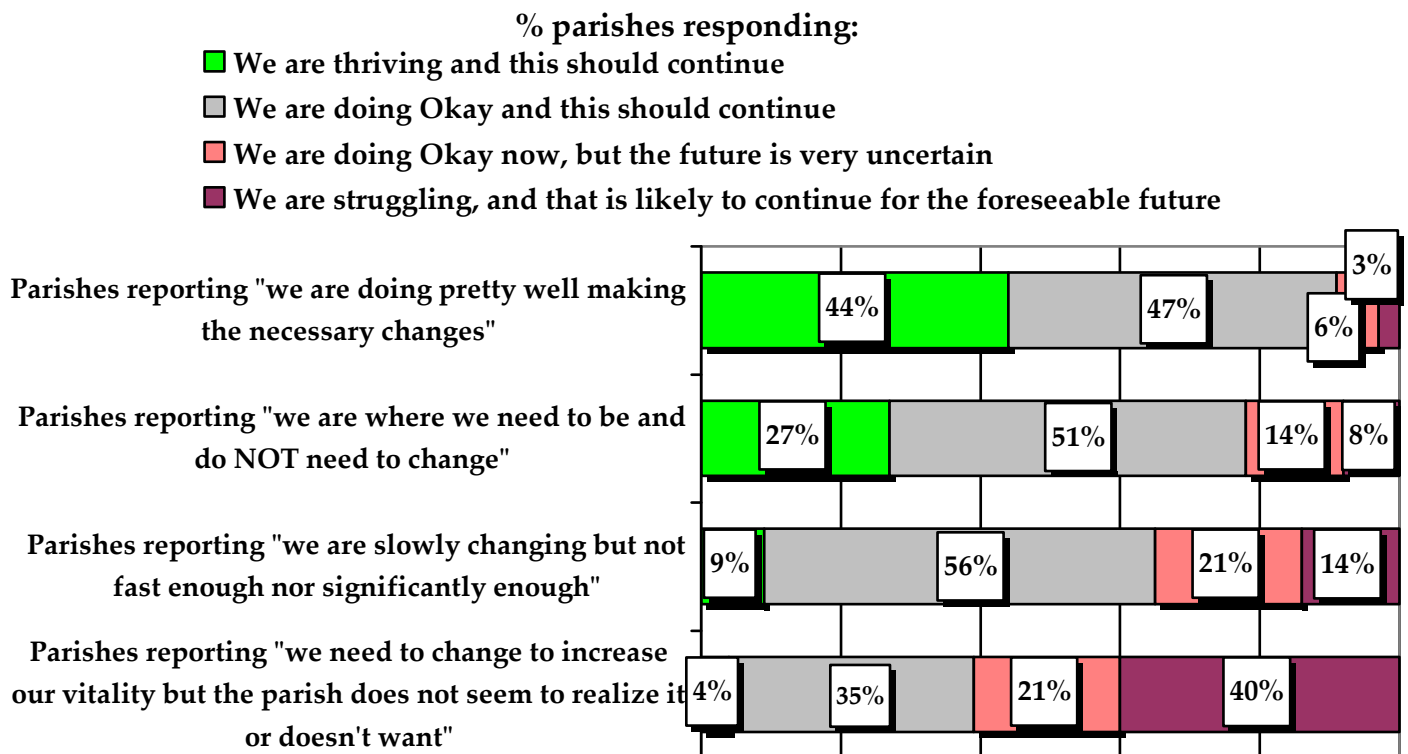


Fig. 17 shows that the parishes that are willing to change and are capable of implementing the changes are much more likely to be thriving parishes than the churches that either are satisfied with their current situation and do not see the need for a change or realize this need but are unable to change. To conclude, the vitality and bright future of a local church community depends largely on this community's willingness and ability to implement and cope with necessary changes.

IV. The Vision of Parish Clergy for Orthodox Church Unity in America.

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ Significantly more American Orthodox priests (71%) than American Orthodox bishops (58%) envision the future of Orthodoxy in America in the form of an administratively united Church;
- ❖ GOA, OCA, Antiochian, Carpatho-Russian and Serbian Orthodox parish clergy hold different positions with regard to the question of Orthodox Church unity in America:
 - According to the survey, the vast majority of priests in the Antiochian Archdiocese (78%) and the Orthodox Church in America (90%) support the creation of an administratively united American Church. Nearly all of them envision such united Church as a full-fledged autocephalous Church.
 - The overwhelming majority of clergy in the Carpatho-Russian Diocese (72%) and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (65%) also favor administrative Church unity in America. However, unlike Antiochian and OCA clergy, most Carpatho-Russian and GOA priests think that this united Church should have a status of an autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
 - The clergy of Serbian Orthodox Church are nearly equally divided between those who support administrative Church unity in America (44%) and those who reject this idea (41%).
- ❖ Out of the three major American Orthodox jurisdictions (AOCA, GOA and OCA), the OCA has the greatest uniformity of bishops' and priests' opinions about the future of Orthodoxy in America: 100% of OCA bishops and 85% of OCA parish clergy want to have an administratively united and full-fledged autocephalous American Orthodox Church;
- ❖ In the Antiochian Archdiocese, there is a discrepancy between the attitudes of priests and hierarchs towards Church unity in America. 78% of AOCA parish clergy support the creation of an administratively united Church in comparison with only 28% of AOCA bishops;
- ❖ Attitudes towards Church unity in America among Orthodox clergy depend on the age of the priests. The younger priests (up to 40 years old) are significantly more supportive of the creation of an administratively united Church in America than the middle-aged (41-60 years old) or older (older than 60 years old) clergy.

DISCUSSION:

The issue of the future of the American Orthodox Church is at the very heart of the work of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Will an administratively united Church ever be created? If a unified Church will come into existence, what will be her status and relations with numerous mother Churches? Presently, there is no clear answer to these crucial questions.

In order to better understand the position of American Orthodox hierarchs with regard to these questions, in 2015, the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops administered the study "Exploring the Path to the Future of Orthodoxy in America." One of the questions asked American Orthodox bishops: "Overall, what is your personal vision for the future of Orthodox Church in the United States after the Great and Holy Council of 2016?" The bishops were given five options to answer:

- ❖ Full-fledged autocephalous Church;
- ❖ Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *but only for a period of time* and as an interim step towards full autocephaly;
- ❖ Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate *as a permanent solution*;
- ❖ I don't personally believe that the time is "ripe" for creating an administratively united Church in America. For the time being, the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their presence and authority;
- ❖ Difficult to tell. At this point, I do not have any opinion on this matter.

The responses of hierarchs in Tab. 6 show that there are three groups of American Orthodox bishops with different visions for the future of Orthodoxy in America.

Tab. 6 "Overall, what is your personal vision for the future of Orthodox Church in the United States after the Great and Holy Council in 2016?"

Answers of all US Orthodox bishops (all jurisdictions combined)	%
Full-fledged autocephalous Church	28%
Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, <i>but only for a period of time</i> and as an interim step towards full autocephaly	11%
Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate <i>as a permanent solution</i>	19%
I don't personally believe that the time is "ripe" for creating an administratively united Church in America. For the time being, the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their presence and authority	30%
Difficult to tell. At this point, I do not have any opinion on this matter	12%

The first group includes the bishops who are supportive of the creation of a unified Church in the United States and who envision such Church as a full-fledged autocephalous Church. 39% of American Orthodox bishops belong to this group. Some of them (28%) feel that the time for the full autocephaly is "ripe" now, while some (11%) think that there is a need for an interim step towards full autocephaly in the form of an "autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate."

The second group is formed by those hierarchs who are supportive of the creation of a unified Church, but think that the American Church should have a status of self-ruling autonomous Church (not autocephalous) in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. One fifth of American Orthodox bishops (19%) belong to this group.

The last group includes almost one-third (30%) of the American bishops, those who do not support administrative unity of Orthodoxy in the United States in the foreseeable future. It is possible, of course, that some of these bishops do not reject - in principle - the creation of a united Church in some point in the distant future, but for the time being their position is clear: "the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their presence and authority."

In a nutshell, only slightly more than half of American Orthodox bishops (58%) today believe in and envision administrative Church unity in America (either in the form of autocephalous or autonomous Church), while almost one-third of hierarchs (30%) reject this idea.

But to what extent do the opinions of American Orthodox hierarchs about Orthodox Church unity in America reflect the attitudes of the rank-and-file Orthodox parish clergy? The study "Orthodox Christian Churches in the 21st Century America" asked Orthodox parish priests: "Many church leaders and experts have argued for administrative Orthodox Church unity in the United States. Overall, what is your personal vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the United States?" The respondents were given four options to answer:

- ❖ Full-fledged autocephalous Church;
- ❖ Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate;
- ❖ I don't personally believe that there is a need for creating an administratively united Church in America. For the time being, the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their presence and authority;
- ❖ Difficult to tell. I do not have any opinion on this matter;

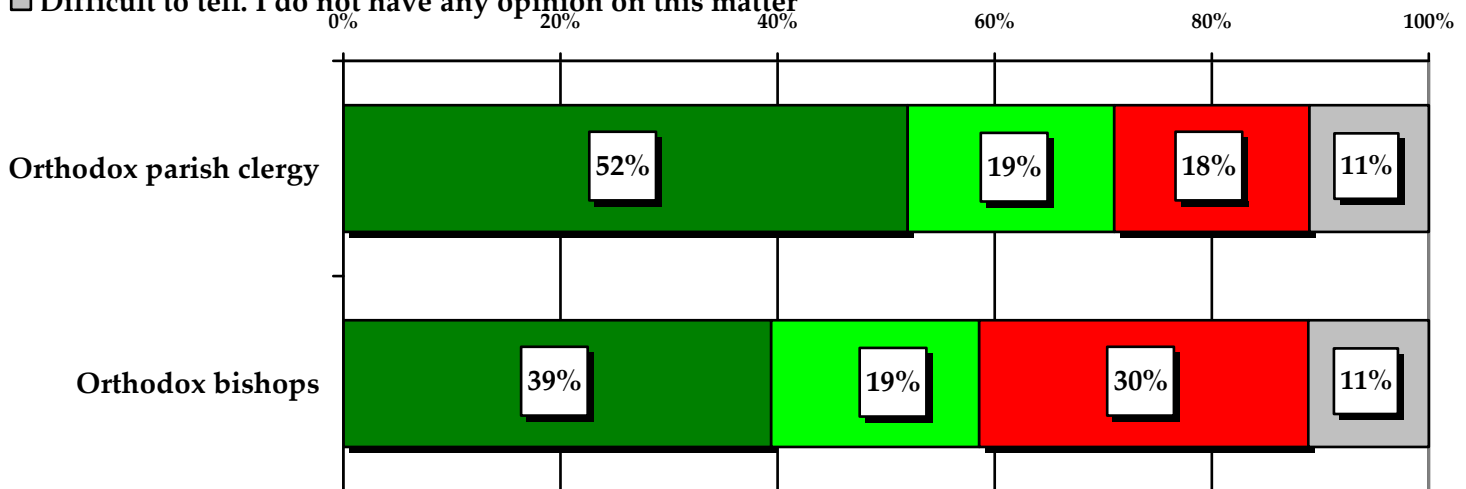
Fig. 18 compares the answers of American Orthodox bishops with opinions of American Orthodox parish clergy. In the case of the bishops, the answers "full-fledged autocephalous Church" and "self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *but only for a period of time* and as an interim step towards full autocephaly" are merged into one single category of bishops who are supportive of the creating of the autocephalous American Orthodox Church.

Fig. 18 Attitudes towards Orthodox Church Unity in America: US Bishops Versus Parish Clergy

"Overall, what is your personal vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the United States?"

% of parish clergy and bishops responding:

- Full-fledged autocephalous church
- Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
- I don't personally believe that there is a need for creating an administratively united Church in America. For the time being, the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their independent presence and authority.
- Difficult to tell. I do not have any opinion on this matter



The most important conclusion from the picture in Fig. 18 is simple: significantly more American Orthodox priests (71%) than bishops (58%) envision the future of Orthodoxy in America in the form of an administratively united Church (either as an autocephalous or as an autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarchate).

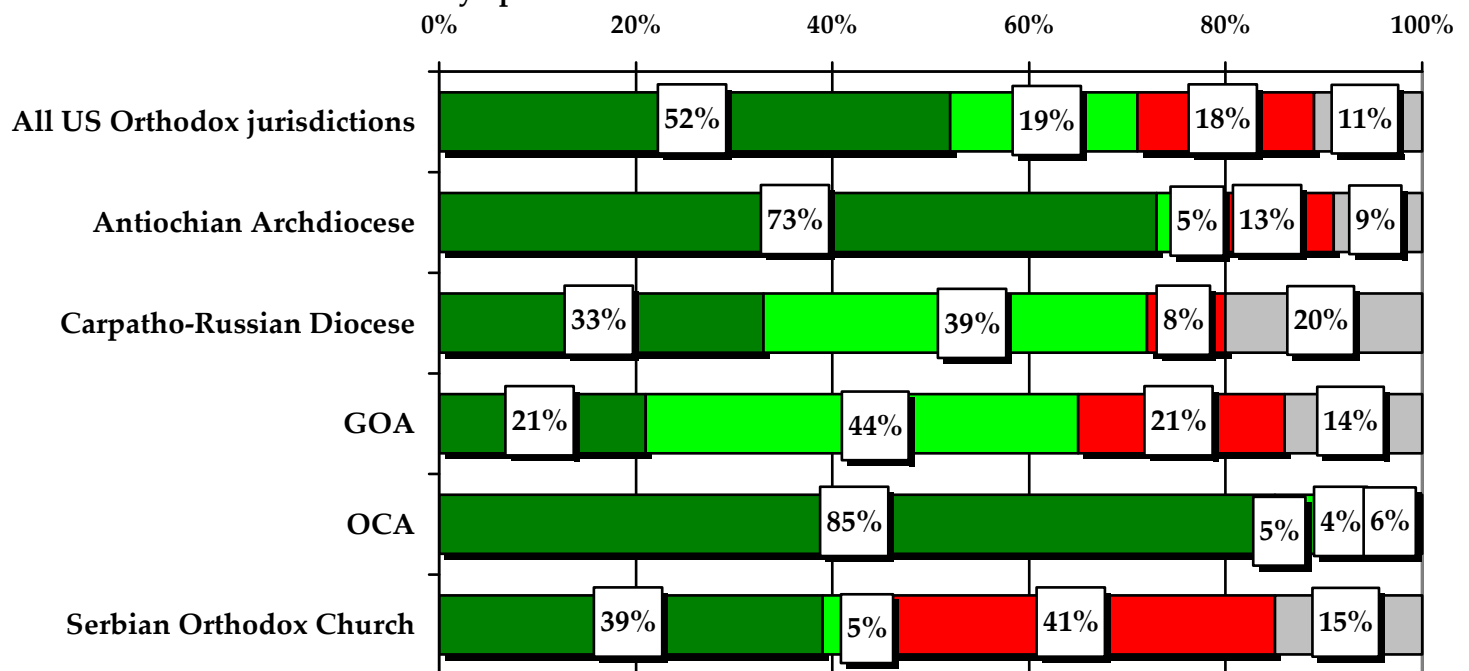
It should be noted, however, that the clergy of individual Orthodox jurisdictions have quite different opinions about the future of American Orthodoxy. See Fig. 19.

Fig. 19 Parish Clergy Vision for the Orthodox Church Unity in America: Differences Among Jurisdictions

"Overall, what is your personal vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the United States?"

% parish clergy responding:

- Full-fledged autocephalous church
- Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
- I don't personally believe that there is a need for creating an administratively united Church in America. For the time being, the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their independent presence and authority.
- Difficult to tell. I do not have any opinion on this matter



Among the clergy of the five jurisdictions for which we have reliable data, one can distinguish three positions.

First, the vast majority of the priests in the Antiochian Archdiocese (78%) and the Orthodox Church in America (90%) support creation of an administratively united American Orthodox Church. Further, nearly all of these clergy envision this Church as a full-fledged autocephalous Church. Very few Antiochian (13%) and OCA clergy (4%) think that American Orthodoxy should remain divided among individual jurisdictions.

Second, the overwhelming majority of clergy in the Carpatho-Russian Diocese (72%) and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (65%) also favor administrative Church unity in America. Unlike Antiochian and OCA clergy, however, most Carpatho-Russian and GOA priests think that this Church should have a status of an autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Lastly, the clergy of the Serbian Church are nearly equally divided between those who support administrative Church unity in America (44%) and those who reject this idea (41%).

Fig. 20 on the next page allows the comparison of the opinions of clergy versus hierarchs in three individual jurisdictions (Antiochian Archdiocese, GOA and OCA) on the subject of Orthodox Church unity in America.

Fig. 20 shows that among three major American Orthodox jurisdictions, the OCA has the greatest uniformity of opinions about the future of Orthodoxy in America among bishops and parish clergy: 100% of OCA bishops and 85% of OCA parish clergy want to have administratively united and full-fledged autocephalous American Orthodox Church.

Differently, in the Antiochian Archdiocese, there is a significant discrepancy between the attitudes of priests and hierarchs towards Church unity in America. 78% of AOCA parish clergy support the creation of an administratively united Church, while only 28% of AOCA bishops hold this position.

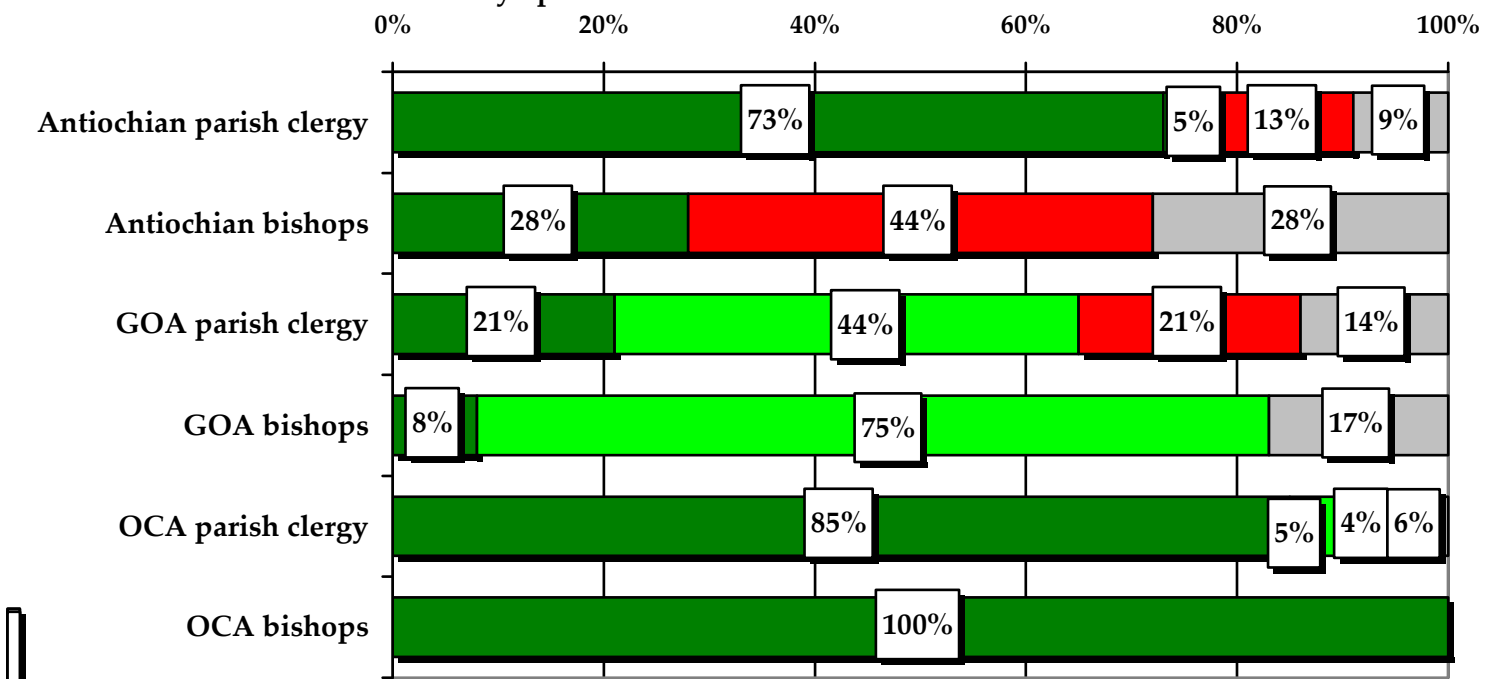
Finally, in the GOA, somewhat more bishops (83%) than parish clergy (65%) are supportive of an administratively united American Orthodox Church. However, both, Greek Orthodox hierarchs and priests agree that a potentially united Church should be an autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Fig. 20 AOCA, GOA and OCA Parish Clergy and Bishops: Opinions About the Future of the Orthodox Church in the USA

"Overall, what is your personal vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the United States?"

% of parish clergy and bishops responding:

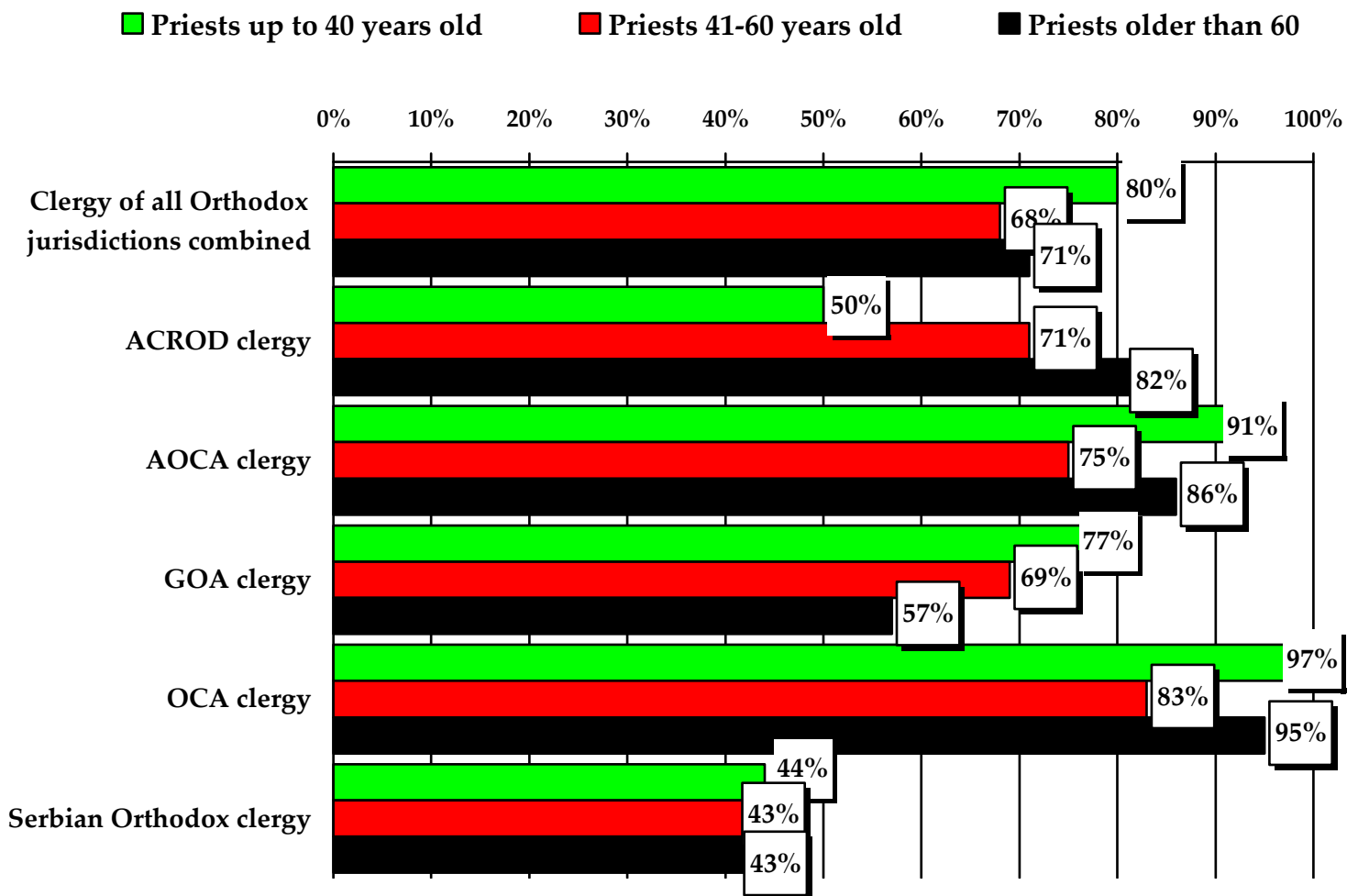
- Full-fledged autocephalous church
- Self-ruling autonomous Church in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
- I don't personally believe that there is a need for creating an administratively united Church in America. For the time being, the current jurisdictions should continue to maintain their independent presence and authority.
- Difficult to tell. I do not have any opinion on this matter



Survey data revealed that attitudes towards Church unity in America depend on the age of the clergy. As a general rule, younger priests (up to 40 years old) are significantly more supportive of the creation of an administratively united Church in America than middle-aged (41-60 years old) or older (over 60 years old) clergy. Fig. 21 shows that this is true for the clergy of all jurisdictions combined and for the priests in the three largest American Orthodox jurisdictions: AOCA, GOA, and OCA.

Fig. 21 Attitudes towards Orthodox Church Unity in America by Age of the Clergy:

% of clergy in various age categories who support creation of unified American Orthodox Church either as an autocephalous Church or an autonomous Church in jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarchate



V. Young Adult Members and Young Adult Ministries in US Orthodox Christian Parishes.

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ Young adults (persons ages 18-34) constitute 12% of active Orthodox church members. This figure (12%) is only half of the presence of young adults (23%) in the US general population. In only 8% of Orthodox parishes the percentage of young adults is equal or higher than 23%;
- ❖ Among individual jurisdictions, the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese has the lowest percentage (8%) of young adults among parishioners, while the Antiochian Archdiocese has the largest presence (15%) of young adults among regularly participating members;
- ❖ Only a small minority (15%) of Orthodox parishes consider young adult ministries as one of their top priorities. There is no significant difference among individual Orthodox jurisdictions in this prioritization.
- ❖ Only one-in-five Orthodox parishes (22%) evaluated their young adult ministries as "Good/Excellent," while 37% of churches judged their young adult ministries as "Poor;" Compared to other jurisdictions, the Antiochian Archdiocese has more parishes (31%) with "Good/Excellent" young adults ministries;
- ❖ Only 9% of parishes developed strategies that are geared to creating opportunities or programs specifically for young adults;
- ❖ Only one-third (35%) of parishes have designated leaders whose primary responsibility is to work with young adults (including 28% with volunteers serving as young adult leaders and 7% with part- or full-time professionals);
- ❖ Survey data show that having designated young adult leaders is *very important* for thriving young adult ministries and growth in young adult members. Parishes with designated young adult leaders are much more likely to grow in the number of young adults and report "Good/Excellent" young adult ministries than the other parishes. Remarkably, this survey data also suggest that it does not make much difference whether these leaders are volunteers or paid professionals (although this answer may change if the survey were expanded to youth leaders): what is most important is to have a person whose clear responsibility is to engage young adults;
- ❖ The five activities/programs that are offered most frequently to young adults in Orthodox parishes are: "community service activities" (offered in 57% of parishes), "fellowship groups" (offered in 52% of parishes), "web, social media sites" (offered in 46% of parishes), "engagement, premarital groups" (offered in 45% of parishes) and "scripture study groups" (offered in 44% of parishes). On the opposite

end are four activities/programs that are rather rarely offered to young adults. These "rare" young adult ministries are "parenting groups/classes" (only 18% of parishes offer this ministry), "worship services specifically for young adults" (13%), "dating groups" (10%) and "singles groups" (9%);

- ❖ Offering young adults the opportunities (1) *to learn more about the Orthodox Faith* (via "scripture study groups/classes," "theology and/or contemporary issues study groups/classes," "prayer groups, spiritual retreats"); and (2) the possibility *to reach out into wider community* (via "community service activities," "mission trips") are the two most crucial areas of activities for the overall success of young adult ministries and attracting young adult church members. Conversely, offering young adults various "social" activities (such as "engagement, premarital groups," "recreational, sport groups," "marriage groups/classes," "parenting groups/classes," "dating groups," "singles groups") has a relatively small effect on attracting and engaging the young adult church members;
- ❖ If Orthodox parishes desire to improve their young adult ministries and attract more young adult members, they should pay much greater attention to "mission trips," "prayer groups, spiritual retreats" and "theology and contemporary issues study groups/classes" specifically designed for young adults;
- ❖ Out of seven characteristics describing the style of worship in an Orthodox parish, the words "joyful" and "inspirational" have the strongest relation with a parish's growth in young adult members and presence of "Good/Excellent" young adult ministries. In other words, *the parishes where worship services are "joyful" and "inspirational" are the parishes that are very likely to grow in the young adult members and have "Good/Excellent" young adult ministries*. On the opposite end are two characteristics of worship that have relatively little or no influence: worship being "reverent" or "innovative." In other words, the fact that a parish has a "reverent" or "innovative" style of worship has no impact on parish's growth in young adult members and presence of thriving young adult ministries;
- ❖ Young adults are especially attracted to the parishes that offer vibrant spiritual life and are open to and welcome new people into a parish community. The presence of various small interest groups in a parish, effective usage of social media, parish's readiness for innovation and change, mutual support and help among parishioners, involvement of a parish in a social justice work, clarity of vision for a parish's future and other characteristics also have a positive influence on attracting young adults. Yet, it is spiritual vibrancy and openness to newcomers that have special appeal for the young adults;
- ❖ The vast majority of parish clergy (71%) believe that the greatest problem in ministering to young adult members are young adults themselves, because they have little interest in participating in parish life;

- ❖ The involvement of a parish with a local OCF chapter and parish's success in serving its own young adult members go hand in hand with each other. That is, compared to other parishes, the parishes that are involved with local OCF chapters:
 - Have significantly higher presence of young adults among parishioners
 - Have experienced growth in the number of young adult parishioners in the past three years
 - Are much more likely to evaluate their young adult ministries as "Good/Excellent"
 - ❖ Typically, the work of a parish with a local OCF chapter is limited to a parish priest who serves as its spiritual advisor. Less than half of the parishes that are involved with OCF either offer to OCF chapters some financial support (48%) or sponsor various OCF events (42%). And only one-in-seven (14%) of parishes that are involved with OCF have permanent boards/committees whose primary goal is to work with OCF chapters.
-

DISCUSSION:

Young adults pose an urgent and difficult challenge for American religious congregations, and Orthodox parishes are not exempt from this challenge. On the one hand, young adult members are crucial for church growth and vitality. This is true both demographically (i.e., growing young families with children) and also because young adults are more likely than older church members to bring into a congregation new energy, talents, approaches and capacity to “think out of the box.” On the other hand, recent studies show¹⁴ that today's young adults are less church affiliated, have more religious “Nones,” and are less inclined to actively participate in organized religion than ever before. Nearly one-quarter of the US general population (23%) are young adults: persons between ages 18-34. But their presence among those who participate in American various religious congregations is less than half that percentage. Indeed, according to the 2015 national “Faith Communities Today” (FACT) study,¹⁵ the average percentage of young adults among members of religious congregations is only 11%. Further, the share of young adult members in American religious congregations decreased from 14% in 2008 to 11% in 2015. Furthermore, while in 2008, 8% of American religious congregations reported no young adults at all among members, in 2015, nearly one in five congregations (18%) reported no young adult presence. In summary, as a general trend, today, young adults continue to “unfriend” religious congregations and drift away from organized religious life. As this study's data show, Orthodox parishes are part of this American religious reality.

¹⁴ See, for example, the report on “American Congregations 2015: Engaging Young Adults” prepared by the Cooperative Congregation Study Partnership: <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Engaging-Young-Adults-Report.pdf>

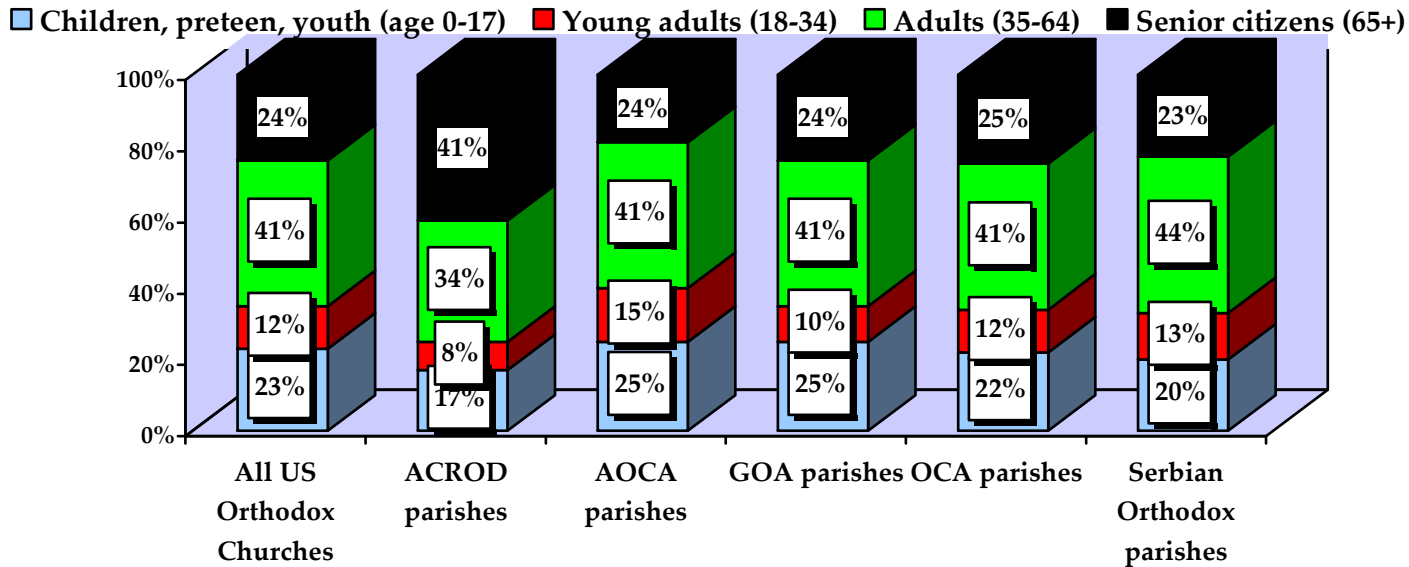
¹⁵ The national report on 2015 FACT study (“American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving”) is available at: <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>

It is commonly accepted knowledge that the retention of young adults in the church is especially challenging task. There are a number of reasons for this (in no particular order). First, in this stage of life, many people go to college and lose connections with their home parishes. While in college, new friends (either not Orthodox or not religious at all), the load of academic work, new interests and social activities often have a higher priority for young adults than finding and joining a new Orthodox parish. Second, young adulthood is also an age when people begin their professional careers, move away from home and - in their new locations - focus primarily on professional growth and building new networks of social relations that are not necessarily associated with the Orthodox Church. Third, more and more people in America postpone marriage and starting families. That is, many young adults are single. And we know from practical experiences that generally Orthodox parishes tend to be more "family-oriented" than "singles-oriented" in terms of what they offer for their members. Fourth, the position of the Church on certain contemporary moral issues has been repeatedly raised by young adults of areas of concern. These and other factors increase the chances for young adults to become "church drop-outs." And this is why it is crucial for the parishes to develop programs and ministries that would address particular needs and interests of their young adult members.

How strong is the presence of young adults in Orthodox parishes? Fig. 22 shows that 12% (one in eight) of all regularly participating US Orthodox church members are young adults between 18-34 years old. It was noted previously that young adults comprise 23% of US general population, but the percentage of young adults among the members of American religious congregations is only 11%. Hence, Orthodox parishes face exactly the same problem as the other religious congregations: that is, young adults tend to stay away from organized religion and – in the overall picture – the Orthodox parishes are not “stronger magnets” for them than the other religious congregations. Among individual jurisdictions, the American Carpatho-Russian Diocese has the lowest percentage (8%) of young adults among parishioners, while the Antiochian Archdiocese has the largest presence (15%) of young adults among regularly participating members.

Fig. 22 Not Many Young Adults Among the Members of Orthodox Parishes

"Of your regular participants, please estimate the percentage of the following age categories:"

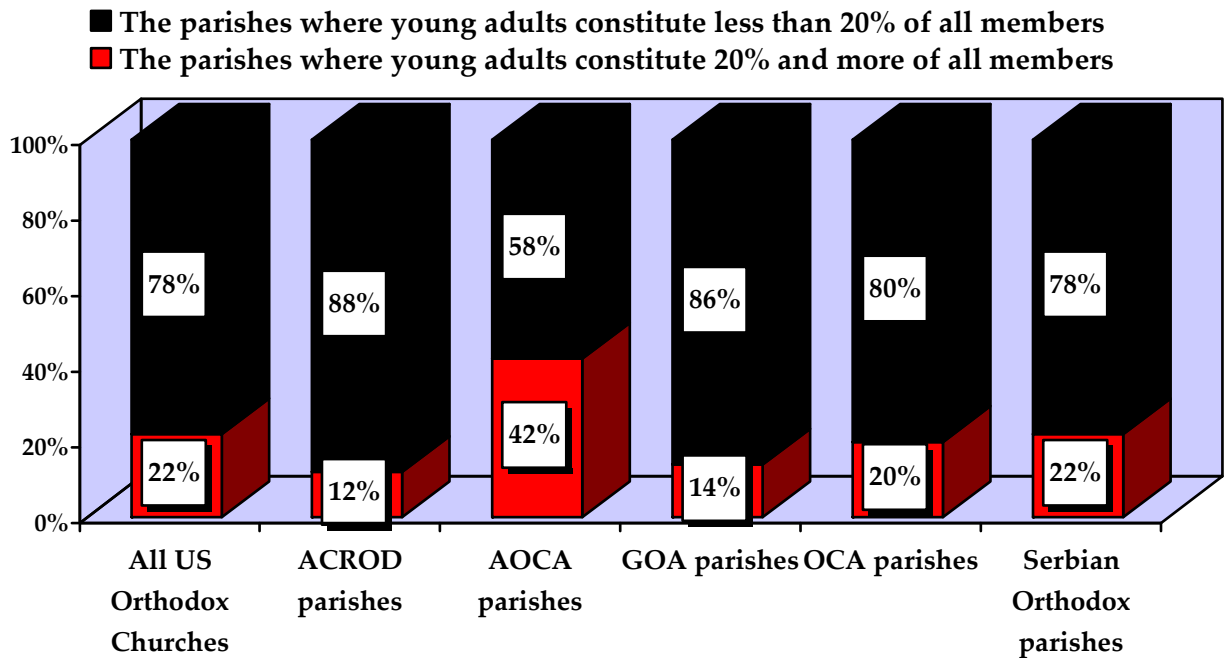


Another way to compare individual Orthodox jurisdictions is by examining the percentage of parishes with the strong presence of young adults. In order to do this:

- ❖ From the entire sample of the parishes, we separated the parishes that have a well-above-average percentage of young adult church members. The parishes *with at least 20%* of young adults among parishioners were considered as parishes with high participation of young adults;
- ❖ We compared jurisdictions by the share of these parishes with at least 20% of young adults among parishioners.

Fig. 23 shows that slightly more than one-fifth (22%) of US Orthodox parishes are the parishes with a strong presence of young adult church members (i.e. these are the parishes with at least 20% of young adults among parishioners).

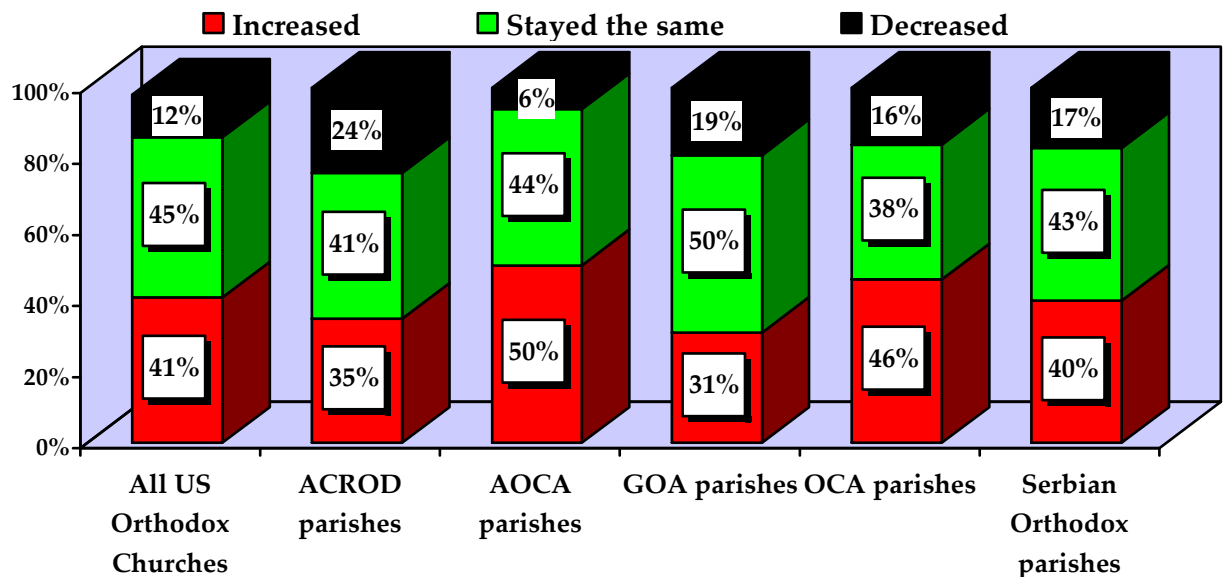
Fig. 23 Percentage of Parishes With the Strong Presence of the Young Adult Members



The somewhat good news for US Orthodox parishes is that 41% of them reported an increase in the percentage of young adults in the past three years, while only 12% of the parishes indicated that the number of their young adult parishioners has diminished. Further, Fig. 24 shows that in all individual jurisdictions participating in the study, the parishes with an increase in young adult members outnumber the parishes where the number of young adults has declined.

Fig. 24 Change in the Number of Young Adult Parishioners in the Past Three Years

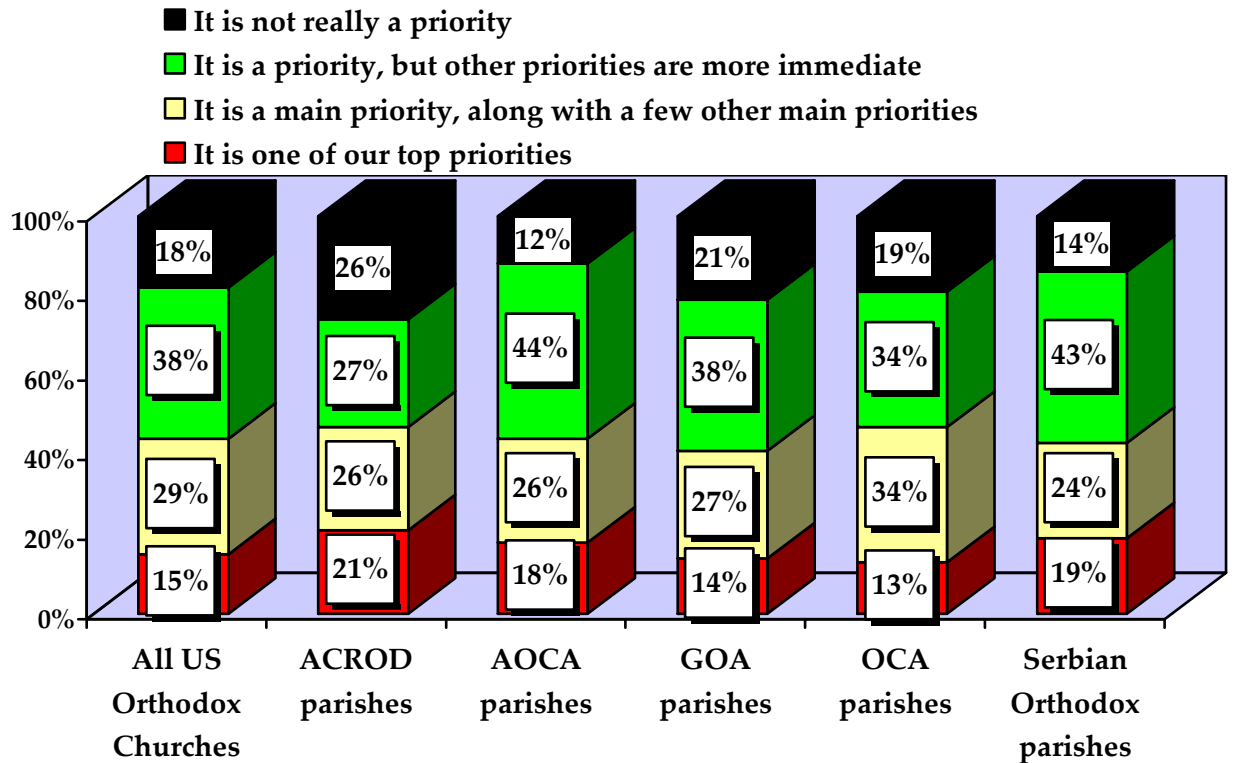
"Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?"



However, this increase in the number of young adults reported by 41% of US Orthodox parishes can be hardly attributed to intentional efforts to attract more young adults and to make their parish communities more "young adult friendly." Fig. 25 indicates that only a small minority - 15% - of Orthodox parishes consider young adult ministries as being one of their top priorities and that all individual Orthodox jurisdictions are fairly similar in this regard.

Fig. 25 Not Much Priority is Given to Young Adult Ministries in Orthodox Parishes:

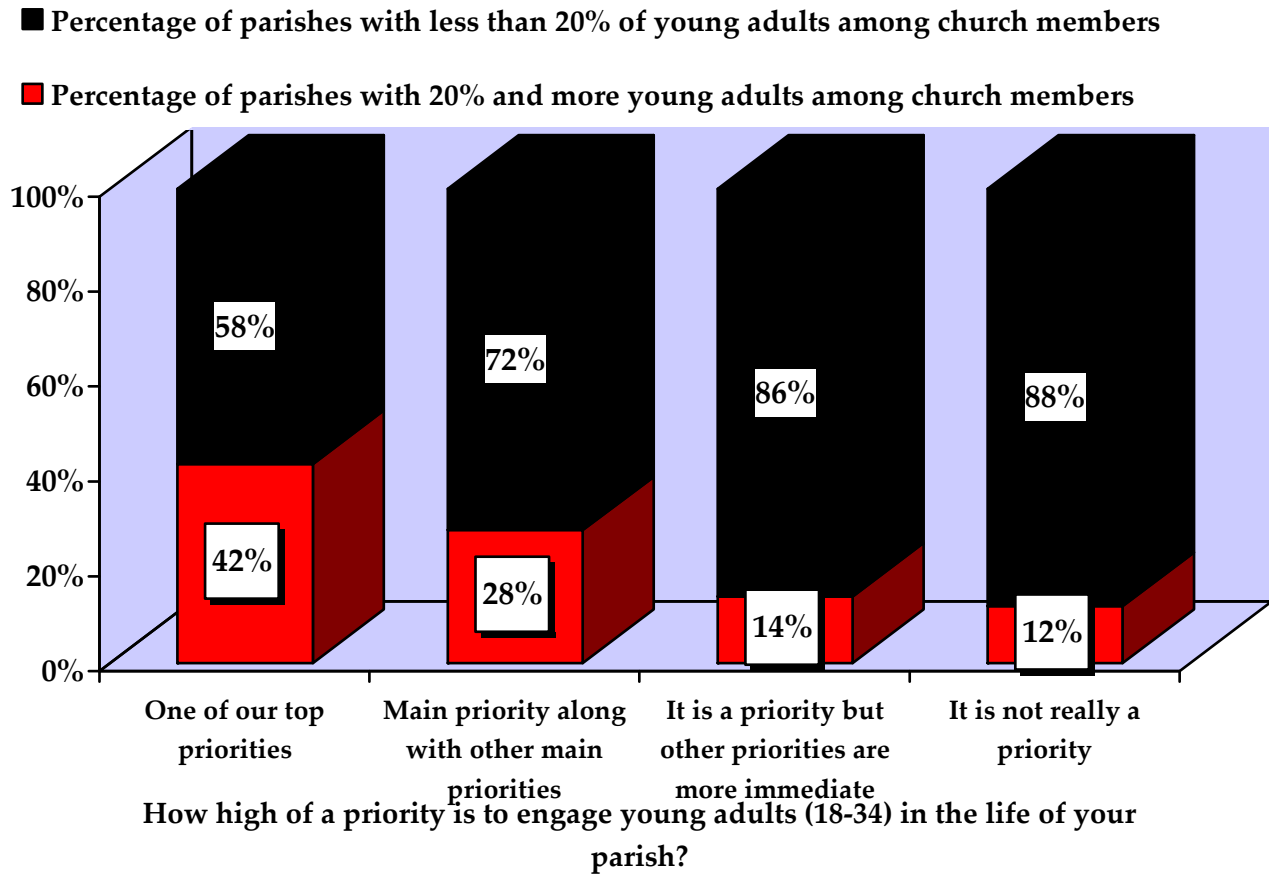
"How high of a priority is to engage young adults (18-34) in the life of your parish?"



Does the intentional emphasis of a parish on engaging young adults make a difference in the actual presence of the young adult members in such parish? The answer to this question is: "It definitely does." Fig. 26 shows that the parishes that consider engaging young adults as their top priority are much more likely to be the parishes where the young adults constitute 20% and more of all members.

Fig. 26 Want More Young Adults? Prioritize their Engagement into a Parish!
Parish's Emphasis on Engaging Young Adults Versus Actual Presence of Young Adults

"How high of a priority is to engage young adults (18-34) in the life of your parish?"



How do the parishes self-evaluate their young adult ministries and programs? The questionnaire asked: "Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministry?" The respondents (parish clergy) were given seven options to respond. The figures in parentheses show percentages of responses to each option:

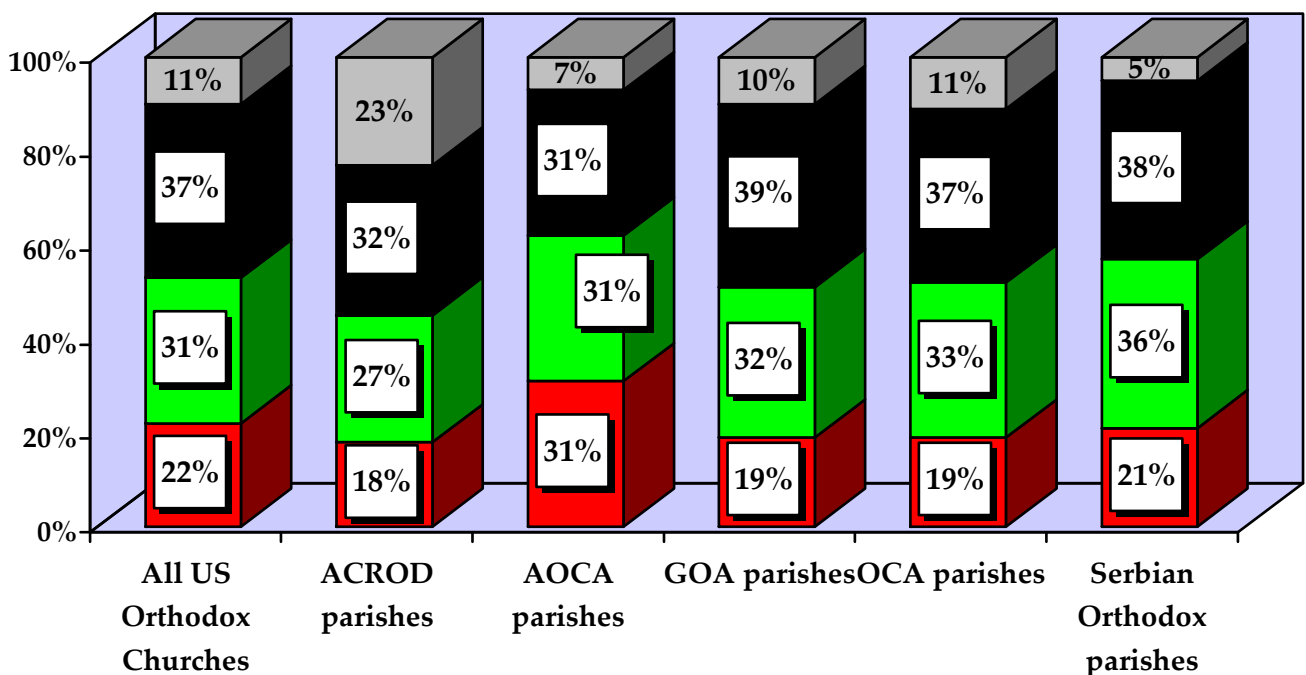
- "It is thriving (7%);"
- "We are doing okay, which is pretty good these days (15%);"
- "We have made some progress, but have a long way to go (31%);"
- "We have tried a few things, but with relatively little success (9%);"
- "We know we need to get something going, but haven't really figured what or how (16%);"
- "Not much, if anything, is going on and there is little urgency or interest to do more (11%);"
- "Not much, if anything, is going on and given how few young adults are in our area there is little or nothing we could realistically do (11%)."

For simplification of analysis, the first and second groups of responses were combined in a single category of parishes with "Good/Excellent young adult ministries." The fourth, fifth and sixth groups of responses were combined in a single category of parishes with "Poor young adult ministries." See Fig. 27

Fig. 27 Self-Evaluation of Young Adult Ministries and Programs by Orthodox Parishes:

"Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministry?"

- There is little we could realistically do given how few young adults are in our area
- Poor
- We made some progress, but have long way to go
- Good/Excellent



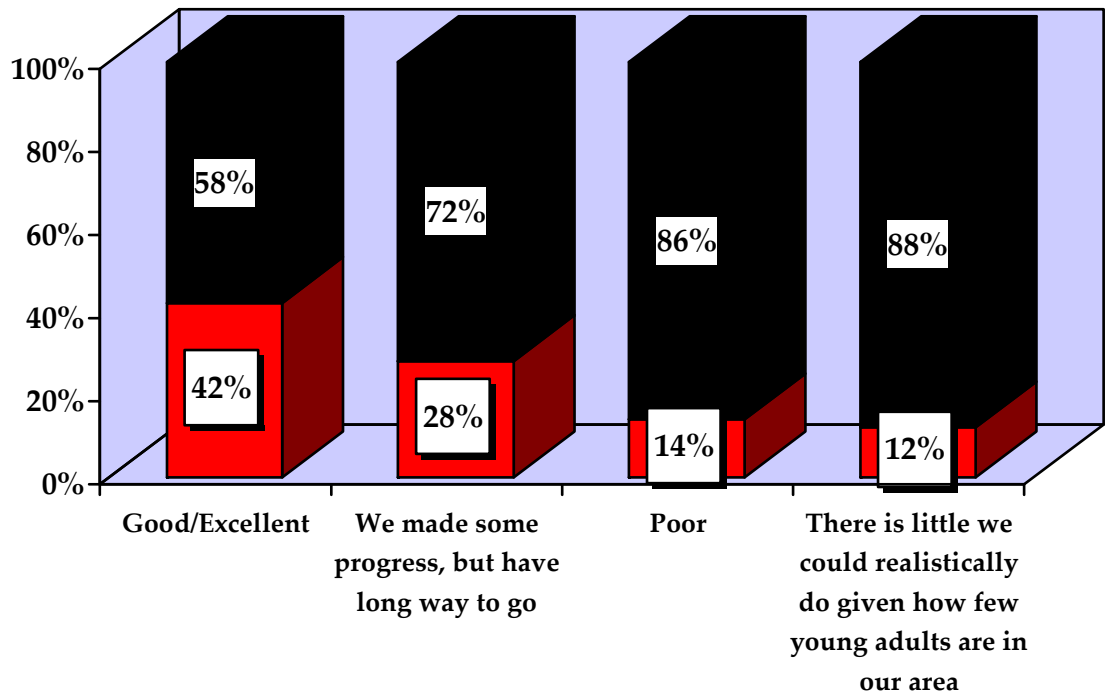
Three major observations can be made from Fig. 27. First, only about one-in-five US Orthodox parishes (22%) have "Good/Excellent" young adult ministries, while many more church communities (37%) cater poorly to the needs of young adults and do not make any progress in this respect. Second, only a small percentage (11%) of US Orthodox parishes have a perceived "excuse" for not having young adult ministries, because of the absence of the young adults living in their area.

Does the quality of the young adult ministries make a difference in the actual presence of the young adult members in a parish? The answer to this question is: "It definitely does." Fig. 28 shows that the parishes that evaluated their young adult ministries as "Good/Excellent" are much more likely to be the parishes where the young adults constitute 20% and more of all members.

Fig. 28 Want More Young Adults in a Parish? Offer Them High Quality Young Adult Ministries!

Parish's Quality of the Young Adult Ministries Versus Actual Presence of Young Adults

- Percentage of parishes with less than 20% of young adults among church members
- Percentage of parishes with 20% and more young adults among church members



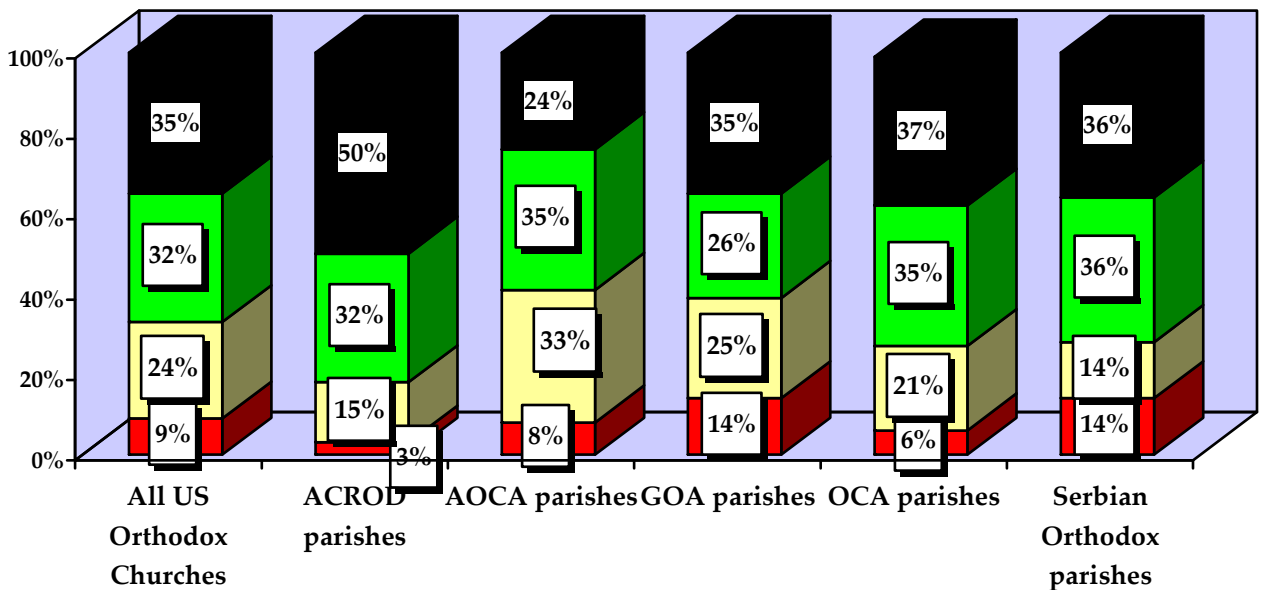
Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministry?

Do parishes develop any intentional strategies for better engaging young adults? Fig. 29 shows that two-thirds of US Orthodox parishes either do not have any strategy for engaging young adults (35% of parishes) or they simply try to involve young adult members in the general life of the parish (32% of parishes). Only 9% of parishes developed strategies that are geared to creating opportunities and programs specifically for young adults.

Fig. 29 Very Few Orthodox Parishes Have Intentional Strategies for Engaging Young Adults:

"Which of the following best describes your parish's strategy for engaging young adults (18-34)?"

- We don't really have an intentional strategy
- Strategy is more geared to involving young adults in the general life of the parish
- Strategy is a pretty even balance of both general involvement and special opportunities/programs for young adults
- Strategy is geared to creating special opportunities/programs specifically for young adults



Having designated leaders whose primary responsibility is working with young adults is a very important factor for congregations that desire to have a thriving young adult ministry. Fig. 30 indicates that only one-third (35%) of parishes have such leaders with 28% of the parishes with volunteers serving as young adult leaders and only a very small number (7%) of the parishes which have part- or full-time paid young adult leaders.¹⁶

¹⁶ Including parishes that have assistant clergy whose responsibility is to work with young adults

Fig. 30 Not Many Orthodox Parishes Have Designated Leaders for Work with Young Adults:

"Does your parish have a leader whose specific responsibility is engaging young adults (18-34)?"

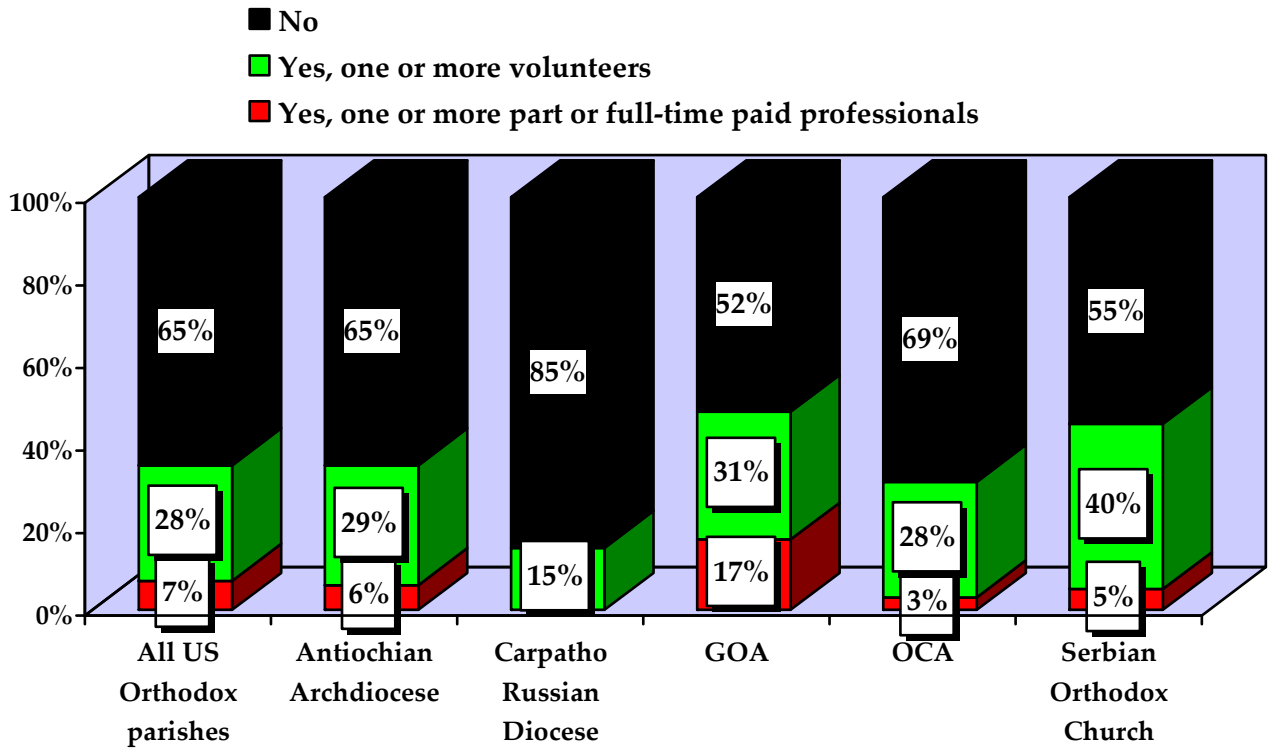
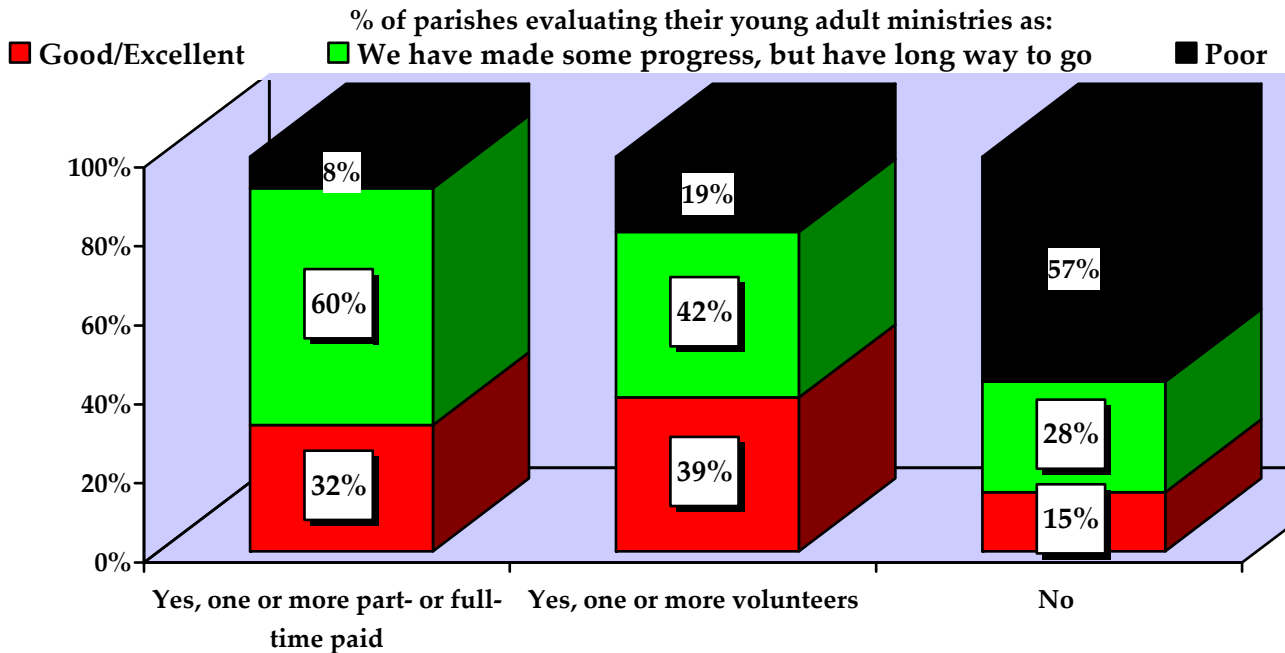


Fig. 31 and 32 demonstrate why having designated young adult leaders is so important for thriving young adult ministries and growth in young adult members. One can see that the parishes with designated young adult leaders (either volunteering or part- or full-time paid) are much more likely to grow in the number of young adults and report "Good/Excellent" young adult ministries than the other parishes. Remarkably, according to the clergy surveyed, it does not make much difference whether these leaders are volunteers or paid professionals. As Fig. 31 and 32 show, clergy in parishes that have volunteer young adult leaders and clergy in the parishes with paid professionals are equally likely to report an increase in their young adult parishioners and thriving young adult ministries. Thus, survey data suggest that it does not make much difference whether these leaders are volunteers or paid professionals: (although this answer may change if the survey were expanded to youth leaders) what is most important is to have a person whose clear responsibility is to engage young adults.

Fig. 31 Having Designated Young Adult Leaders Is Very Important for Parish's Young Adult Ministries

"Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministries?"

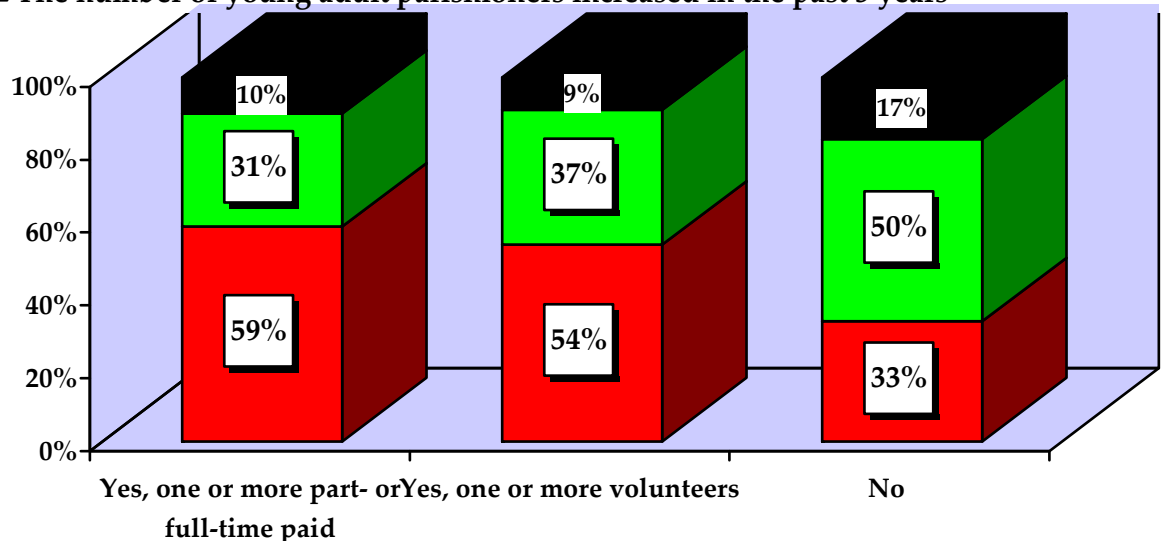


Does your parish have a leader whose specific responsibility is engaging young adults?

Fig. 32 Having Designated Young Adult Leaders in a Parish Is Very Important for Growth in Young Adults Members

"Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?"

- The number of young adult parishioners decreased in the past three years
- The number of the young adult parishioners stayed the same in the past 3 years
- The number of young adult parishioners increased in the past 3 years



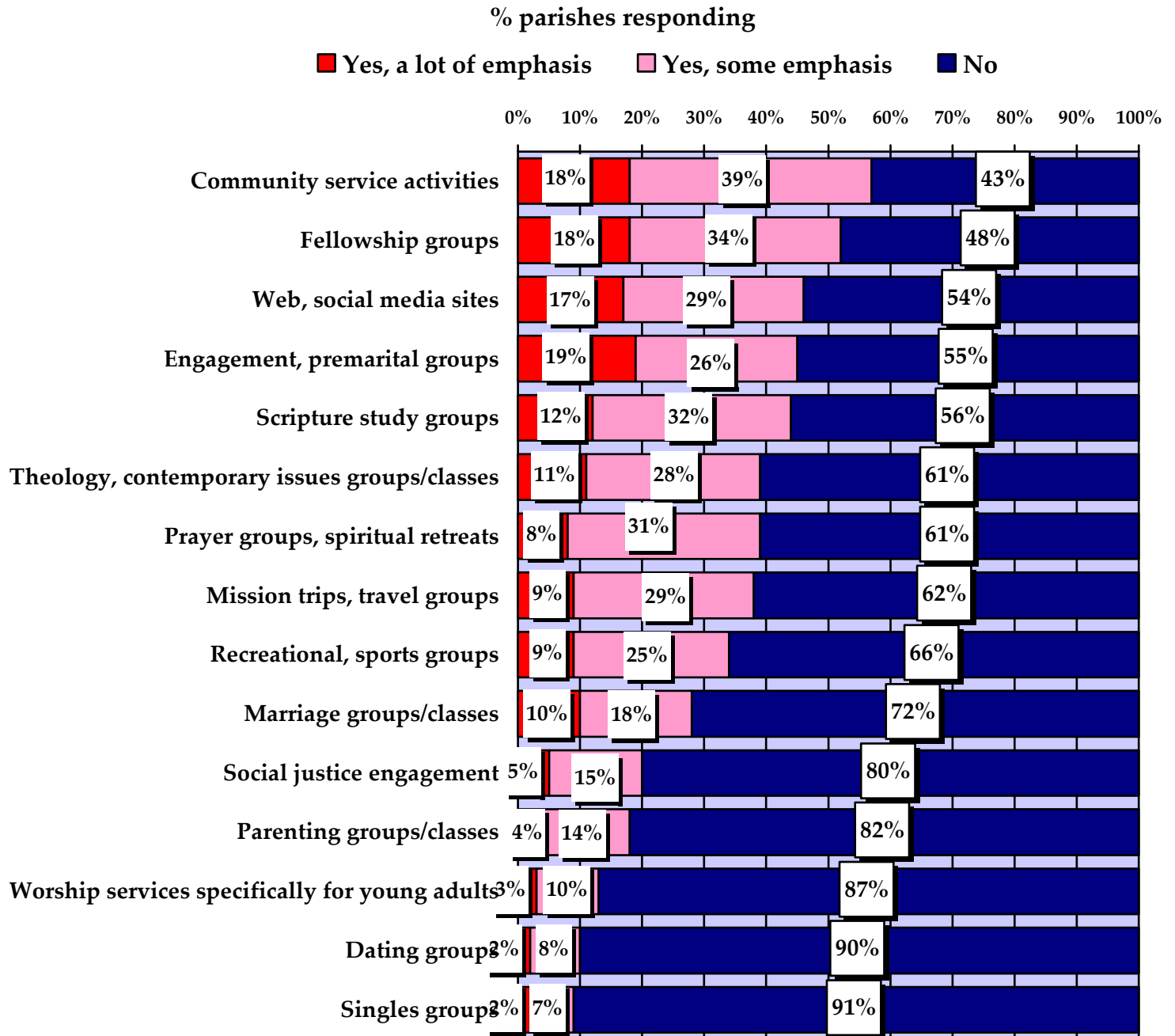
Does your parish have a leader whose specific responsibility is engaging young adults?

The next question is: if a parish offers some ministries or activities specifically for their young adult members, what are exactly these ministries or activities? The survey asked: "Does your parish have any of the following groups, programs or activities that are specifically intended for young adults? If yes, how much emphasis is given to each?" The parishes were given a list of fifteen programs/activities/ministries and with regard to each they can respond:

- "No;"
- "Yes, some emphasis;"
- "Yes, a lot of emphasis;"

Fig. 33 on the next page shows the answer to this question for the parishes of all jurisdictions combined.

Fig. 33 What the Parishes Do and What They Don't Do for their Young Adult Members:
“Does your parish have any of the following groups, programs or activities that are
***specifically intended for young adults*? If yes, how much emphasis is given to each?”**



The five top activities/programs/services that are offered specifically to young adults in more than 40% of American Orthodox parishes are: "Community service activities" (offered in 57% parishes), "Fellowship groups" (offered in 52% parishes), "Web, social media sites" (offered in 46% parishes), Engagement, premarital groups (offered in 45% parishes) and "Scripture study groups" (offered in 44% parishes).

On the opposite end are the four activities and programs that are offered to young adults rather rarely: in no more than 20% of US Orthodox parishes. These "rare" young adult ministries are "Social justice engagement" (only 20% offer this ministry), "Parenting groups/classes" (18%), "Worship services specifically for young adults" (13%), "Dating groups" (10%) and "Singles groups" (9%).

There are some significant differences among the parishes of five individual jurisdictions in what they offer to their young adult members. In summary, compared to other jurisdictions:

- ❖ The parishes of Antiochian Archdiocese offer more often to their young adults:
 - Fellowship groups
 - Pre-marital groups/classes
 - Parenting groups/classes
- ❖ The parishes of American Carpatho-Russian Diocese offer more often to their young adults:
 - Worship services specifically for young adults
 - Prayer groups, spiritual retreats
 - Dating groups
 - Mission trips, travel groups
- ❖ The parishes of Greek-Orthodox Archdiocese offer more often to their young adults:
 - Worship services specifically for young adults
 - Fellowship groups
 - Pre-marital groups/classes
 - Parenting groups/classes
 - Web, social media sites
- ❖ The parishes of Orthodox Church in America offer more often to their young adults:
 - Scripture study groups/classes
- ❖ The parishes of the Serbian Orthodox Church offer more often to their young adults:
 - Scripture study groups/classes
 - Prayer groups, spiritual retreats
 - Dating groups
 - Recreational, sports groups
 - Mission trips, travel groups

So far we have discussed what Orthodox parishes offer and what they do not offer to their young adult members. But the more crucial question is: "Which of these programs and activities are most essential for the thriving young adult ministries? Which of these programs and activities are most likely to attract young adults?"

In order to respond this question a two-step analysis was performed. First, we constructed the "Index of Success of Young Adult Ministry" or ISYAM (its description follows). Second, we examined the statistical relationship between this index and the emphasis that the Orthodox parishes place on various young adult ministries presented in Fig. 33.

The ISYAM was constructed out of responses to two questions that were analyzed previously:

- ❖ The first question used to construct ISYAM was "Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?" If a parish responded "Decreased," this answer was coded as 1. If a parish responded "Stayed the same," this answer was coded as 2. If a parish responded "Increased," this answer was coded as 3.
- ❖ The second question used to construct ISYAM was "Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministry?" If a parish responded "Poor," this answer was coded as 1. If a parish responded "We made some progress, but have long way to go," this answer was coded as 2. If a parish responded "Good/Excellent," this answer was coded as 3. The parishes that responded "There is little that we realistically could do, because of very few young adults in our area" were excluded from further analysis.

For each parish, the coded responses to question 1 were added to coded responses to question 2. The resulting sum was divided by two. The obtained figure served as ISYAM. For example, if a parish reported increase in young adults within past three years (coded answer "3") and described its young adult ministries as "We made some progress, but have long way to go" (coded answer "2"), then the ISYAM was equal: $(2+3) / 2 = 2.5$ The ISYAM can vary from 1 to 3. The higher its value is, the more successful an Orthodox parish is in its young adult ministries and attracting new young adult members into a parish. The analysis of the statistical relation between ISYAM and the parish's emphasis on each of 15 young adult services/programs/activities identified six services/programs/activities that are especially important for the overall success of the young adult ministries.

Listed in descending order of their importance, the six programs and activities that are especially important for the overall success of the young adult ministries and attracting more young adult parishioners are:

- ❖ Fellowship groups
- ❖ Theology and contemporary issues study groups/classes
- ❖ Scripture study groups/classes
- ❖ Prayer groups, spiritual retreats
- ❖ Community service activities
- ❖ Mission trips, travel groups

In simple terms, the parishes with a strong emphasis on these six areas of the young adult activities and programs are much likely to be the parishes with thriving young adult ministries and growing number of young adult parishioners.

Remarkably, except for "fellowship groups," all other programs/activities that are most important for thriving young adult ministries are related to two areas of Christian life: "Learning more about and deepening one's faith ("Scripture study groups/classes," "Theology and/or contemporary issues study groups/classes," "Prayer groups, spiritual retreats") and "Outreach into wider community" ("Community service activities," "Mission trips, travel groups").

In other words, survey data indicate that the opportunity to learn more about the Orthodox Faith and possibility to reach out into the wider community are two areas that are truly crucial for the overall success of the young adult ministries and attracting young adult church members. Differently, various "social activities" ("engagement, premarital groups," "recreational, sport groups," "marriage groups/classes," "parenting groups/classes," "dating groups," "singles groups") are relatively less important for attracting and engaging young adults into a parish.

Out of the six most important areas of young adult ministries, only three were reported by a significant number of parishes as something that they have in place and offer to their young adults: "Fellowship groups," "Scripture study groups/classes," and "Community service activities" (see Fig. 33). The lesson is simple: if Orthodox parishes desire to improve their young adult ministries, they definitely should pay greater attention to "Mission trips," "Prayer groups, spiritual retreats" and "Theology and/or contemporary issues study groups/classes" specifically designed for and offered to their young adult members.

Sacramental worship is very central to the life of any Orthodox parish. Although Orthodox Liturgy allows for significantly less "experimentation" and "innovation" than Protestant services each Orthodox parish has its own "style" of how Liturgy and other services are celebrated. The duration of and language used in worship services, the vibrancy and relevance of sermons, the engagement of children and youths into altar service, the quality of the choir or chanters, the implementation of congregational singing, the inclusion of certain "optional" elements into the service, the understanding by parishioners of "what happens" during each part of the service rather than being simply "absentmindedly present in the church" and many other nuances make a huge difference in the quality of Orthodox worship experience in each local parish.

It would be feasible to assume that both the overall quality of services as well as certain "styles" and "forms" of worship may have significant influence on parish's success in developing young adult ministries and attracting more young adult members.

The survey asked clergy to describe worship services in their parishes in terms of seven characteristics. "How well do the following describe your parish's regular Sunday worship service?"

- ❖ Reverent
- ❖ Filled with a sense of God's presence
- ❖ Thought-provoking
- ❖ Nurturing people's faith
- ❖ Innovative
- ❖ Inspirational
- ❖ Joyful

With regard to each characteristic the clergy could say that it describes the worship services in their parishes "very well," "quite well," "somewhat," "slightly" or "not at all."

Fig. 34 shows percentages of clergy who think that each of these characteristics describe worship services in their parishes "very well" or "quite well"

Fig. 34 “How well do the following describe your parish’s regular Sunday worship service?”

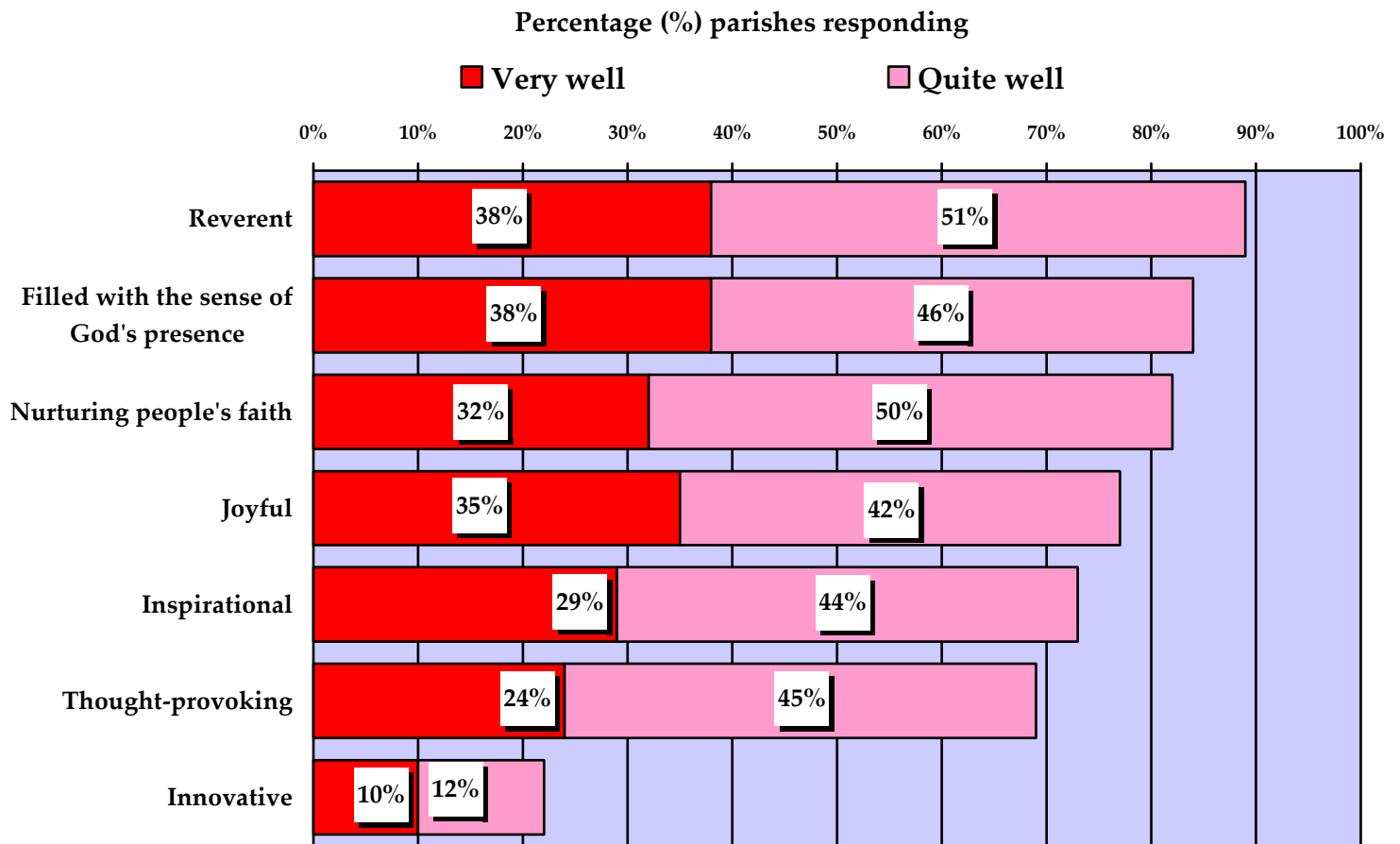


Fig. 34 shows that "Reverent" and "Filled with the sense of God's presence" were the words most frequently chosen by the clergy as describing "quite/very well" worship in their parishes: 89% and 84% respondents agreed that these characteristics describe accurately their worship services. At the same time, the clergy were significantly less likely to say that "Joyful," "Inspirational" and "Thought-Provoking" are good definitions for the worship services in their parishes: only 77%, 73% and 69% respondents agreed that these characteristics describe accurately their worship services. That is, the three characteristics of worship that would require a more creative approach on the part of the clergy are less common in US Orthodox parishes than the characteristics that are more associated simply with following established liturgical practices ("Reverent" and "Filled with the sense of God's presence."). The clergy were also far less likely to say that their worship services are "innovative" (only 22% of clergy think so) which is not surprising, because of the emphasis of the Orthodox Church on preserving traditional forms of worship and because "innovation" in worship might not be something that would be seen as positive by some t parish priests.

The most crucial question is: which of these seven characteristics of worship are most important for the success in the parish’s young adult ministries and attracting new young adult members into a parish? In order to answer this question, we examined the statistical relationship between the agreement of clergy with each of seven characteristics as describing correctly worship services in their parishes AND the fact that a parish a) grows in young adult members and b) reports “Good/Excellent” young adult ministries.

The most important finding was that out of seven characteristics of worship, the words “joyful” and “inspirational” have the strongest relation with parish’s growth in young adult members and presence of “Good/Excellent” young adult ministries. Fig. 35A-35D demonstrate this finding

Fig. 35A Parishes with “Joyful” Worship Services Are Likely to Have Thriving Young Adult Ministries

“Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministries?”

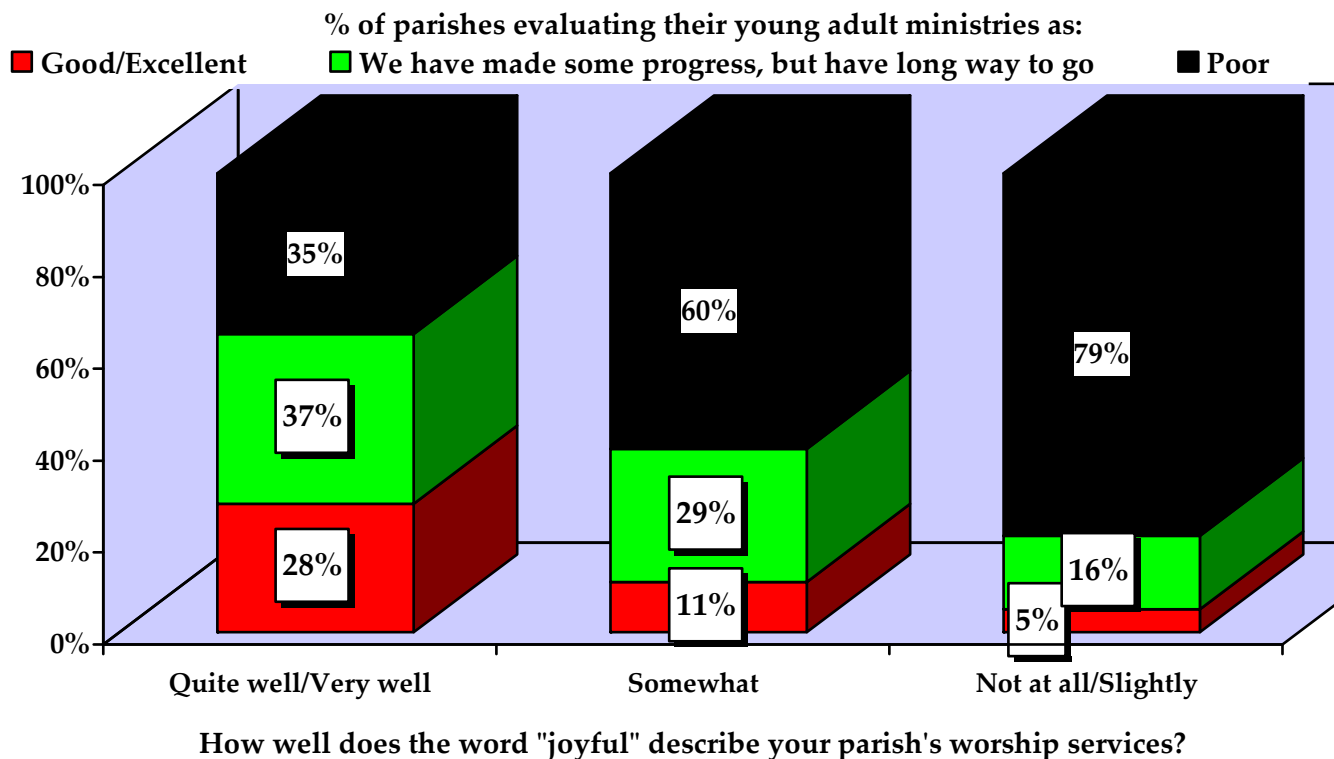


Fig. 35B Parishes with “Joyful” Worship Services Are Likely to Grow in Young Adult Members

"Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?"

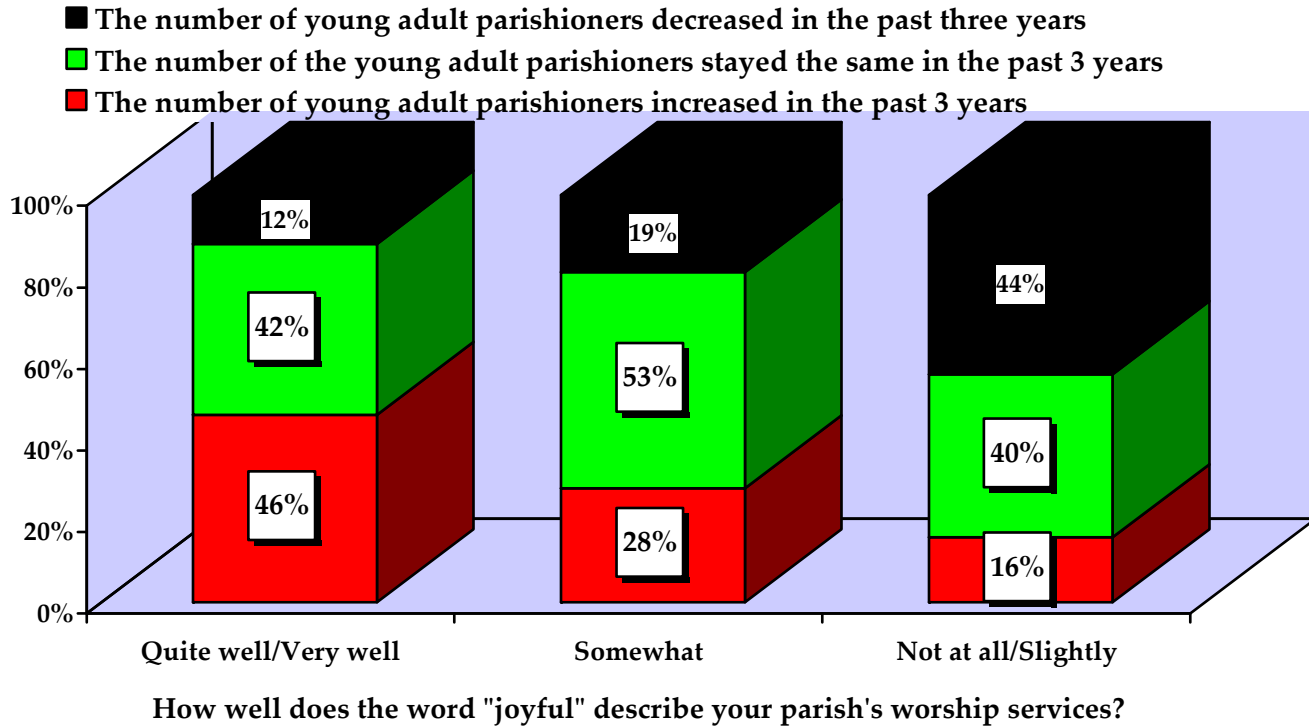


Fig. 35C Parishes with “Inspirational” Worship Services Are Likely to Have Thriving Young Adult Ministries

"Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministries?"

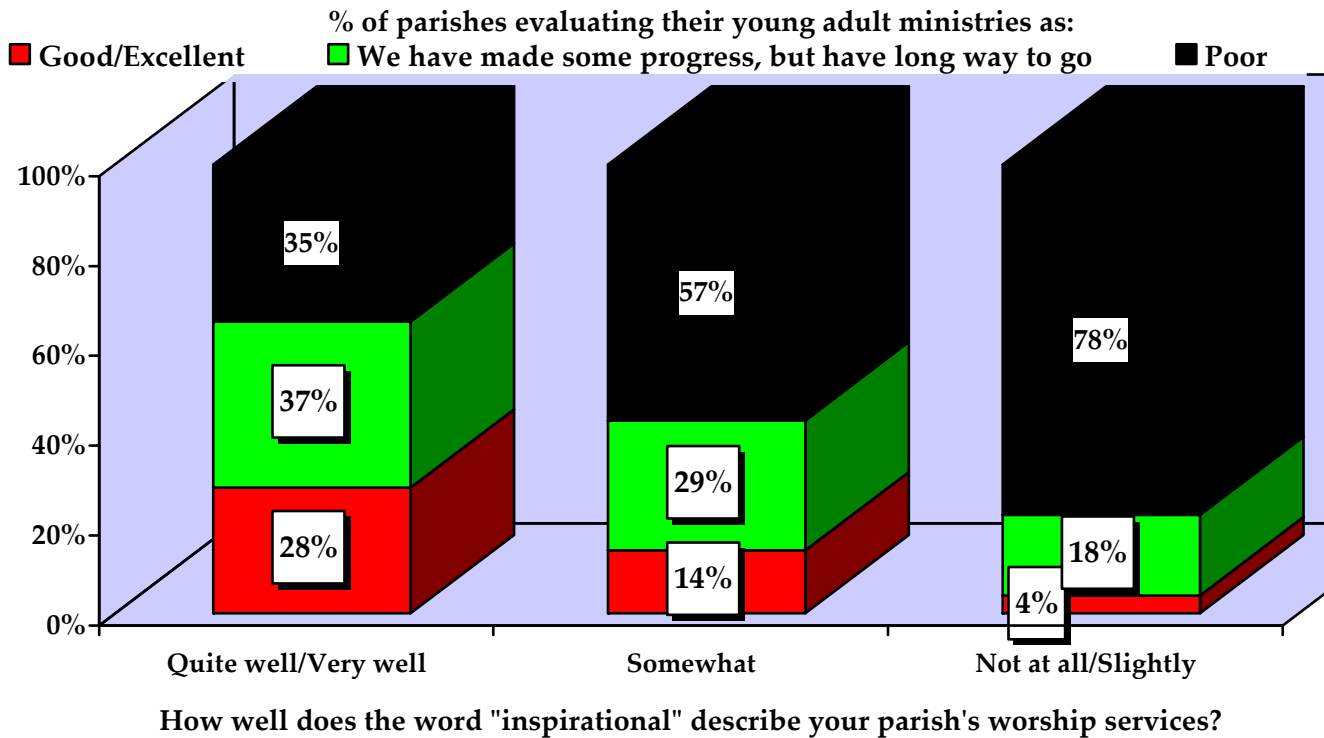
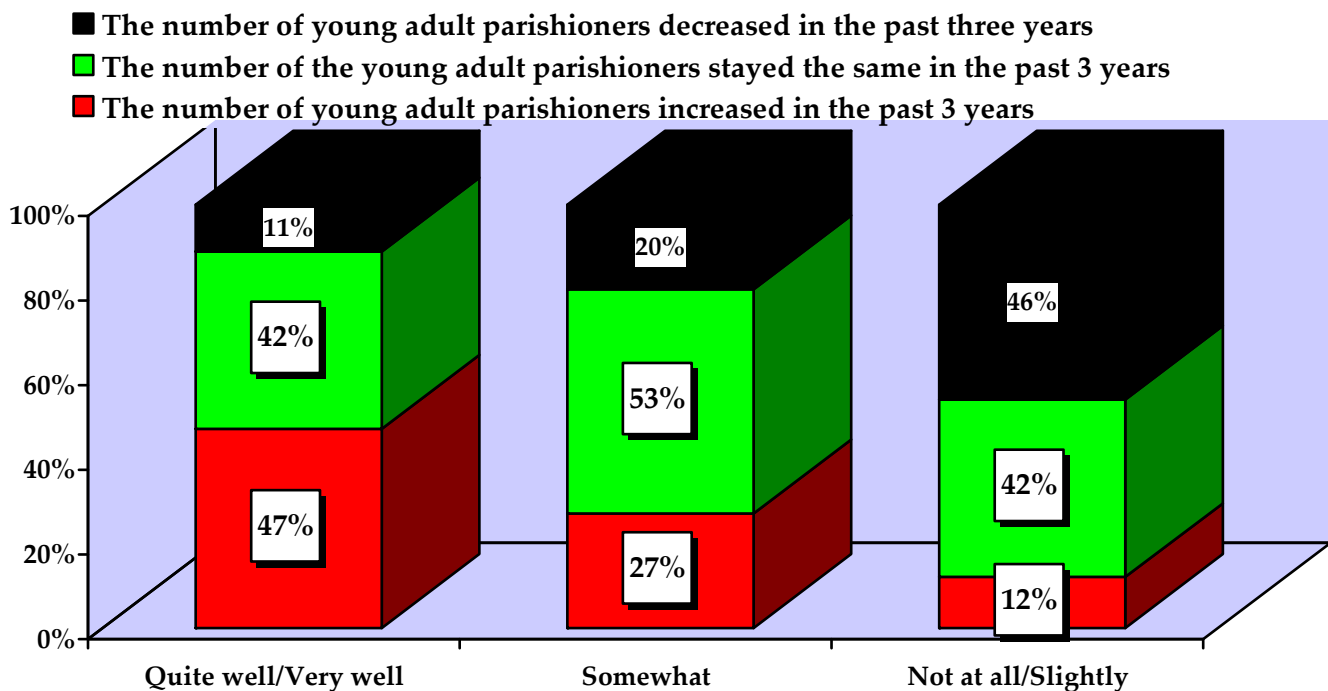


Fig. 35D Parishes with “Inspirational” Worship Services Are Likely to Grow in Young Adult Members

"Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?"



How well does the word "inspirational" describe your parish's worship services?

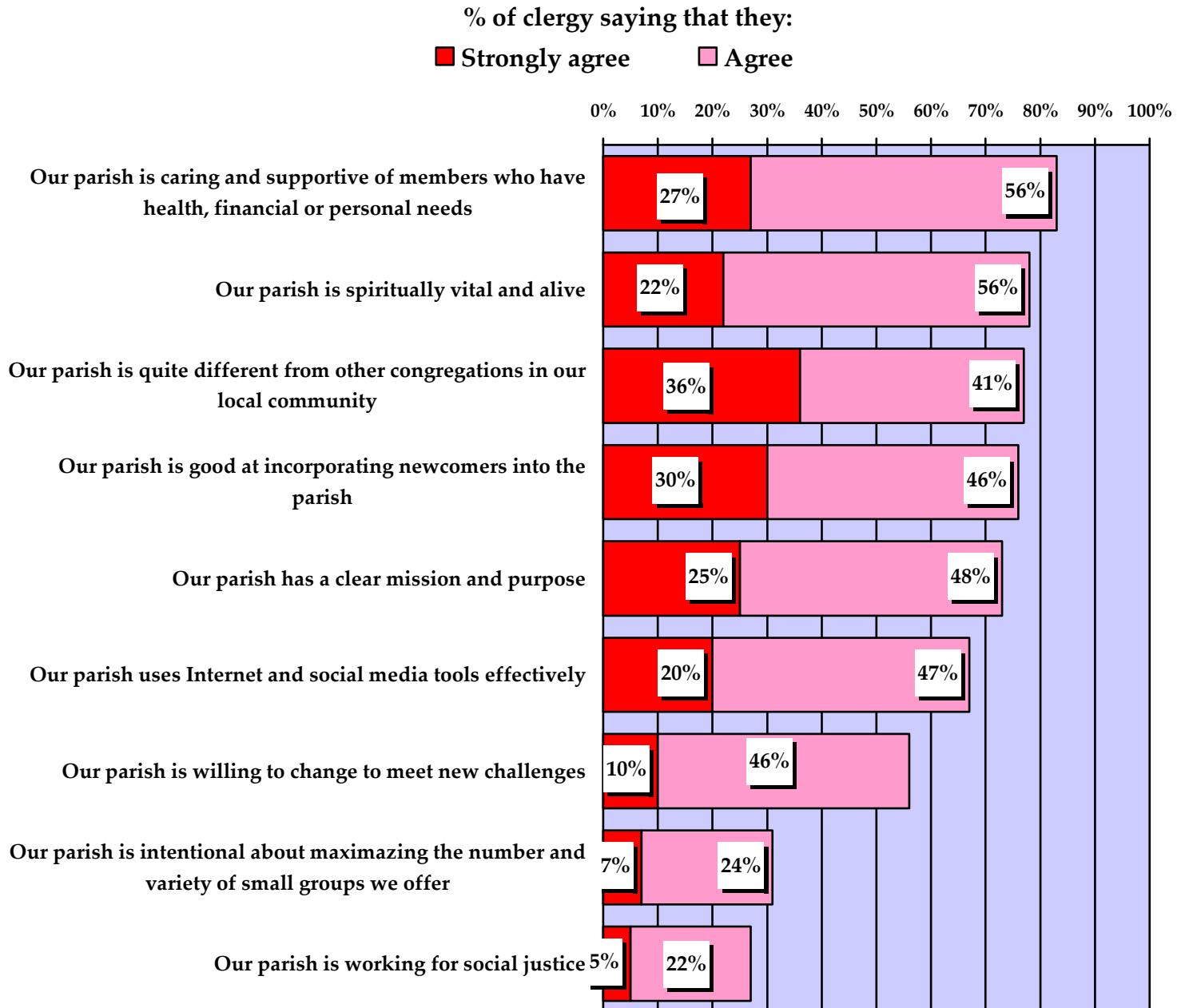
In simple terms, *the parishes where worship services are "joyful" and "inspirational" are the parishes that are very likely to grow in young adult members and have "Good/Excellent" young adult ministries.* On the opposite end are two characteristics of worship that have relatively little or no influence on young adults: worship being "reverent" and "innovative." In other words, the fact that a parish has a "reverent" or "innovative" style of worship has little influence on the fact that a parish would be growing in young adult church members and have thriving young adult ministries.

Orthodox parishes organize their religious and social lives in very different ways. Some of them limit themselves to liturgical services, while others develop a wide range of social and educational activities. Some church communities embrace innovation and change, while others emphasize their adherence to established traditions. Some cherish their ethnic identity and make a conscious effort to preserve their ethnic heritage, while others strive to be "pan-Orthodox" and/or "All-American" parishes. Some parishes consider social and religious outreach into the local community among their top priorities, while others are more "insular" and have fewer interactions with their neighborhoods and the "religious others," etc. Each of these numerous characteristics and features can be seen as a part of parish's distinct identity. Combined, they create a unique local Orthodox Christian community.

The survey asked “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parish?” The clergy were given nine statements describing various aspects of parish life. With regard to each statement, the respondents could say that they: "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral/not sure," "disagree," "strongly disagree." Fig. 36 shows the percentage of the study participants who either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with each statement.

Fig. 36 Clergy’s Perception of their Parishes

“Do you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements about your parish?”



All parish features presented in Fig. 36 are positive characteristics. The question is, however: out of these nine parish features, which are most important for attracting young adults into a parish and creating thriving young adult ministries? In order to answer this question, we examined the statistical relationship between the agreement of clergy with each of nine statements as describing accurately their parishes AND the fact that a parish a) grows in young adult members and b) reports “Good/Excellent” young adult ministries.

Out of nine parish features, two have by far the strongest connection with parish’s growth in young adult members and presence of “Good/Excellent” young adult ministries: being “spiritually vital and alive” and “good at incorporating new members.” In simple terms, young adults are first of all attracted to parish communities that offer vibrant spiritual life and, at the same time, are open to and welcome new people. As might also be expected, the presence of small interest groups within a parish, effective usage of social media, the parish’s readiness for innovation and change, mutual support and help among parishioners, involvement of a parish in social justice work, clarity of vision for a parish’s future – all other characteristics have also positive influence on attracting young adults. Yet, it is spiritual vibrancy and openness to newcomers that are especially important for young adult church members.

What else can help the parishes to improve their ministry with and attract more young adults? The questionnaire asked "How important do you believe each of the following would be for helping your parish improve its ministry with young adults?" See Fig. 37 on the next page.

Fig. 37 So, What Is Exactly the Problem with Your Parish’s Young Adult Ministries?

“How important each of the following would be for helping your parish improve its ministry with young adults?”

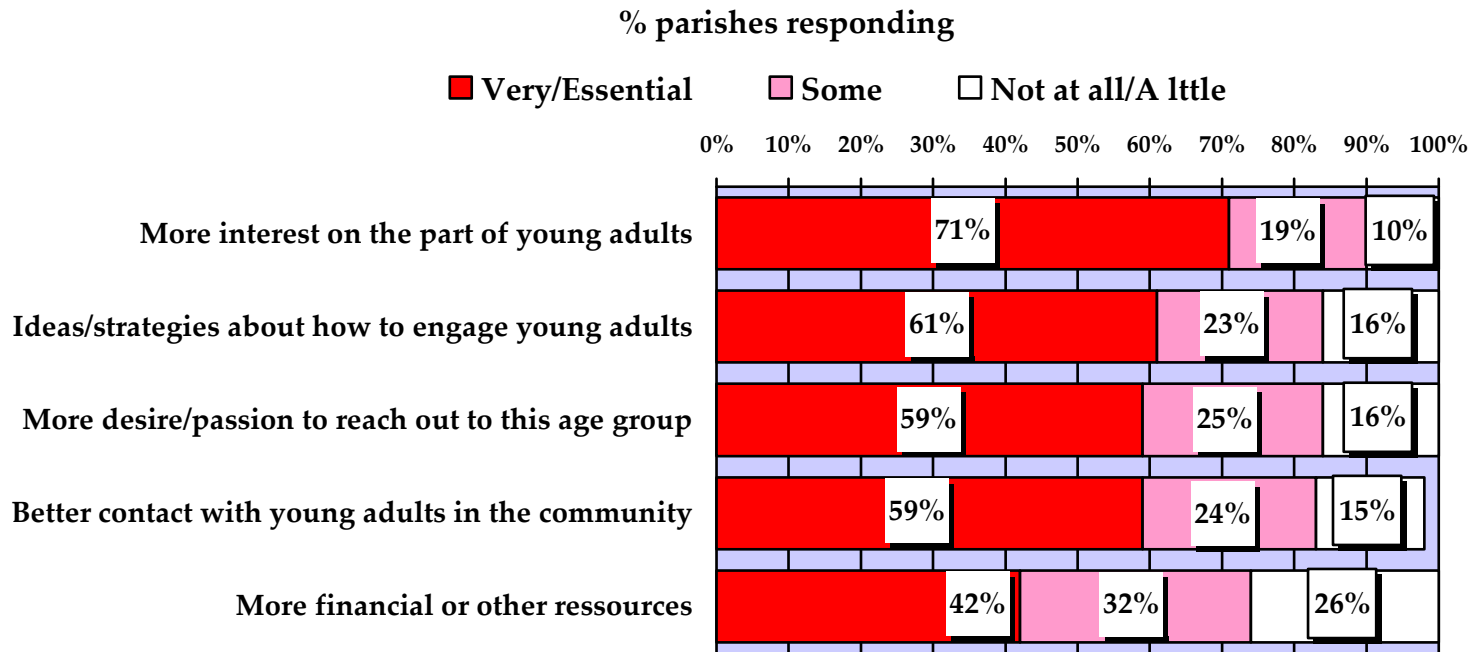


Fig. 37 shows that - from the perspective of parish clergy - the greatest problem in ministering to young adult members are the young adults themselves, because they appear to them to have little interest in participating in parish life. Indeed, 71% of the respondents said that "more interest on the part of young adults" is "Very important/Essential" for improving their parishes' ministry with young adults. That is, parish clergy are more inclined to "blame" the young adults for not participating in a parish rather than think about lack of a certain action on the part of a parish such as "Ideas/strategies about how to engage young adults," "More desire/passion to reach out to this age group," and "Better contact with young adults in the community." Remarkably, less than half of parishes (42%) think that the major problem in ministering to young adults is insufficient "financial or other resources."

Clearly, there could be many other factors that could help parishes improve their ministries with young adults. Therefore, the questionnaire had an open-end question asking for any "other factors" that would improve the quality of young adult ministries. Relatively few respondents answered this question. Below are some answers that can be insightful and helpful for other parishes:

- ❖ "A young priest is needed to communicate better with young adults."
- ❖ "Defining a leader among young adults is important."
- ❖ "A dedicated staff person to direct the ministry: paid youth staff would help."

- ❖ "Priests and parents need to do everything possible when sending their kids to college to hand them off to a local parish community and plug them in to an OCF."
- ❖ "We need help from the parents to facilitate and support Young Adult ministry events. This would be key in our church. If the parents think this is something worth doing, you are more likely to have the young adults think the same."
- ❖ "We need to combine efforts with other Orthodox Churches in our region on working with young adults."
- ❖ "What young people want is to be included in the life of the parish--not as 'young adults,' but as Christians."

The question of young adult ministries in Orthodox parishes is closely related to the subject of Orthodox Christian Fellowship - the national campus ministry of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops. Indeed, both issues deal with the same age category of church members. In 2013-2014, the Assembly conducted a comprehensive study of the OCF chapters in US colleges and universities. Both Orthodox students (i.e. OCF members) and Orthodox clergy (i.e. OCF spiritual advisors) took part in this study. Divided in two parts, the full report from this study is available on Assembly's website at:

<http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/docs/research/OCF2-Study-Report.pdf>

Among many subjects examined in this study was the question about relations between OCF chapters and the nearby local Orthodox parishes (e.g., most OCF spiritual advisors also serve as full-time priests in local Orthodox parishes, many Orthodox parishes offer their support to the nearby OCF chapters or provide students with a place to meet, etc.).

Two questions in the "Orthodox Christian Parishes in 21st Century America" study looked at the involvement of the Orthodox parishes in the lives of nearby OCF chapters. The first question asked: "Is your parish involved with any local OCF (Orthodox Christian Fellowship) chapter?" See Fig. 38.

Fig. 38 Involvement of US Orthodox Parishes with the OCF (Orthodox Christian Fellowship) Chapters

"Is your parish involved with any local OCF chapter?"

- No
- No, but our parish maintains communications with former teen parishioners who attend colleges "away from the home"
- Yes

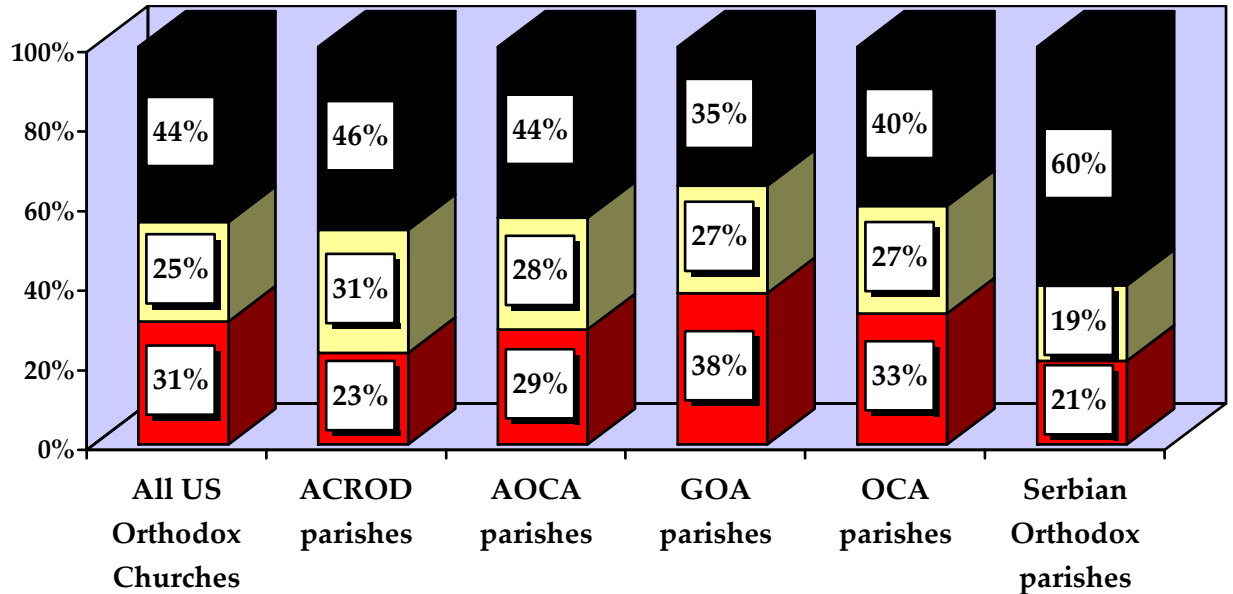


Fig. 38 shows that only three-in-ten (31%) Orthodox parishes have some relations with local OCF chapters. Is the figure of 31% US Orthodox parishes being involved with local OCF chapters satisfactory or not? In order to answer this question accurately we would need to map the parishes participating in our study and compare their locations with locations of OCF chapters. But we do not have such data in this survey.

The survey data show that an involvement of a parish with a local OCF chapter and parish's success in serving its own young adult members go hand in hand with each other. That is, compared to the other parishes, the parishes that ARE involved with the local OCF chapters:

- A. Have significantly higher presence of young adults among current parishioners
- B. Have experienced growth in the number of young adult parishioners in the past three years
- C. Are much more likely to evaluate their young adult ministries as "Good/Excellent"

Fig. 39 A-C demonstrate these statements.

Fig. 39a Parish's Involvement with Local OCF Chapters Means Also More Young Adult Parishioners

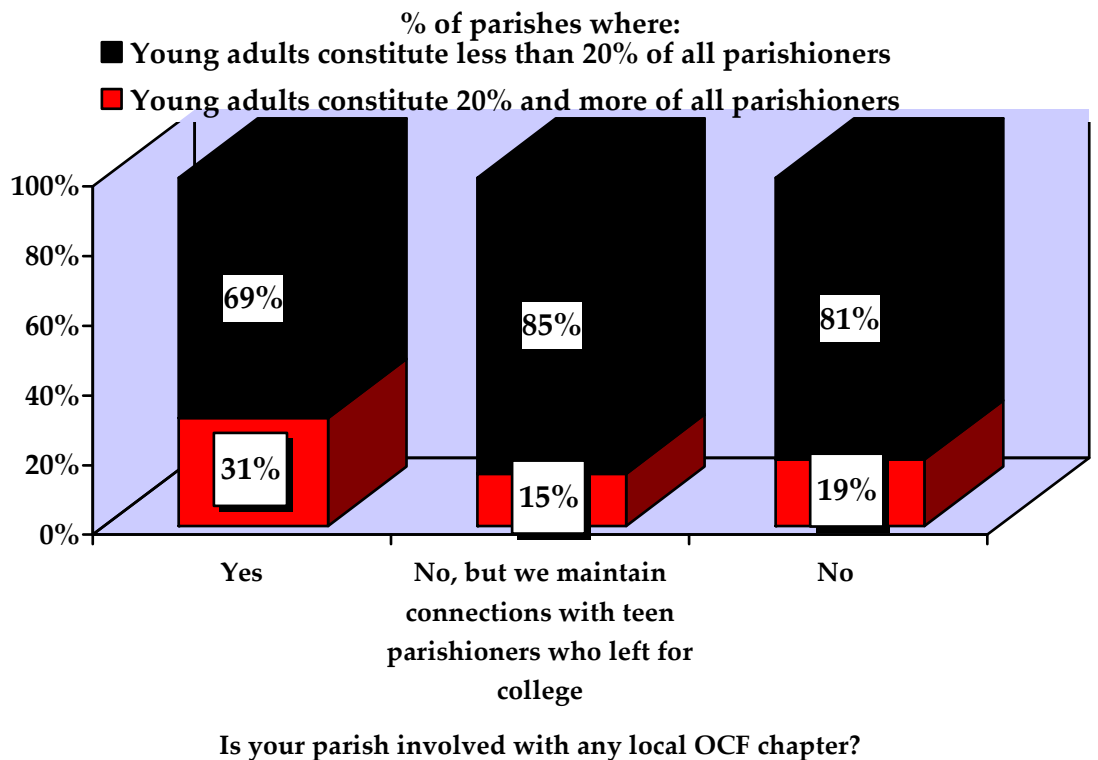


Fig. 39b Parish's Involvement with Local OCF Chapters Attracts More Young Adults into a Parish

"Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?"

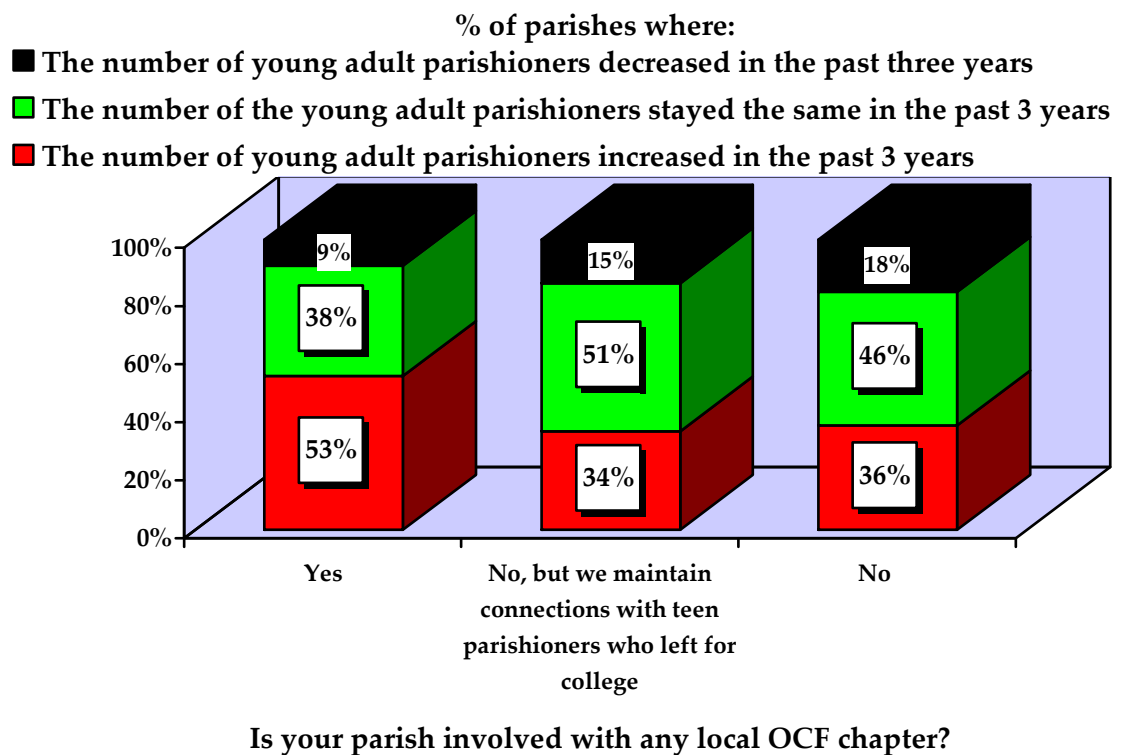
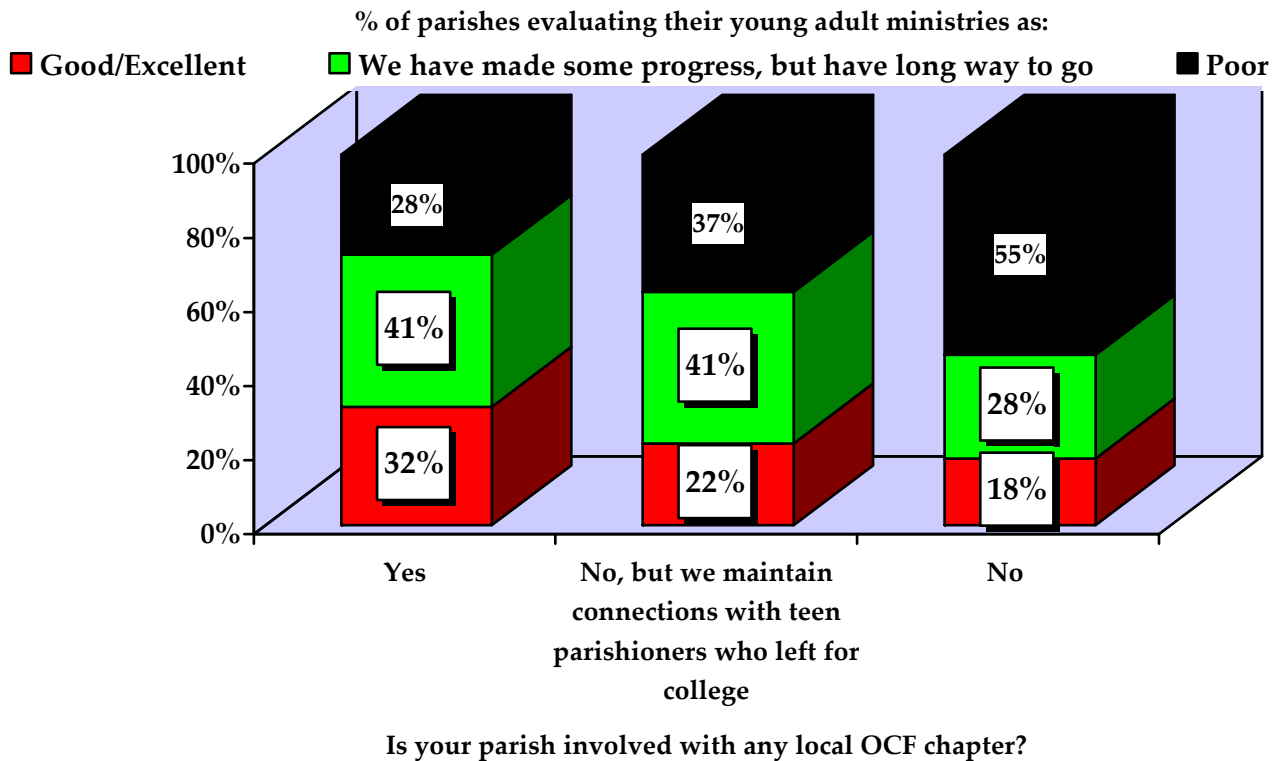


Fig. 39c Parish's Involvement with OCF Chapters Helps to Improve Parish's Young Adult Ministries

"Which of the following best describes your parish's young adult ministries?"



Clearly, it is equally likely that:

- ❖ A parish's involvement with OCF may have positive influence on young adults' presence among parishioners and the quality of the parish's young adult ministries AND VICE VERSA
- ❖ A strong presence of young adult parishioners and good young adult ministries could result in parish's involvement with the OCF chapter

The bottom line is: the survey data indicate clearly that a parish's success in serving its young adult parishioners and parish's involvement with local OCF chapters go hand in hand with each other.

"Involvement of a parish with a local OCF chapter" is a broad term. But what do the parishes actually do for and how do they help the OCF chapters? If a parish responded "yes" to the general question about involvement with OCF, the survey followed with the question about specific forms of support offered to OCF chapters. Fig. 40 shows the percentages of the parishes that answered "yes" on the general question about involvement with OCF and then indicated their participation in specific OCF related activities.

Fig. 40 Of All US Orthodox Parishes Involved With Local OCF Chapters, the Percentage (%) of Parishes Which Do Each of the Following

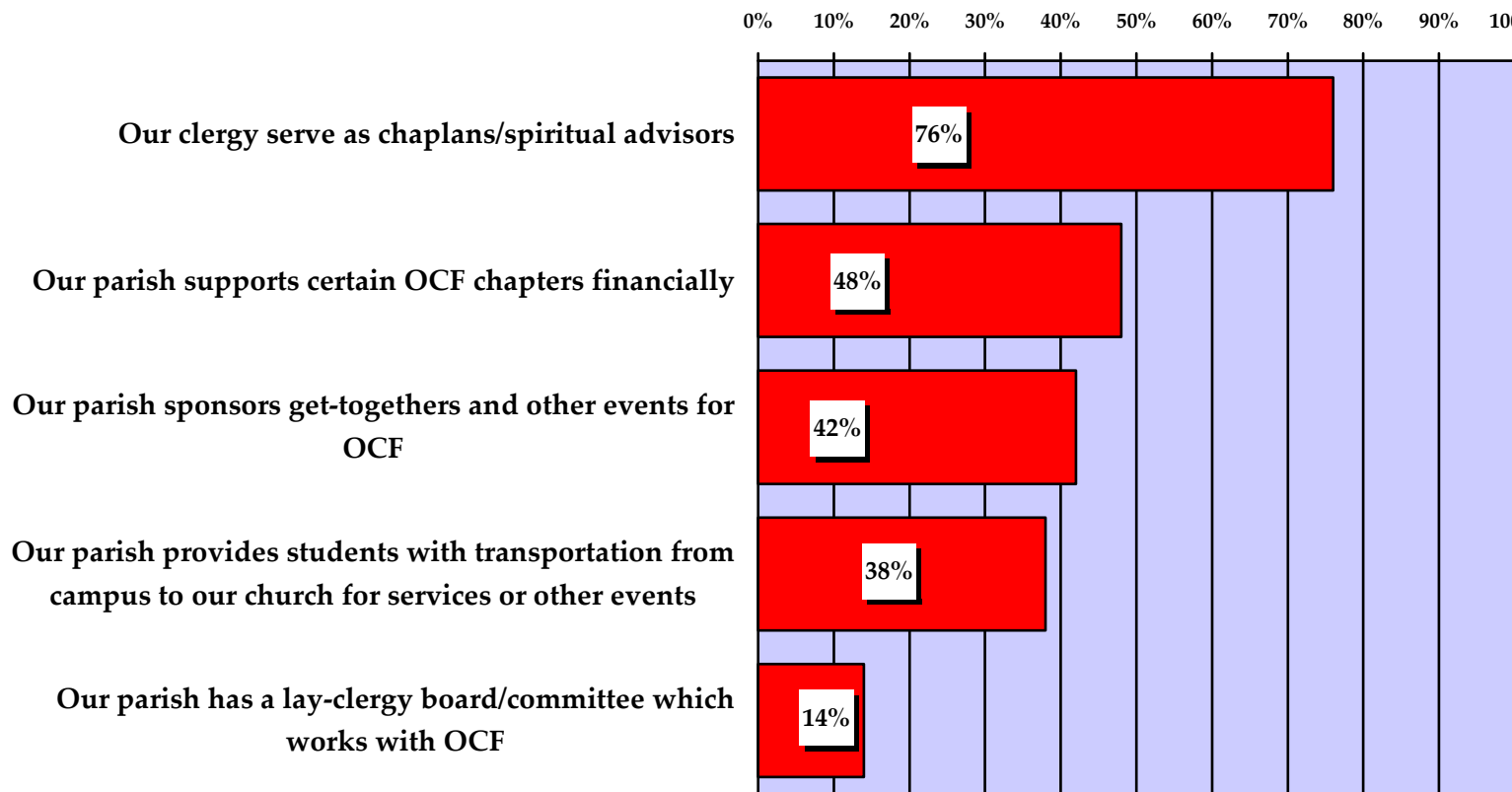
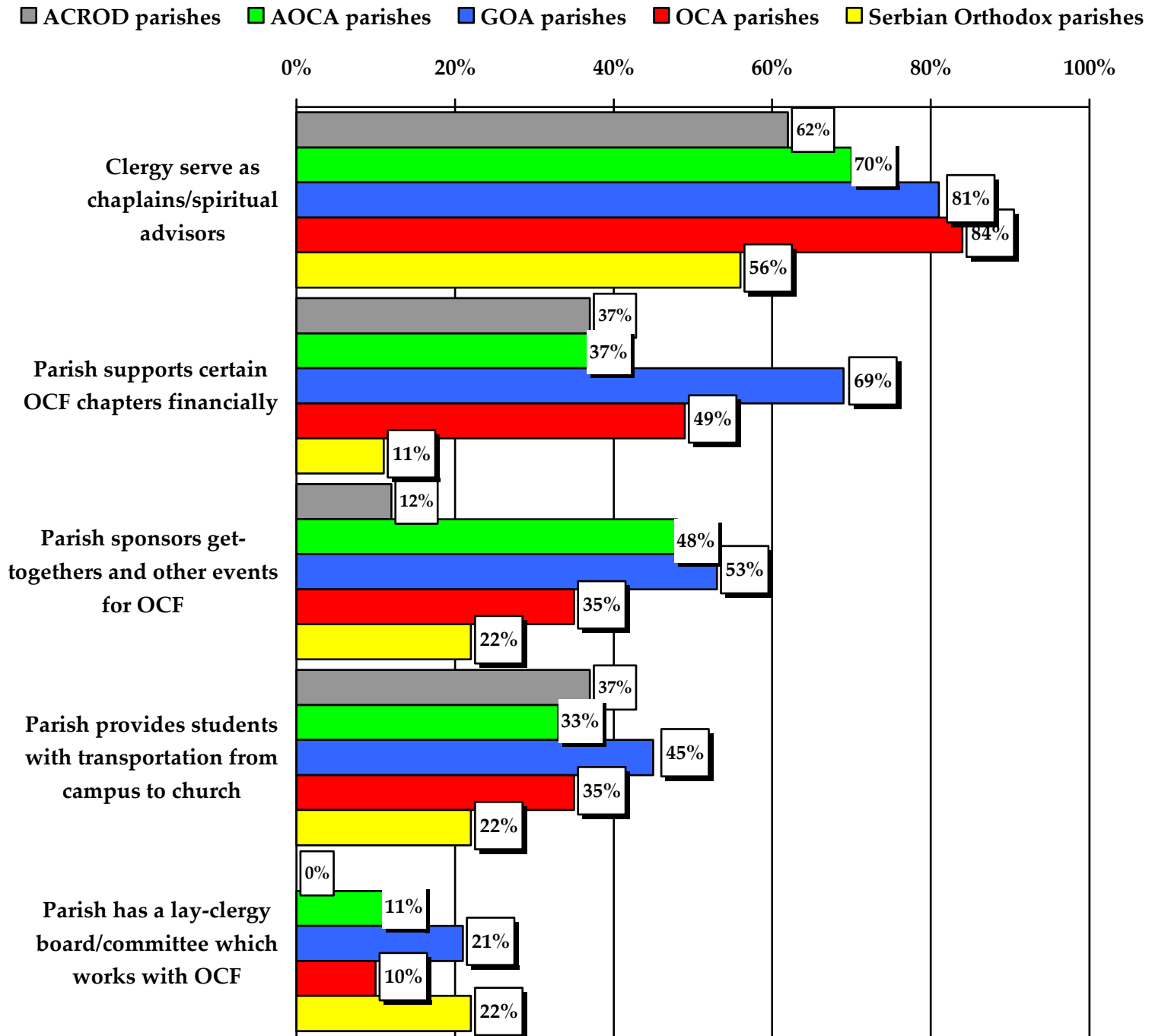


Fig. 40 shows that by far the most widespread form of involvement of the parishes with OCF (76%) is their clergy serving as spiritual advisors. Less than half of the parishes involved with OCF offer to OCF chapters some financial support (48%) or sponsor various OCF events (42%). And only one-in-seven (14%) of parishes involved with OCF take their involvement truly seriously and have permanent boards/committees that work with OCF chapters.

There are certain variations between the parishes of five individual jurisdictions in forms and, most importantly, degree of their involvement with the local OCF chapters. Fig. 41 on the next page shows that all jurisdictions are similar in a way that having clergy serving as spiritual advisors/chaplains in OCF chapters is the most common form of involvement with OCF, whereas establishing permanent lay-clergy boards/committees working with Orthodox students is the least common form. But the jurisdictions differ significantly from each other by the degree of their involvement in each form of work with OCF: i.e., by the percentage of parishes that participate in each area of activities presented in Fig. 41.

Fig. 41 Differences between Antiochian, American Carpatho-Russian, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox Parishes in their Involvement with the Local OCF Chapters

Of all parishes reporting that they are "involved with the local OCF chapters," percentage (%) of parishes which do each of the following



Clearly, the involvement of Orthodox parishes with OCF chapters is not limited to five areas indicated in Fig. 40 and 41. Therefore the questionnaire also asked about "any other forms of cooperation with OCF." Only a few parishes provided some additional information on their work with OCF. Three of these answers were interesting in a sense that they described something that could be considered and implemented by other

parishes. One parish indicated that its OCF chapter has a designated "Orthodox Christian Resident House on campus." Another parish noted that besides working with Eastern Orthodox students, it also helps with "Oriental Indian Orthodox College Ministry." Finally, one parish mentioned that when OCF students attend this parish's services they always receive "special welcome and recognition."

VI. Money Matters: Finances in US Orthodox Parishes

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ 41% of Orthodox clergy participating in the survey described overall financial health of their parishes as "good or excellent." 40% of the priests reported that financial health of their churches is "tight, but manageable." One-in-five respondents (19%) indicated that financial health of their parishes is "in some or serious difficulty." Among individual jurisdictions, the Carpatho-Russian Diocese has the highest proportion of churches that reported that their financial health is "good or excellent" (54%). On the contrary, the GOA has lowest percentage of parish clergy that think that financial health of their churches is "good or excellent" (37%);
- ❖ From 2010-2015, the overall financial health of US Orthodox parishes has improved significantly. The proportion of Orthodox clergy evaluating financial health of their parishes as "good or excellent" increased from 32% in 2010 to 41% in 2015. The proportion of parishes whose finances were described as "in some or serious difficulty" decreased from 35% in 2010 to 19% in 2015.

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DISCUSSION:

How sound is the overall financial health of American Orthodox parishes? The survey asked parish clergy, "How would you describe your parish's financial health?" They can respond: "in serious or some difficulty," "tight but we manage," and "good or excellent." See. Fig. 42 on the next page.

**Fig. 42 Overall Financial Health of U.S. Orthodox Parishes:
"How would you describe your parish's financial health?"**

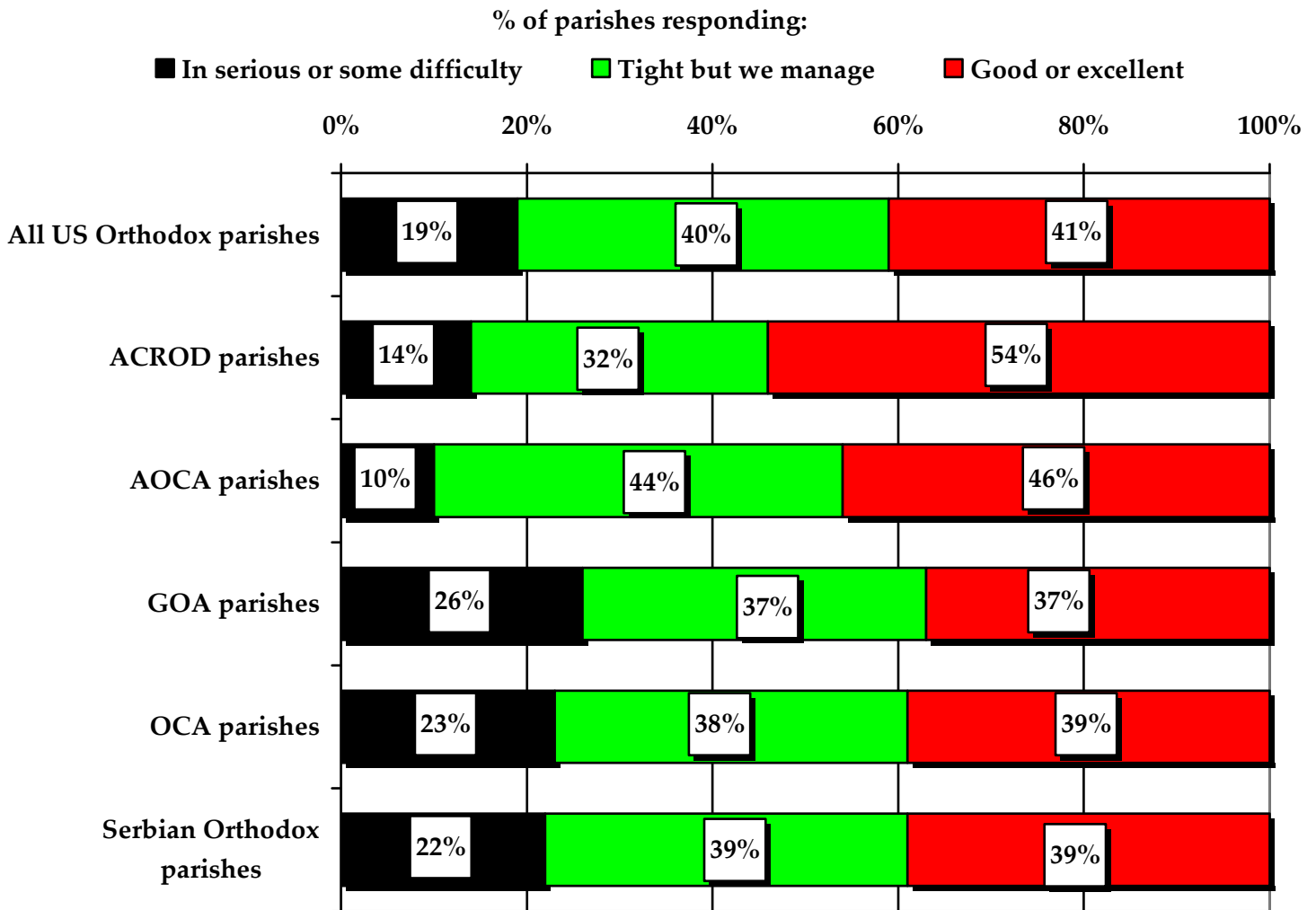


Fig. 42 shows that 41% (relative majority) of American Orthodox clergy describe overall financial health of their parishes as "good or excellent." In 40% of the parishes, the finances are "tight, but manageable." Finally, one-in-five parishes (19%) is in "some or serious" financial difficulty. However, there is a significant difference between ACROD, AOCA, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox priests in how they evaluate the financial well-being of their churches. From the perspective of parish clergy, the parishes of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese are in the best financial situation. Absolute majority (54%) of ACROD priests reported that the financial health of their parishes is "good or excellent." On the opposite end are the GOA clergy. Only 37% of them reported "good or excellent" financial health of their parishes, whereas in more than a quarter (26%) of the GOA parishes the finances were described as being in "some or serious" difficulty.

To be sure, it is very possible that more GOA than OCA, AOCA, ACROD and Serbian Orthodox parishes run diverse parish-based programs, have more paid staff, or are involved in ambitious building projects. Yet, the results of the survey tell us that the *feelings* of GOA clergy about their current economies are more negative than this is the case among OCA, AOCA, ACROD, and Serbian Orthodox priests.

The study found that during 2010-2015 overall financial health of U.S. Orthodox parishes has improved significantly. Indeed, in addition to the question "How would you describe your parish's financial health today?", the survey also asked, "How would you describe your parish's financial health in 2010?" Fig. 43 allows us to compare the responses of the parishes to these two questions.

Fig. 43 Overall Financial Health of U.S. Orthodox Parishes: 2010 versus 2015
"How would you describe your parish's financial health today and in 2010?"

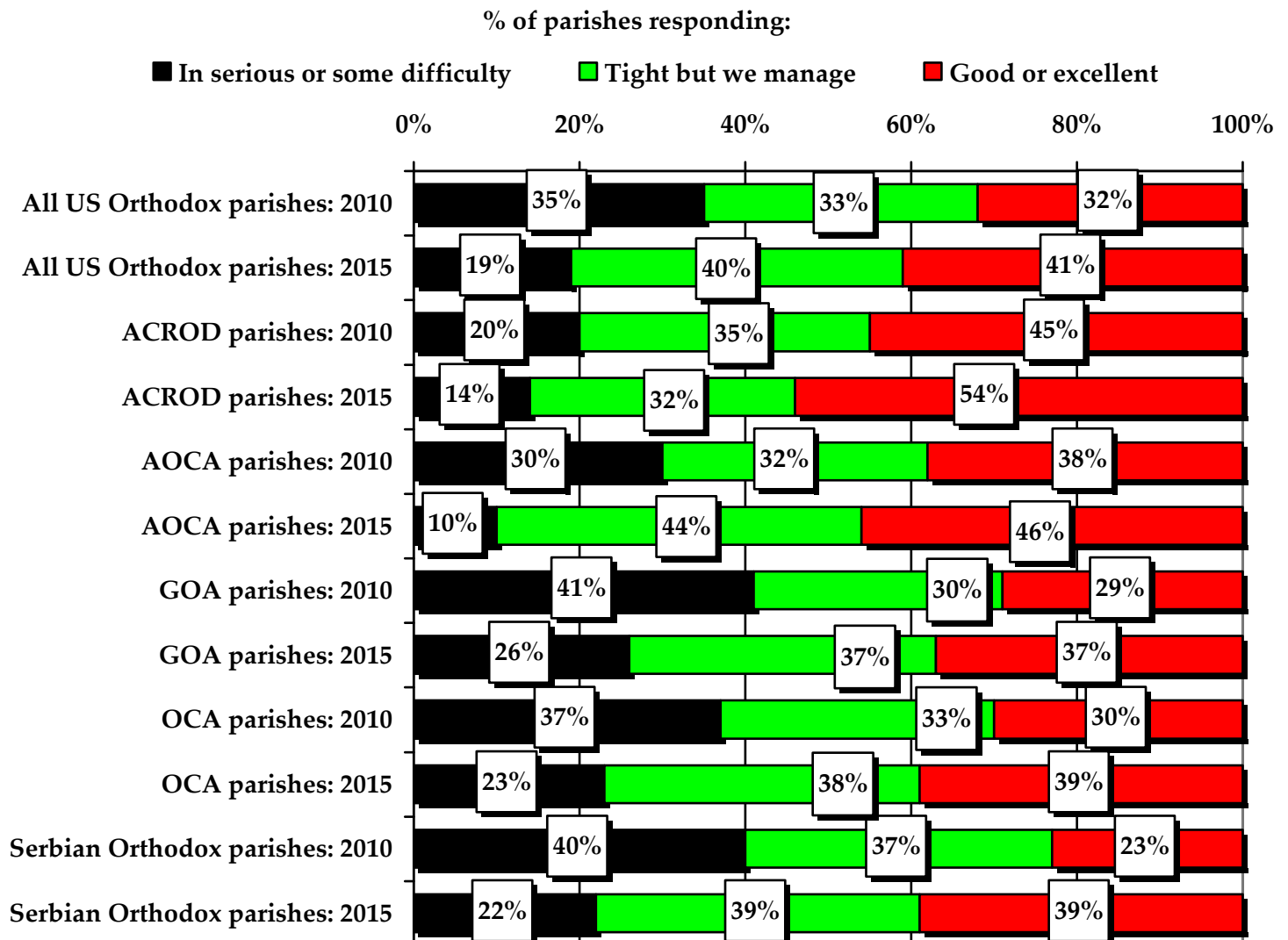


Fig. 43 shows that within a five years period, the proportion of U.S. Orthodox parishes evaluating their financial health as "good or excellent" rose by nine percentage points: from 32% in 2010 to 41% in 2015. At the same time, the proportion of parishes whose finances were "in some or serious difficulty" decreased by 16%: from 35% in 2010 to 19% in 2015. Not only U.S. Orthodox parishes as a whole, but the parishes of all the five individual jurisdictions experienced significant improvement in their financial health from 2010-2015.

VII. Worship in US Orthodox Parishes

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS

- ❖ Among the five jurisdictions participating in the study, OCA and ACROD parishes have the best rates of church attendance among their *regularly participating* church members: nearly 90% of them attend church services on Sunday. On the contrary, Serbian Orthodox parishes have the lowest rates of church attendance: less than half (49%) of Serbian parishioners are in church on an average weekend. It should be emphasized that these percentages reflect frequency of church attendance not by all parishioners but only by the persons who are considered by the parishes as "regularly participating in the life of a parish." That is, the "real" rates of church attendance - if calculated by using the total number of all parishioners - would be significantly lower;
- ❖ Between 2010 and 2015, the number of persons (including children) attending weekend worship services in an average American Orthodox parish and on a typical weekend dropped from 159 to 120. Among three major Orthodox jurisdictions, Antiochian parishes experienced an especially sharp decline in average weekend worship attendance: from 140 persons in 2010 to 107 persons in 2015. In the GOA parishes, average weekend worship attendance declined from 228 parishioners in 2010 to 201 persons in 2015. Only OCA parishes increased slightly their average weekend worship attendance: from 88 parishioners in 2010 to 91 in 2015;
- ❖ From 2010-2015, AOCA and GOA *regularly participating* church members have become less engaged in the lives of their parishes. Differently, in OCA parishes, there was no change in degree of church engagement of their *regularly participating* members;
- ❖ Well over 80% of clergy feel that the words "reverent" (89%) and "filled with the sense of God's presence" (84%) describe worship in their parishes "quite well" or "very well." The clergy were significantly less likely to say that "inspirational" and "thought provoking" are also good descriptions of the worship services in their parishes. Only 73% and 69% respondents, respectively, agreed that these words describe accurately their worship services. And only 22% of the priests described their worship services as "innovative;"

- ❖ The clergy of the various Orthodox jurisdictions are fairly similar in how they describe worship services in their parishes;
- ❖ The parishes where worship services are described as "joyful" and "inspirational" are the parishes that are also very likely to describe themselves as being "thriving" and growing in young adult members. On the opposite end are two descriptions of worship that have little or no influence: worship being "reverent" and "innovative." In other words, the fact that a parish has "reverent" or "innovative" style of worship has no connection with, or no influence on, the fact that a parish would be "thriving" and "growing in young adult church members."

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DISCUSSION

Sacramental worship is very central to the life of every Orthodox parish. The Orthodox Church is intentional about preserving her liturgical traditions and Orthodox services are regulated by numerous requirements and rules. Subsequently, Orthodox liturgical worship allows for significantly less "experimentation" and fewer "innovations" than Protestant or even Roman Catholic worship services. Nevertheless, each Orthodox parish has its own "style" of how Liturgy and other worship services are celebrated. The duration of, and language used in worship services, the vibrancy and relevance of sermons, the engagement of children and youths into altar service, the quality of the choir, the implementation of congregational singing, the inclusion of certain "optional" elements into the service, the understanding by parishioners of what happens during each part of the service, and many other nuances make a huge difference in the experience of Orthodox worship in each local parish.

The percentage of parishioners who attend worship services on a regular basis is a good indicator of how successful each parish is in building a strong local Christian community and making its people genuine disciples of Christ rather than being merely "financially contributing" church members.

The survey asked, "Please estimate the average attendance at your regular weekend worship services (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). If you have more than one weekend worship service, estimate the attendance for all weekend services combined." Tab. 7 compares two figures: the number of persons typically attending weekend worship services and the number of all regularly participating parishioners in an average parish (for this figure we used the data on parish membership provided in Chapter 2 of this study report).

**Tab. 7 Worship Attendance versus Number of Regularly Participating Church Members
in the Parishes of Various Jurisdictions**

	Weekend worship attendance (persons) in an "average" parish	Number of regularly participating parishioners in an "average" parish	Percentage (%) of weekend worship attendees in the total of regularly participating parishioners
All parishes	120	171	70%
ACROD parishes	63	71	89%
AOCA parishes	107	144	74%
GOA parishes	201	321	63%
OCA parishes	91	104	88%
Serbian Orthodox parishes	90	183	49%

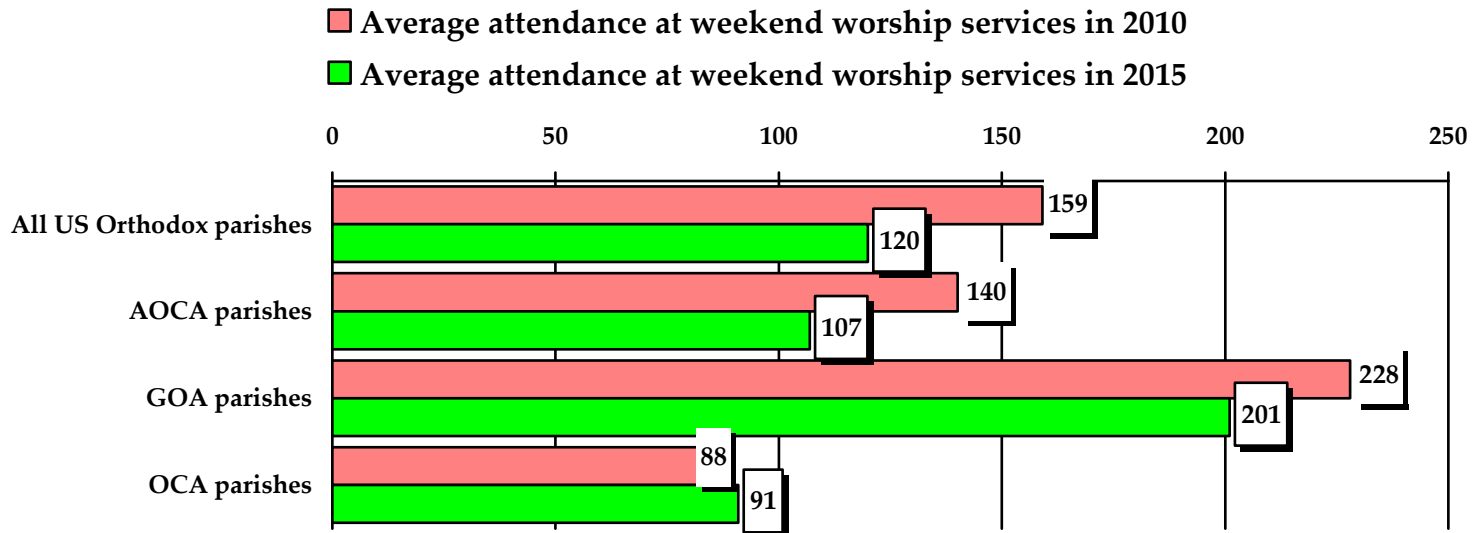
The last (right) column in Tab. 7 shows percentage of regularly participating church members who are present in church on an average weekend. Tab. 7 shows that OCA and ACROD parishes have the best rates of church attendance among their regularly participating church members: nearly 90% of them are present in church at weekend worship services. On the contrary, Serbian Orthodox parishes have the lowest rates of church attendance: less than half (49%) of Serbian Orthodox regularly participating parishioners are in the church on an average weekend. It should be emphasized that the percentages in the right column reflect the frequency of church attendance not by all parishioners but only by the persons who are considered by the parishes as "regularly participating in the life of a parish." That is, the "real" rates of church attendance - if calculated by using the total number of all parishioners - would be, of course, significantly lower.

The same question about the total number of persons attending weekend worship services was asked in the 2010 national survey of U.S. Orthodox parishes. Fig. 45 compares an average weekend worship attendance in 2010 and 2015 for all U.S. Orthodox parishes and for the parishes of three major Orthodox jurisdictions: AOCA, GOA and OCA.¹⁷

¹⁷ ACROD and Serbian Orthodox parishes were not present in significant numbers in 2010 survey. Therefore, we do not statistically reliable 2010 data for this two jurisdictions.

Fig. 45 Change in the Number of Persons Attending Weekend Worship Services from 2010-2015

"Please estimate the average attendance at your regular weekend worship services (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). If you have more than one weekend worship service, estimate the attendance for all weekend services combined."



The data presented in Fig. 45 are worrisome. Within a five year period, between 2010 and 2015, the number of persons (including children) attending weekend worship services in an average American Orthodox parish and on a typical weekend dropped from 159 to 120. Among three major Orthodox jurisdictions, Antiochian parishes experienced the sharpest decline in average weekend worship attendance: from 140 persons in 2010 to 107 persons in 2015. In GOA parishes, average weekend worship attendance declined from 228 parishioners in 2010 to 201 persons in 2015. Only OCA parishes increased slightly their average weekend worship attendance: from 88 parishioners in 2010 to 91 in 2015.

An important observation can be made by comparing data in Fig. 45 with information on changes in the number of regularly participating church members in the parishes of three major jurisdictions (this subject was discussed in Chapter 2, see also Fig. 2c). In Chapter 2, we found that between 2010 and 2015, the total number of persons *regularly participating* in church life increased in the GOA from 147,200 to 179,400 (an increase by 22%); increased in the OCA from 56,100 to 58,100 (an increase by 4%); and decreased in the AOCA from 40,000 to 35,400 (a decline by 12%).

Theoretically, one may expect that the changes in the number of persons attending worship services in the parishes would reflect the changes in the number of their regularly participating members. In other words, a smaller number of regularly participating parishioners means a smaller number of persons attending weekend worship services. The reality, however, is more complex. Between 2010 and 2015, GOA parishes had an increase in the number of *regularly participating* church members, but, at the same time, they experienced a decline in the number of persons attending weekend worship services. What this means is that a number of those parishioners who are still considered by the GOA clergy as *regularly participating members* have become less engaged and now come to church less frequently than they did in the past.

AOCA parishes declined in the number of *regularly participating* church members by 12%, but their decline in the average worship attendance was even more staggering; by 24% (from 140 persons in an "average" parish in 2010 to 107 in 2015). That is, not only have AOCA parishes lost a number of their *regularly participating* church members, but their remaining *regularly participating* members became less engaged and now attend worship services less frequently than they did in the past.

Only in OCA parishes have the changes in the number of regularly participating members (+4%) corresponded with the changes in the average worship attendance at weekend services (+3%). In summary, from 2010-2015, AOCA and GOA church members have become less engaged in the lives of their parishes and they attend worship services less frequently than they did five years ago. In contrast, in OCA parishes, there was no change in the degree of members' church engagement.

The survey asked clergy how well the following seven characteristics describe their parish's regular Sunday worship services:

- ❖ Reverent;
- ❖ Filled with a sense of God's presence;
- ❖ Thought-provoking;
- ❖ Nurturing people's faith;
- ❖ Innovative;
- ❖ Inspirational;
- ❖ Joyful.

With regard to each characteristic, the clergy could say that it describes the worship services in their parishes "very well," "quite well," "somewhat," "slightly," or "not at all."

Fig. 46 shows percentages of clergy who think that each of these characteristics describe worship services in their parishes "very well" or "quite well."

Fig. 46 "How well do the following describe your parish's regular Sunday worship service?"

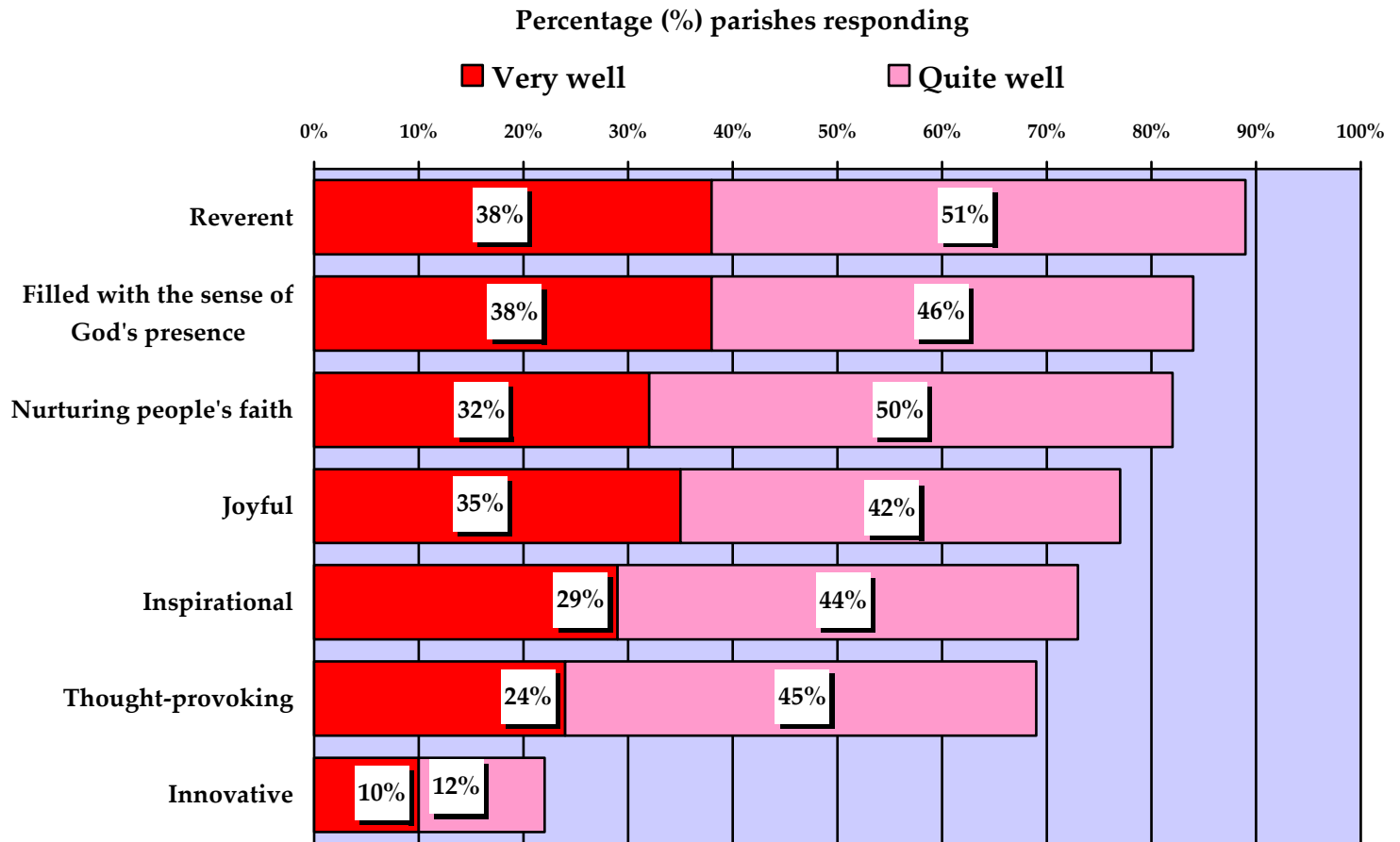


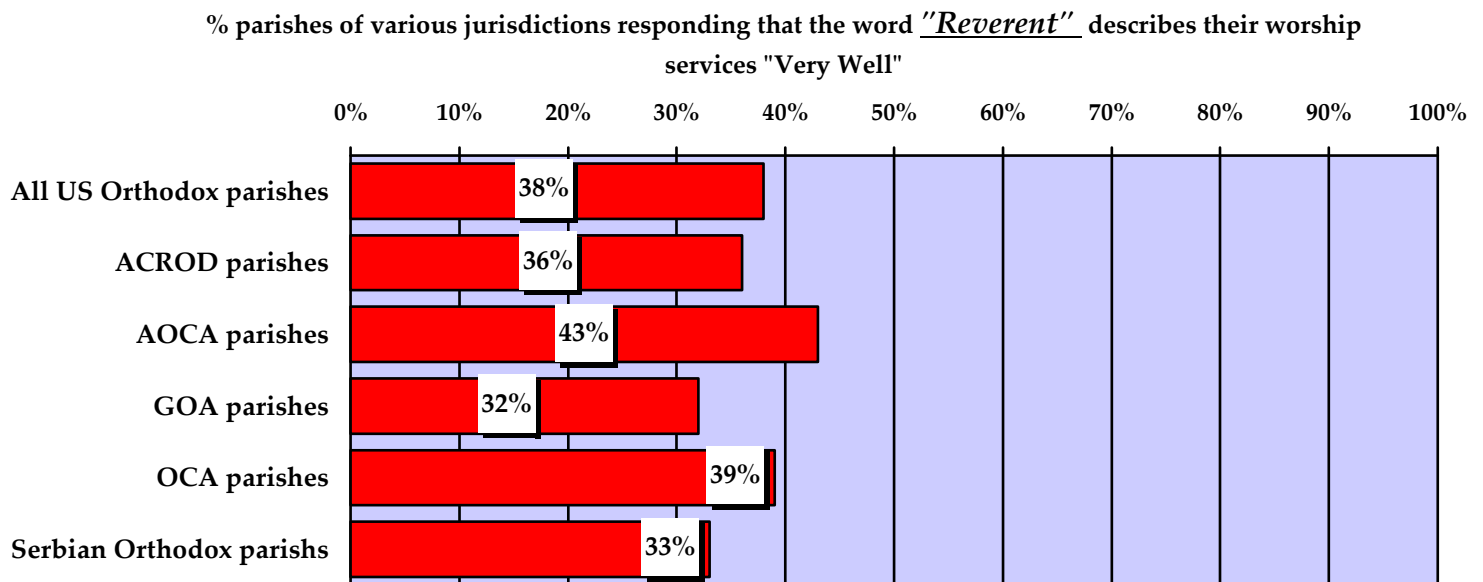
Fig. 46 allows for two observations. First, it shows that the vast majority of clergy (69% or more) said that "reverent," "filled with the sense of God's presence," "nurturing people's faith," "joyful," "inspirational" and "thought provoking" describe worship in their parishes "quite well" or "very well." These quite positive evaluations are not surprising, because essentially our respondents - parish priests - evaluated themselves since they are the persons who conduct worship services. The clergy were far less likely to say that their worship services are "innovative" (only 22% of clergy think so) which is also not surprising, because of the emphasis of the Orthodox Church on preserving traditional forms of worship and because innovation in worship is not something that would be seen as positive by most parish priests.

Second, while a strong majority of clergy agreed with six out of seven characteristics as "quite/very well" describing worship in their parishes, there is still a significant difference between these six characteristics in how likely the clergy were to agree with each. "reverent" and "filled with the sense of God's presence" were

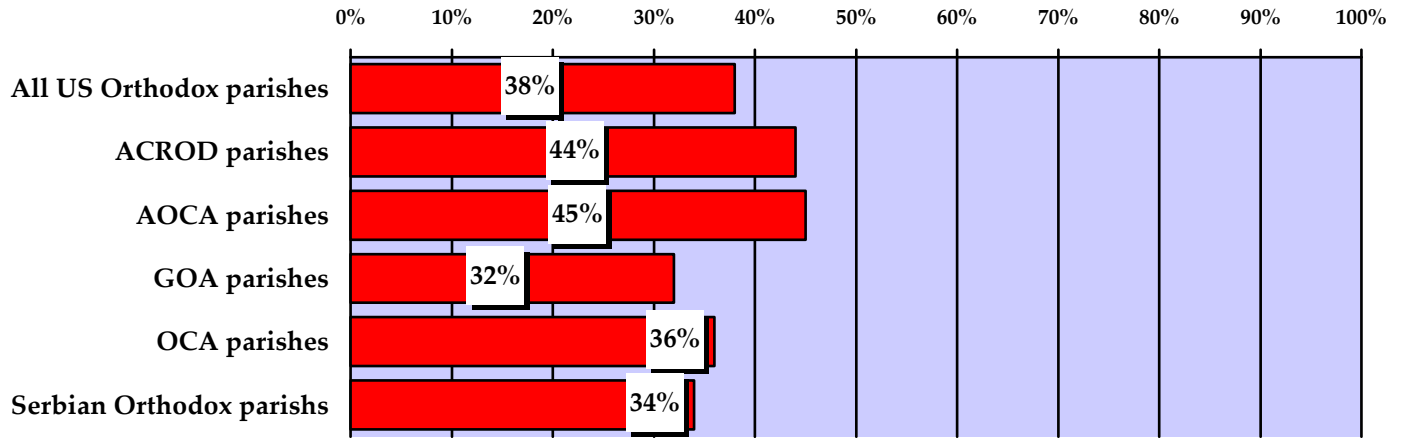
most frequently indicated by the clergy as describing worship in their parishes "quite/very well:" respectively, 89% and 84% of respondents agreed that these characteristics accurately describe their worship services. At the same time, the clergy were significantly less likely to say that "inspirational" and "thought provoking" are good definitions for the worship services in their parishes: only 73% and 69% respondents, respectively, agreed that these characteristics accurately describe their worship services. That is, the two characteristics of worship that would require a more creative approach on the part of the clergy are less common than the characteristics that are more associated simply with simply following established liturgical practices ("reverent" and "filled with the sense of God's presence.").

Are there any significant differences between the clergy of various Orthodox jurisdictions in how they describe their worship services and how likely they are to agree with each of the seven characteristics of worship? The answer to this question is: "Not much difference." Fig. 47 compares the percentage of clergy in the five jurisdictions who reported that each of the seven characteristics describes worship services in their parishes "very well." One can see that there are certain variations in their degree of agreement with each of seven characteristics of worship, but not significant differences or strong patterns that would indicate that the style of worship services in certain jurisdictions differs significantly from others. In short, the clergy of the five Orthodox jurisdictions are fairly similar in how they describe worship services in their parishes.

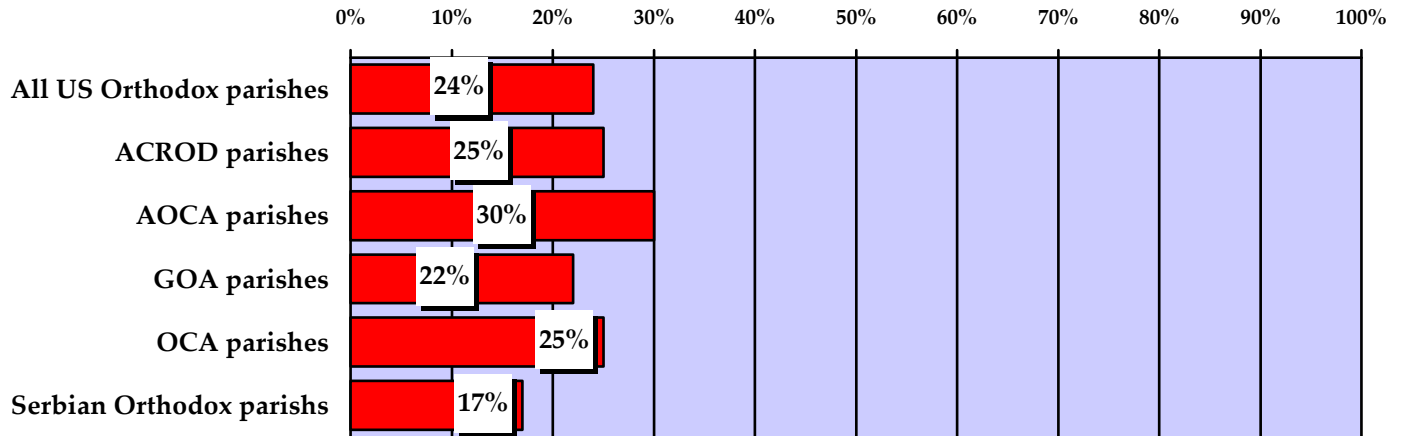
Fig. 47 "How well does each of the following characteristics describe your parish's regular Sunday worship service?"



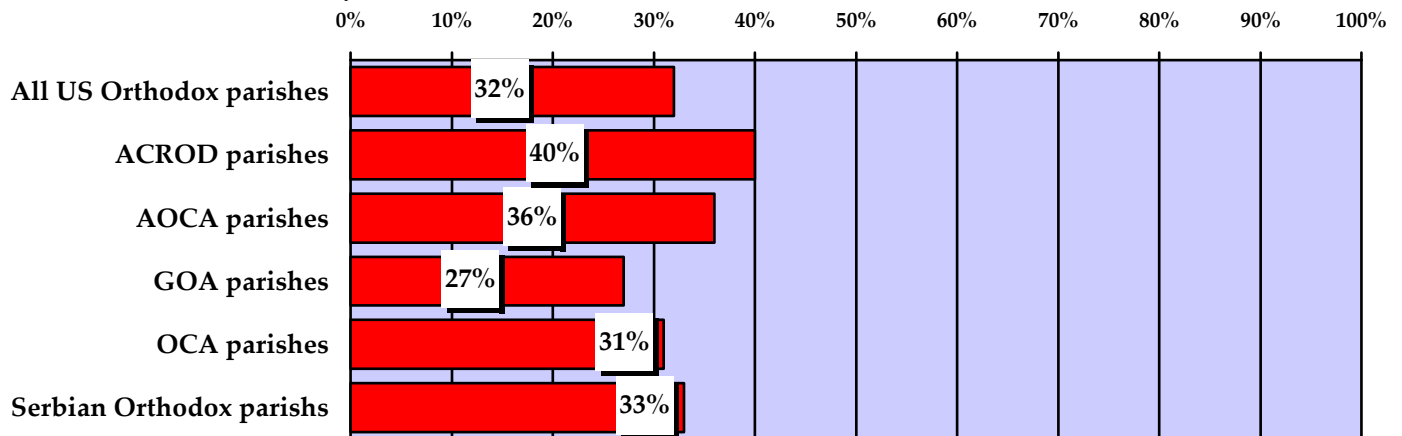
% parishes of various jurisdictions responding that *"Filled with a sense of God's presence"* describes their worship services "Very Well"



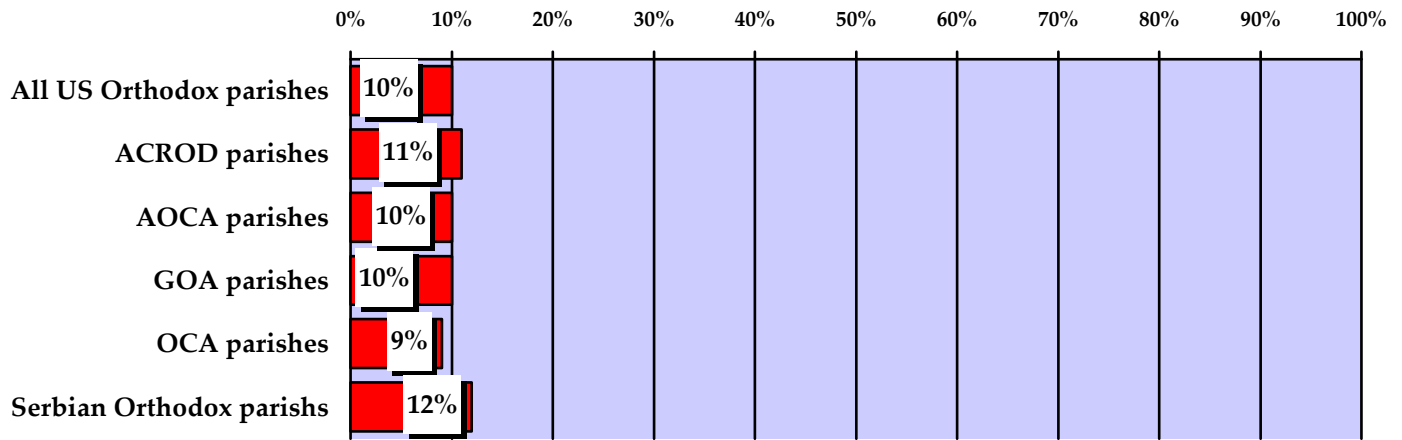
% parishes of various jurisdictions responding that the word *"Thought-Provoking"* describes their worship services "Very Well"



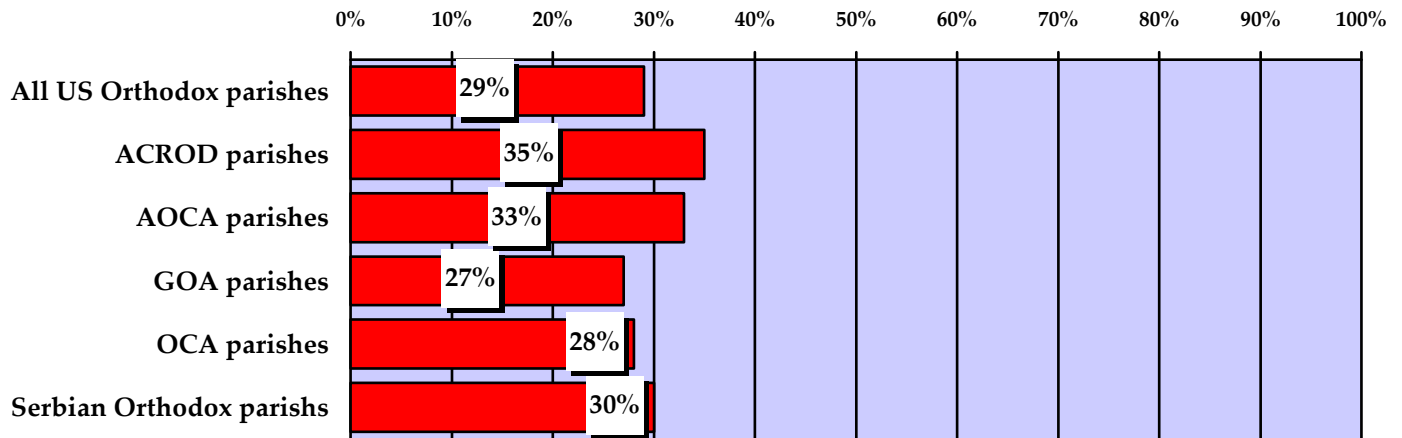
% parishes of various jurisdictions responding that *"Nurturing People's faith"* describes their worship services "Very Well"



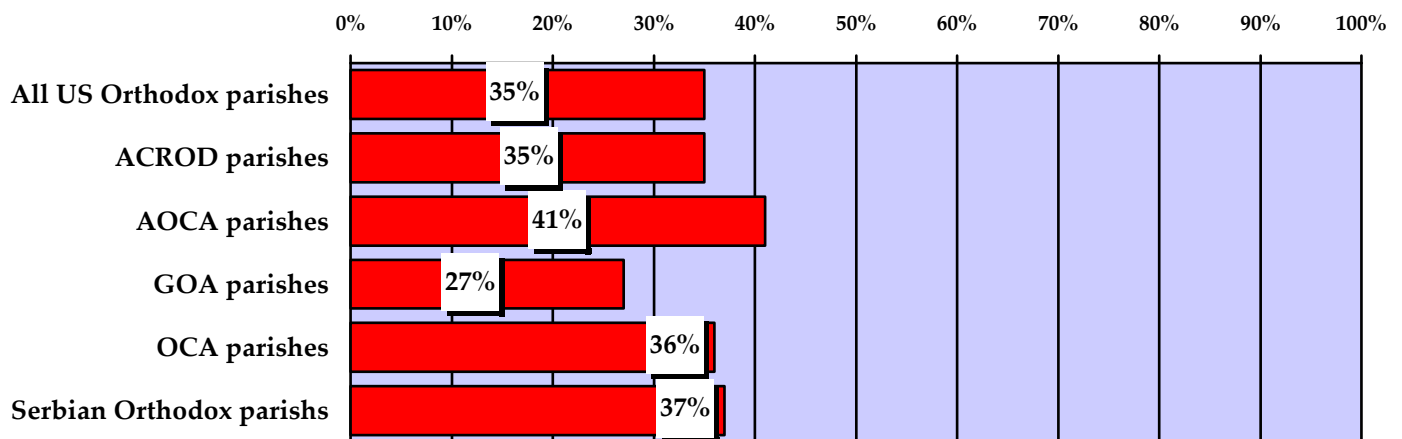
% parishes of various jurisdictions responding that the word *"Innovative"* describes their worship services "Very Well"



% parishes of various jurisdictions responding that the word *"Inspirational"* describes their worship services "Very Well"



% parishes of various jurisdictions responding that the word *"Joyful"* describes their worship services "Very Well"



Liturgical worship is the most essential element in the parish life. Therefore, it would be logical to presume that "high quality" worship services would have a positive influence on many other aspects of the life of a parish, thus making the local Orthodox community more vibrant and stronger. The question is: are any of seven characteristics of worship especially important for building a strong parish community?

In order to answer this question, we used clergy answers to two questions that were discussed in previous chapters. The first question (discussed in Chapter 5) was about changes in the number of young adult church members in the parish within past three years: "Has the number of young adults participating in your parish increased or decreased in the past three years?" (the clergy could reply "increased," "stayed the same" or "decreased"). The second question used for the analysis was about clergy predictions of the future of their parishes discussed in Chapter 3: "What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?" (The clergy could reply "we are thriving and this should continue," "we are doing okay and this should continue," "we are doing Okay now, but the future is uncertain," or "we are struggling and this is likely to continue in the foreseeable future").

We analyzed the statistical relationship between answers to these two questions and their degree of agreement with each of seven characteristics of worship in their parishes. Out of seven characteristics of worship, two have by far the strongest relation with parish being thriving and growing in young adult members: worship being "joyful" and "inspirational." In other words, *the parishes where worship services are "joyful" and "inspirational" are the parishes that are very likely to be thriving and growing in the young adult members.* On the opposite end are two characteristics of worship that have relatively little or no influence: worship being "reverent" and "innovative." In other words, the fact that a parish has "reverent" or "innovative" style of worship has no connection with or no influence on the fact that a parish would be thriving and growing in young adult church members.

VIII. Programs, Faith Formation, and Ecumenical Involvement

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS

- ❖ The clergy were asked about the presence of seven program areas in their parishes and about how much emphasis is given to each of these programs:
 - The only type of program that receives serious attention in an absolute majority of U.S. Orthodox parishes is "fellowships and other social activities" (62% of clergy reported that in their parishes "fellowships and other social activities" are given "a lot of emphasis" or are "specialty of ours");
 - Less than half of American Orthodox parishes (47%) pay serious attention to "community service activities and helping those in needs;"
 - Less than half of parishes (43%) place a strong emphasis on "Bible, Scripture studies other than Sunday school;"
 - Only slightly more than one-third (37%) of parishes give strong emphasis to "youth (14-17) activities and programs" and only one-in-six parishes (17%) is focused on developing programs and activities for young adult (18-34) church members.
- ❖ There are significant differences among the parishes of various jurisdictions with regard to how much attention is paid to developing various parish-based programs and ministries:
 - Compared to the parishes of other jurisdictions, GOA churches pay more attention to developing "fellowships and social activities," "community service activities and helping those in needs," "youth (13-17) activities and programs" and "Bible, Scripture studies other than Sunday school;"
 - "Prayer groups and spiritual retreats" are much more present and emphasized in AOCA churches than in parishes of other jurisdictions;
 - "Music programs" play a more important role and receive much greater attention in both AOCA and OCA parishes than in parishes of other jurisdictions.
- ❖ Parishes that place strong emphasis on "Bible, Scripture studies other than Sunday school" and "prayer groups and spiritual retreats" are very likely to report that "we are thriving and this is likely to continue in the future;"
- ❖ The clergy were asked about how much priority they give to different goals in their parish religious education programs. Four major findings emerged from responses to this question:
 - By far the greatest priority in the parish-based religious education programs is to "nurture belief and trust in Jesus Christ;"

- The second priority is to teach parishioners to live the Orthodox faith in their daily lives: "to inspire parishioners to express their faith in life" and "to relate the Orthodox faith's beliefs and practices to each age level;"
 - The third priority is "to engage parishioners in nurture and fellowship;"
 - From the perspective of the clergy, the goal of acquiring formal knowledge of the Scriptures is not as important as the first three priorities.
- ❖ The degree of involvement of church members in parish-based religious education programs is remarkably similar in the parishes of the five jurisdictions. 25-29% of the regularly participating church members in the ACROD, AOCA, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox parishes are involved in parish-based religious education programs;
 - ❖ The parishes with a higher than average involvement of parishioners in continuing religious education share three features:
 - They typically have a greater presence of children and pre-teens (age 0-12) among their members;
 - They typically have a strong command of Internet and social media;
 - In their religious education programs these parishes give especially strong priority to "relating Orthodox practices and beliefs to each age level" and "engaging parishioners in nurture and fellowship."
 - ❖ The Orthodox practice of fasting is seen as an important by two-thirds of American Orthodox priests: 66% of the parish clergy reported that their parishes place "a lot" or "quite a bit" of emphasis on this practice. Among the parishes of the five jurisdictions, the Serbian Orthodox parishes place the greatest emphasis, while the GOA parishes place the smallest emphasis on the practice of fasting;
 - ❖ There is a very strong positive correlation between how much emphasis a parish gives to the practice of "parents talking with children about the Orthodox faith" and that parish's notion that "we are thriving and this should continue;"
 - ❖ A quarter (25%) of US Orthodox parishes engage in ecumenical worship services and one-third of them (35%) participate together with other religious congregations in various educational and fellowship activities. The degree of involvement of the Orthodox parishes in interfaith cooperation related to community service activities is significantly higher: 59% of the parishes reported that they have been involved in ecumenical "community service activities;"
 - ❖ Significantly more Serbian Orthodox and GOA parishes participate in ecumenical worship services, and educational and fellowship activities than AOCA and OCA churches;

- ❖ Two aspects in parish identity have a profound *positive effect* on the participation of the Orthodox parishes in various ecumenical activities: namely, the agreement of a parish with the statements "our parish is working for social justice" and "our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer." In other words, the parishes that agree with these statements are much more likely to be involved in the ecumenical worship events, educational, fellowship and community service activities than the parishes that either disagree or are "not sure" about these statements;
- ❖ Orthodox parishes that are led by younger clergy (up to 40 years old) are *much less* likely to engage in any ecumenical activities than parishes served by the middle-aged priests (40-59 years old) or, especially, older clergy (60 years and older).

DISCUSSION

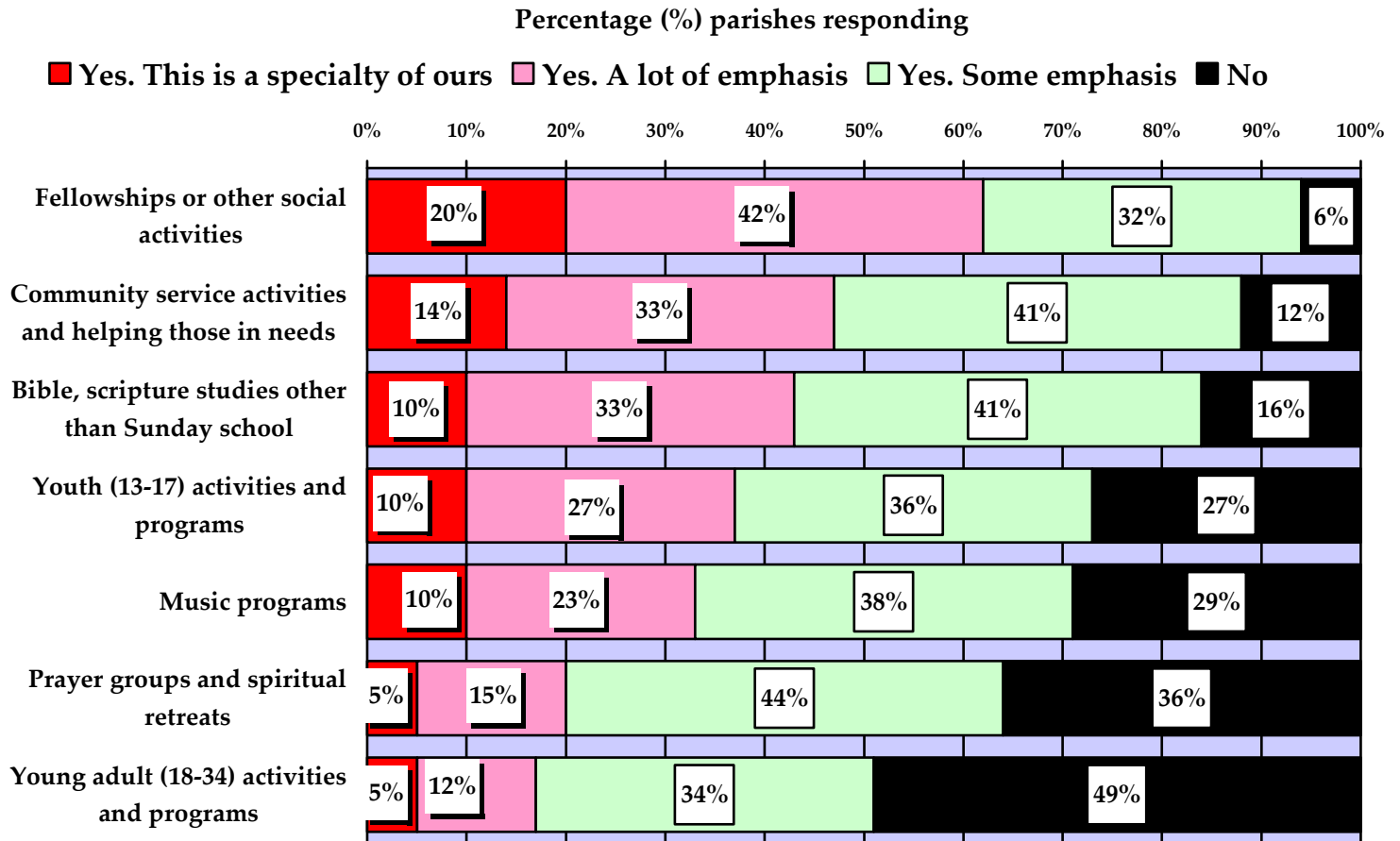
There is no doubt that sacramental liturgical worship is by far the most important aspect of any Orthodox parish. Yet, each parish is not only a worshipping congregation, but also a living and evolving local Christian community. A good parish community addresses various needs of its members by offering them different programs and activities. A parish may also develop some social ministries that are oriented to a parish's local neighborhood and society at large. Among various parish-based activities, especially important are the programs and practices that are related to continuing parishioners' faith formation. This goal - making parishioners stronger disciples of Christ and more devoted and engaged church members - can be pursued both via different forms of formal religious education and by teaching parishioners how to live out Orthodox Christian beliefs, values and traditions in their daily lives. This chapter will look at various parish-based programs in U.S. Orthodox Churches and it will examine what American Orthodox parishes do in terms of continuing faith formation of their members. In addition, this chapter also addresses the question of various forms of interaction and cooperation of American Orthodox parishes with non-Orthodox religious congregations.

The questionnaire first asked the clergy about the presence of various programs and ministries in their parishes and about how much attention the parish pays to each of these programs and ministries: "Does your parish have any of the following programs or activities? If yes, how much emphasis is given to the activity?" The respondents were given the list of seven broad program-areas. With regard to each, the respondents can reply: "No," "Yes. Some emphasis," "Yes. A lot of emphasis," or "Yes. This is a specialty of ours."

Fig. 48 summarizes the answers of the parish priests to this question.

Fig. 48 Programs and Ministries in U.S. Orthodox Parishes

“Does your parish have any of the following programs or activities? If yes, how much emphasis is given to the activity?”



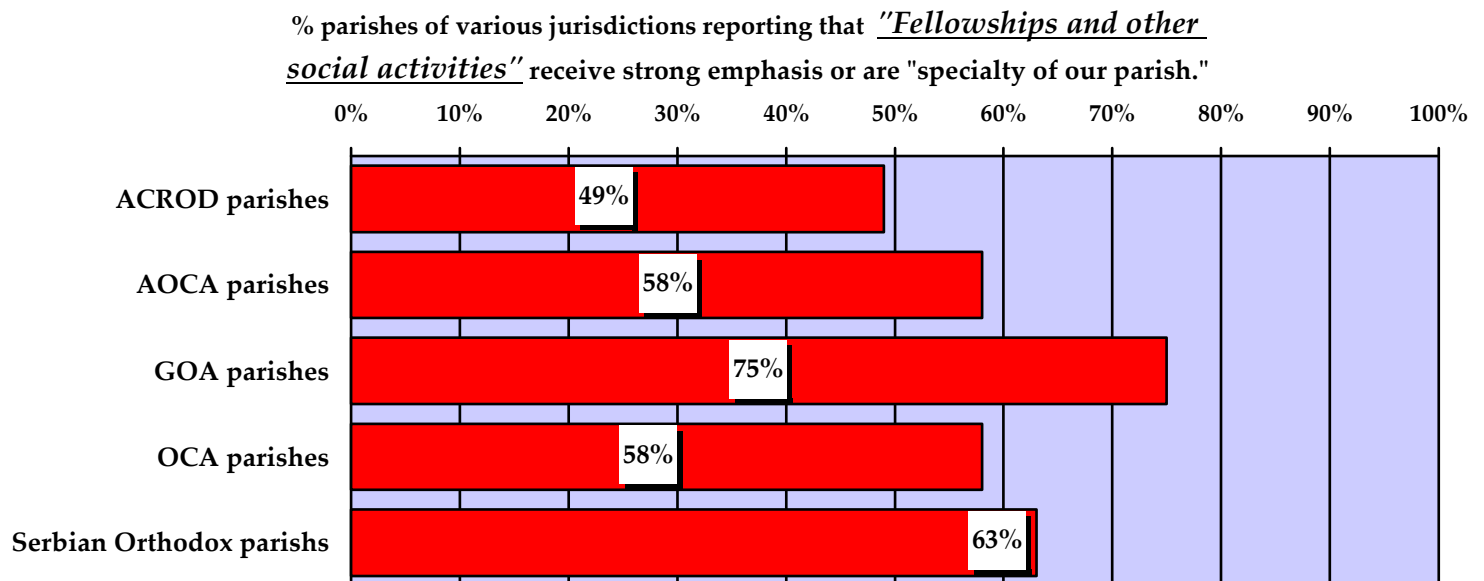
The picture in Fig. 48 is somewhat troubling, because the only type of activities/programs that receives serious attention in an absolute majority of American Orthodox parishes is "Fellowships and other social activities." 62% of clergy reported that in their parishes "Fellowships and other social activities" are given "a lot of emphasis" or are "specialty of ours."

Less than half of American Orthodox parishes (47%) pay serious attention to "community service activities and helping those in need." Similarly, when it comes to religious education of church members less than half of the parishes (43%) place strong emphasis on "Bible, Scripture studies other than Sunday school." As to various forms of other less formal faith formation programs such as "prayer groups, spiritual retreats," only one-in-five churches (20%) pay strong attention to offering these programs to church members.

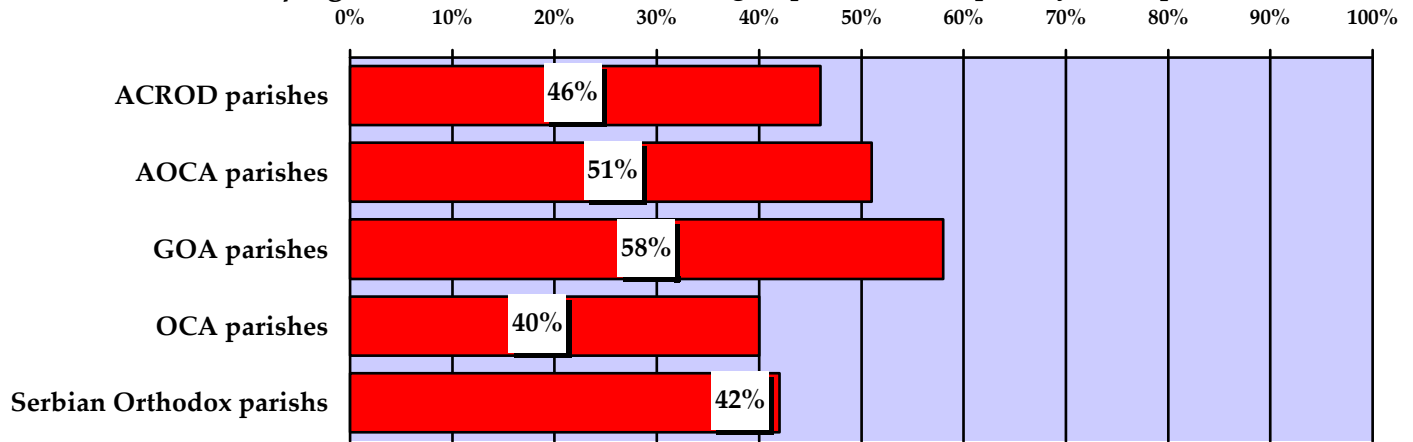
While the subject of young people leaving the Church is a very urgent topic in American Orthodox Churches, only slightly more than one-third (37%) of the parishes give a strong emphasis to "youth (14-17) activities and programs" and only one-in-six parishes (17%) is focused on developing programs and activities for young adult (18-34) church members.

Fig. 48 presents an overall picture of programs and ministries in American Orthodox parishes. At the same time, there are significant differences among the parishes of various jurisdictions. Fig. 49 compares the parishes of the five jurisdictions by how much emphasis they place on each of the seven types of activities and programs. For each type, Fig. 49 shows the percentage of parishes of various jurisdictions that give "strong emphasis to" or consider this type of activities and programs "a specialty of ours."

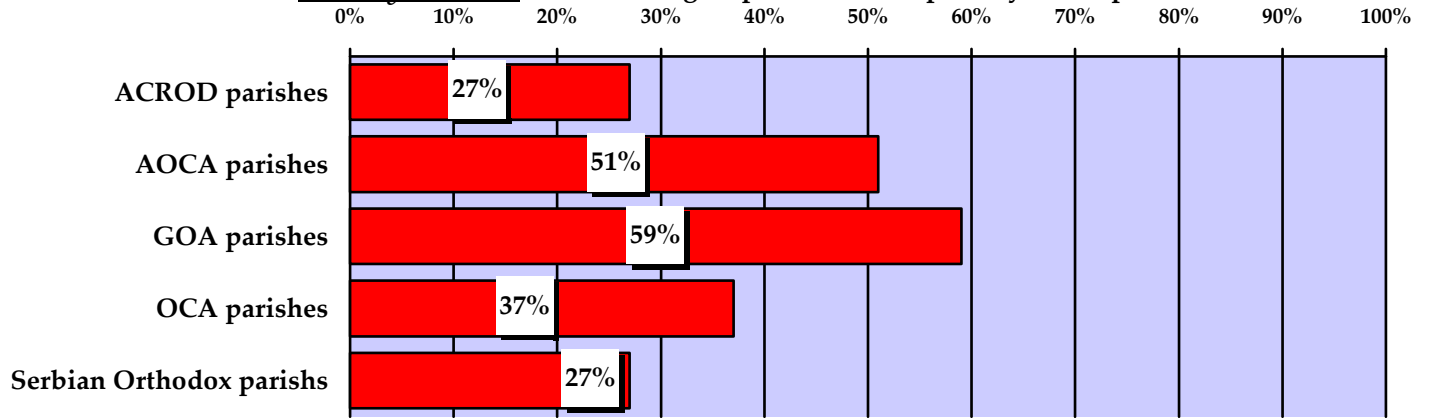
Fig. 49 "Does your parish have any of the following programs or activities? If yes, how much emphasis is given to the activity?"



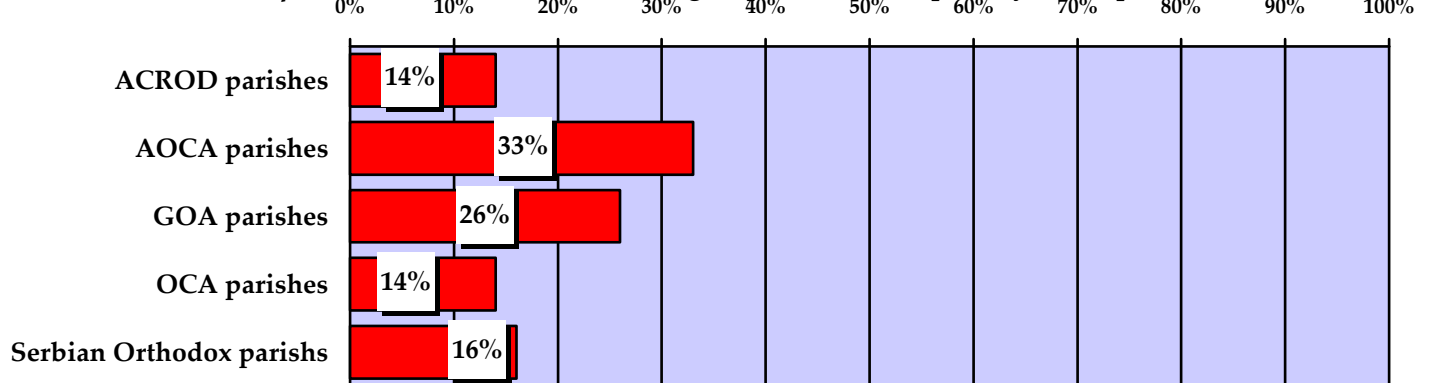
% parishes of various jurisdictions reporting that *"Community service activities or helping those in needs"* receive strong emphasis or are "specialty of our parish."



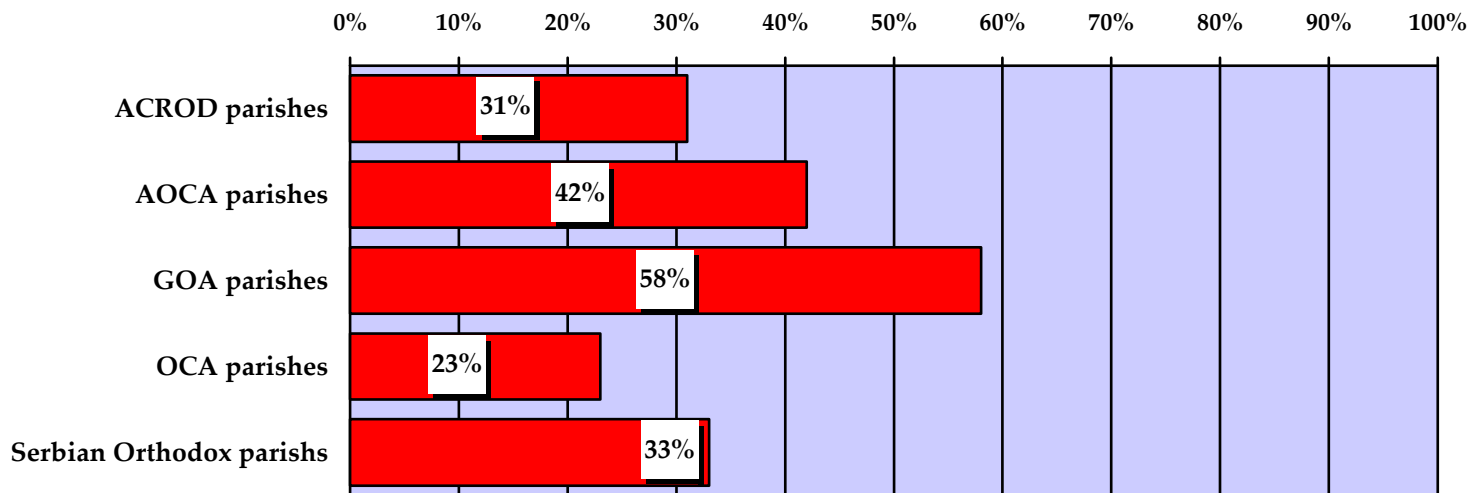
% parishes of various jurisdictions reporting that *"Bible, scripture studies other than Sunday school"* receive strong emphasis or are "specialty of our parish."



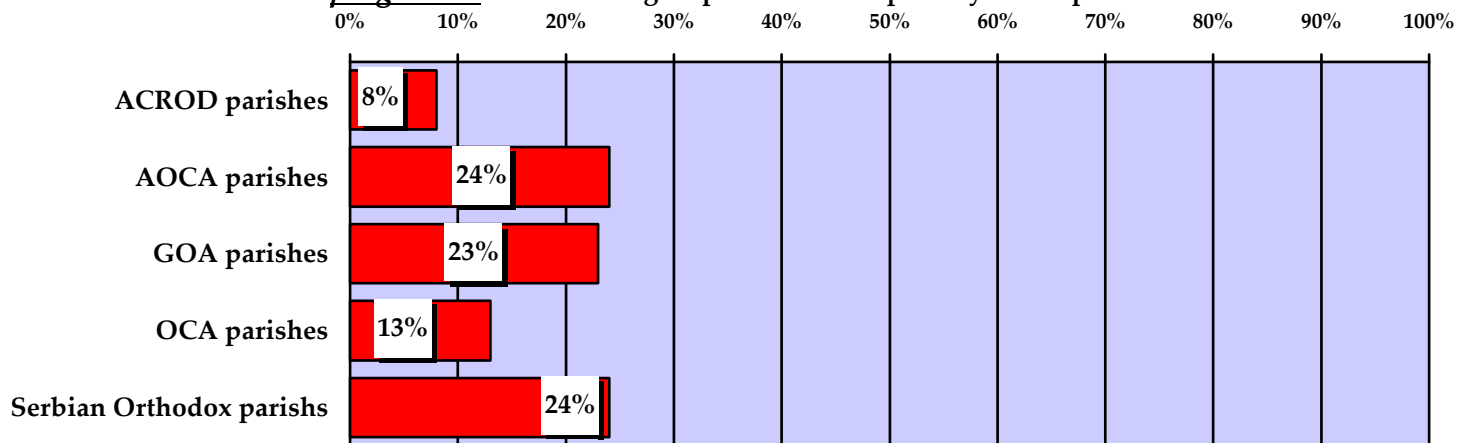
% parishes of various jurisdictions reporting that *"Prayer groups, spiritual retreats"* receive strong emphasis or are "specialty of our parish."



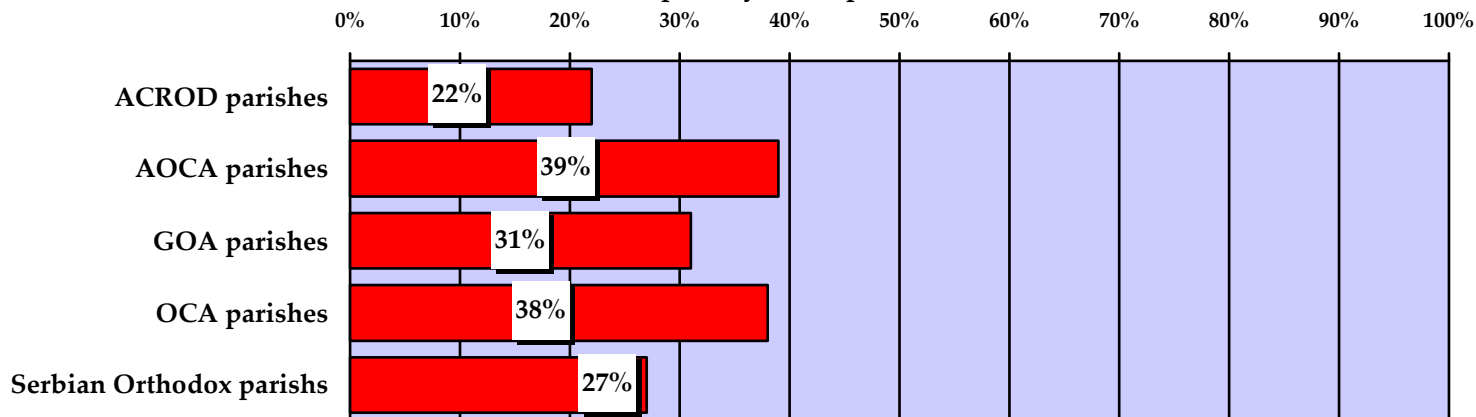
% parishes of various jurisdictions reporting that *"Youth (14-17) activities and programs"* receive strong emphasis or are "specialty of our parish."



% parishes of various jurisdictions reporting that *"Young adult (18-34) activities and programs"* receive strong emphasis or are "specialty of our parish."



% parishes of various jurisdictions reporting that *"Music programs"* receive strong emphasis or are "specialty of our parish."



In summary, Fig. 49 allows for three observations. First, GOA churches are ahead of parishes of other jurisdictions in how much emphasis they give to most parish-based programs and activities. This is true for "fellowships and social activities," "community service activities and helping those in needs," "youth (13-17) activities and programs" and "Bible, Scripture studies other than Sunday school." For each of these areas of programs and ministries, significantly more GOA priests than the clergy of other jurisdictions reported that these programs/activities are given "a lot of emphasis" or are "specialty of our parish."

Second, "prayer groups and spiritual retreats" are much more present and emphasized in the lives of AOCA churches than in the parishes of other jurisdictions. Compared to only 17% among all U.S. Orthodox parish clergy, twice as many (33%) Antiochian priests said that "prayer groups and spiritual retreats" are given "a lot of emphasis" or are "specialty of our parish."

Third, "music programs" play more important role and receive much greater attention in both AOCA and OCA parishes than in the churches of other jurisdictions.

Are any of these seven areas of programs and ministries especially important for a parish to be a thriving local Christian community? In order to answer this question, we analyzed the relationship between how much emphasis is given in a parish to each of these seven programs and the responses to the question which was analyzed in Chapter 3: "What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?" (the clergy could reply "We are thriving and this should continue," "We are doing okay and this should continue," "We are doing okay now, but the future is uncertain," "We are struggling and this is likely to continue in the foreseeable future.").

Predictably, there was a positive correlation between a greater emphasis on these seven program areas and the clergy's sense that their parishes are thriving. However, this positive relation was especially strong in the case of two areas of parish programs and ministries: "Bible, Scripture studies other than Sunday school" and "prayer groups and spiritual retreats." Both areas are directly related to continuing faith formation of church members. In short, paying serious attention to any parish-based ministries increases the chances for a parish to be a thriving Christian community. However, placing a strong emphasis on programs that are related to continuing faith formation is especially crucial for a parish to be a vibrant Christian community with a bright future.

The study followed with a number of questions exploring various approaches of the parishes to the faith formation of their members. It first examined the state of religious education in American Orthodox parishes.

Tab. 8 shows that in the vast majority of parishes the responsibility to organize religious education rests on the shoulders of parish clergy. 71% of the parishes reported that "clergy" have the "primary responsibility for organizing the educational ministries." In only one quarter of the parishes (24%), lay volunteers are responsible for developing religious education programs. The practice of having paid lay staff with the primary task to design and implement parish-based religious education ministries and programs is virtually non-existent. Only 2% of parishes have a paid lay staff person who takes care of, and is responsible for, religious education.

Tab. 8 Religious Education Teachers in US Orthodox Parishes: "Who has primary responsibility for organizing the educational ministries of the parish?" (% , percentages in each column add to 100%)

	All US Orthodox parishes	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA Parishes	Serbian Orthodox parishes
Clergy	71%	74%	68%	66%	75%	76%
Lay paid staff	2%	0%	0%	4%	1%	2%
Lay volunteer	24%	23%	27%	27%	21%	19%
Other	3%	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%

What is the focus and what are the main goals of parish-based religious education programs? Is there anything that is given especially strong emphasis? The survey asked: "How high or low a priority is each of the following in your religious education programs?" See Fig. 50.

Fig. 50 Priorities in Religious Education Programs in US Orthodox Parishes

"How high or low a priority is each of the following in your religious education programs?"

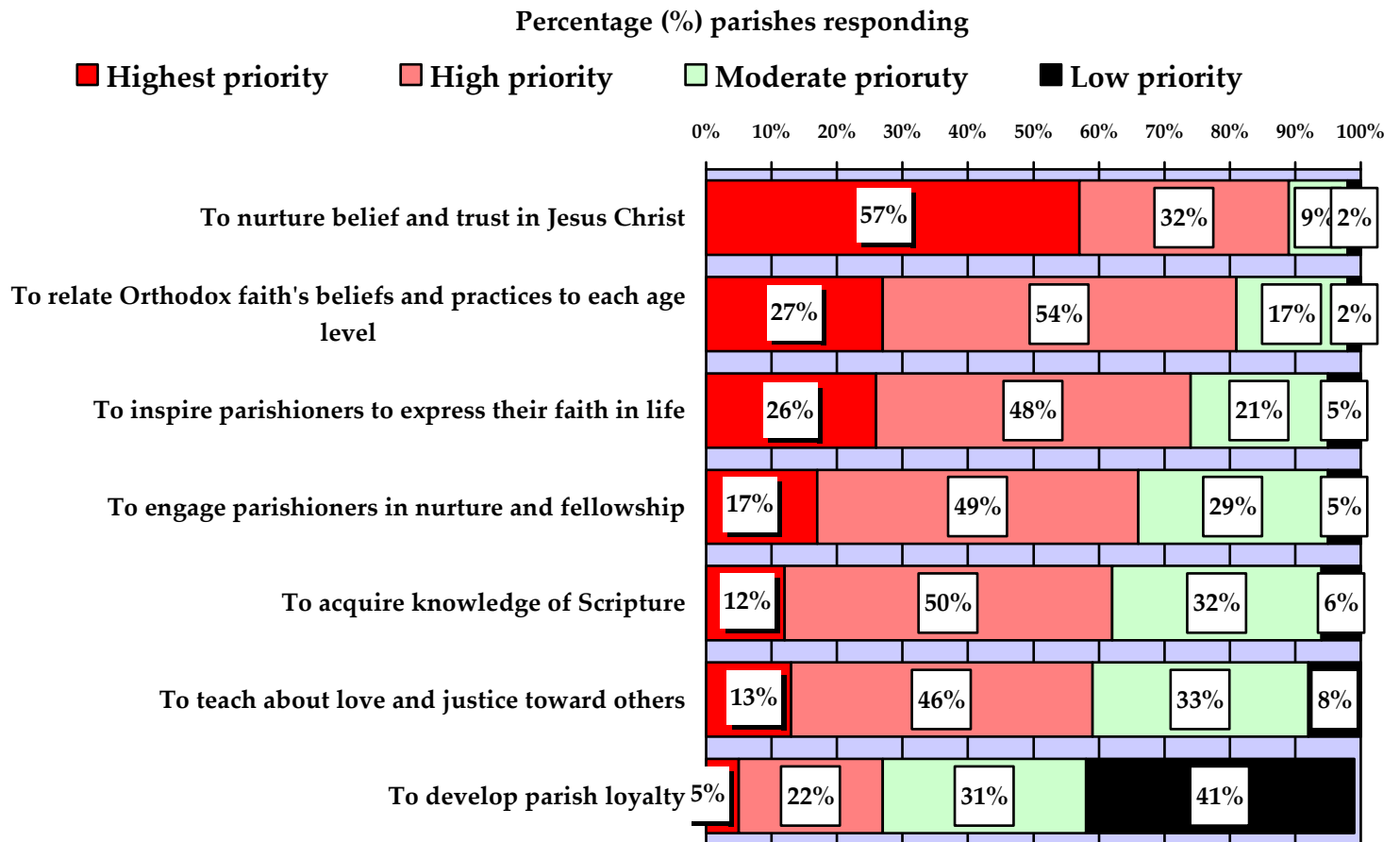


Fig. 50 shows that "nurturing belief and trust in Jesus Christ" is by far the most important goal of parish-based religious education programs. Nine-in-ten (89%) parish priests reported that this goal is given high or highest priority in their parish religious education.

The second priority of parish-based religious education programs, according to the survey, is teaching parishioners to live the Orthodox faith in their daily lives. Three quarters of the clergy (75%) reported that "to inspire parishioners to express their faith in life" receives "high" and "highest" priority in parish religious education ministries and 81% of the priests said the same about the goal "to relate Orthodox faith's beliefs and practices to each age level."

The third priority of parish-based religious education is building a loving local Christian community. Two-thirds of clergy indicated that "to engage parishioners in nurture and fellowship" is given "high" and "highest" priority in their parish-based religious education.

Remarkably, from the perspective of the clergy, the goal of acquiring formal knowledge of the Scriptures is important, but not as important as the first three priorities. Less than two-thirds of the clergy (62%) give "high" or "highest" priority to this goal in their parish religious education.

The survey asked how many persons (children and adults) regularly participate in the parish's religious education (including Sunday school and any other religious education programs). Clearly, the answers to this question are affected by the size of the parishes. The bigger a parish is, the more people are likely to participate in religious education. At the same time, the data on parish membership (discussed in Chapter 2) allow us to calculate the percentage of parishioners who are involved in a parish's religious education. Tab. 9 shows two figures. The upper row indicates the average number of persons who participate in various religious education programs in the parishes of five different jurisdictions. The lower row provides the data on percentage of parishioners who are involved in a parish's religious education in the total number of the regularly participating parish members.

Tab. 9 Involvement of Parishioners in Parish-Based Religious Education: "Approximately how many persons (both children and adults) regularly participate in Sunday school and any other religious education program or classes?"

	All US Orthodox parishes	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian Orthodox parishes
Average number of persons (children and adults combined) involved in various religious education programs in a single parish	46	19	37	80	29	49
Percentage (%) of persons (children and adults combined) who are involved in various religious education programs in the total of regularly participating parishioners	28%	28%	29%	28%	29%	25%

Tab. 9 shows that in all of the five jurisdictions, the degree of involvement of regularly participating church members in parish-based religious education programs is low. 25-29% of regularly participating church members in ACROD, AOCA, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox parishes are involved in parish-based religious education programs. It should be noted that these percentages reflect the degree of involvement in religious education programs of only those church members who are considered by the clergy as regularly participating church members. Clearly, if the same calculation will be applied to all parishioners (i.e. both regularly and occasionally participating) the extent of involvement in parish-based religious education would be even lower.

The data in Tab. 9 present the average picture, and there are many parishes with much higher participation of parishioners in various religious education programs. An important question is: what are the distinct features of the parishes that achieve high involvement of church members in continuing religious education? In order to answer this question we analyzed the strength of correlation between the degree of parishioners' involvement in parish religious education programs and the various characteristics of the parishes that were discussed previously.

A number of positive relations emerged, but three strong correlations stood out. The first is related to demography of parish membership. More specifically, the greater presence of children and pre-teens (ages 0-12) in a parish is strongly associated with a higher participation of church members in parish religious education programs. The best way to interpret this finding is simple: children and preteens (age 0-12) are the persons who - of all parishioners - are most likely to participate regularly and *en masse* in religious education programs.

The second factor is related to what we called "parish identity" - the subject that was covered in Chapter 3 which discussed the responses of parishes to the question: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parish?" The parishes were given nine statements describing various characteristics of parish life:

- ❖ Our parish has a clear mission and purpose;
- ❖ Our parish is quite different from other congregations in our local community;
- ❖ Our parish is good at incorporating newcomers into the parish;
- ❖ Our parish is spiritually vital and alive;
- ❖ Our parish is working for social justice;
- ❖ Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have health, financial or personal needs;
- ❖ Our parish is willing to change to meet new challenges;
- ❖ Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer;
- ❖ Our parish uses Internet and social media tools effectively.

With regard to each statement, the respondents could report: "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral/not sure," "disagree," or "strongly disagree."

Out of these nine statements, agreements with the statements "Our parish is spiritually vital and alive" and "Our parish uses Internet and social media tools effectively" have a very strong positive relation to high involvement of parishioners in the parish's religious education programs. Clearly, in the case of the statement "Our parish is spiritually vital and alive" this positive relation with parishioners' involvement into continuing religious education is mutual. That is, a greater emphasis to continuing personal religious education results in a greater degree of spirituality among parish members. Vice versa, the parishes with the greater sense of spirituality are more likely to have more parishioners who want to learn about their faith. As to the statement "Our parish uses Internet and social media tools effectively," it is not surprising that the parishes agreeing with it have higher rates of participation in religious education since the Internet and diverse social media offer numerous resources that can be used in religious education. No wonder then that the parishes that have strong command of Internet and social media are also good at engaging their members into religious education.

Lastly, we found that the involvement of parishioners in parish-based religious education depends on what is given greater priority in these religious education programs. Out of seven priority areas presented in Fig. 50, two have a strong relation with high involvement of parishioners in religious education: "relating Orthodox practices and beliefs to each age level" and "engaging parishioners in nurture and fellowship." That is, the parishes that place a strong priority on these two subjects are especially successful at engaging their members in religious education.

The faith formation of church members is not limited to continuing religious education. Along with learning more about Orthodox beliefs, the observance of various Orthodox religious practices, traditions and requirements is equally important for a person to be a "good Orthodox Christian" and devoted Church member. The survey asked parish clergy: "How much does your parish emphasize the following personal and family religious practices?" The respondents were given the list of six religious practices, and with regard to each they could respond: "not at all/a little," "some," "quite a bit," or "a lot." See Fig. 51.

Fig. 51 Emphasis on Various Personal and Religious Practices in U.S. Orthodox Parishes

"How much does your parish emphasize the following personal and family religious practices?"

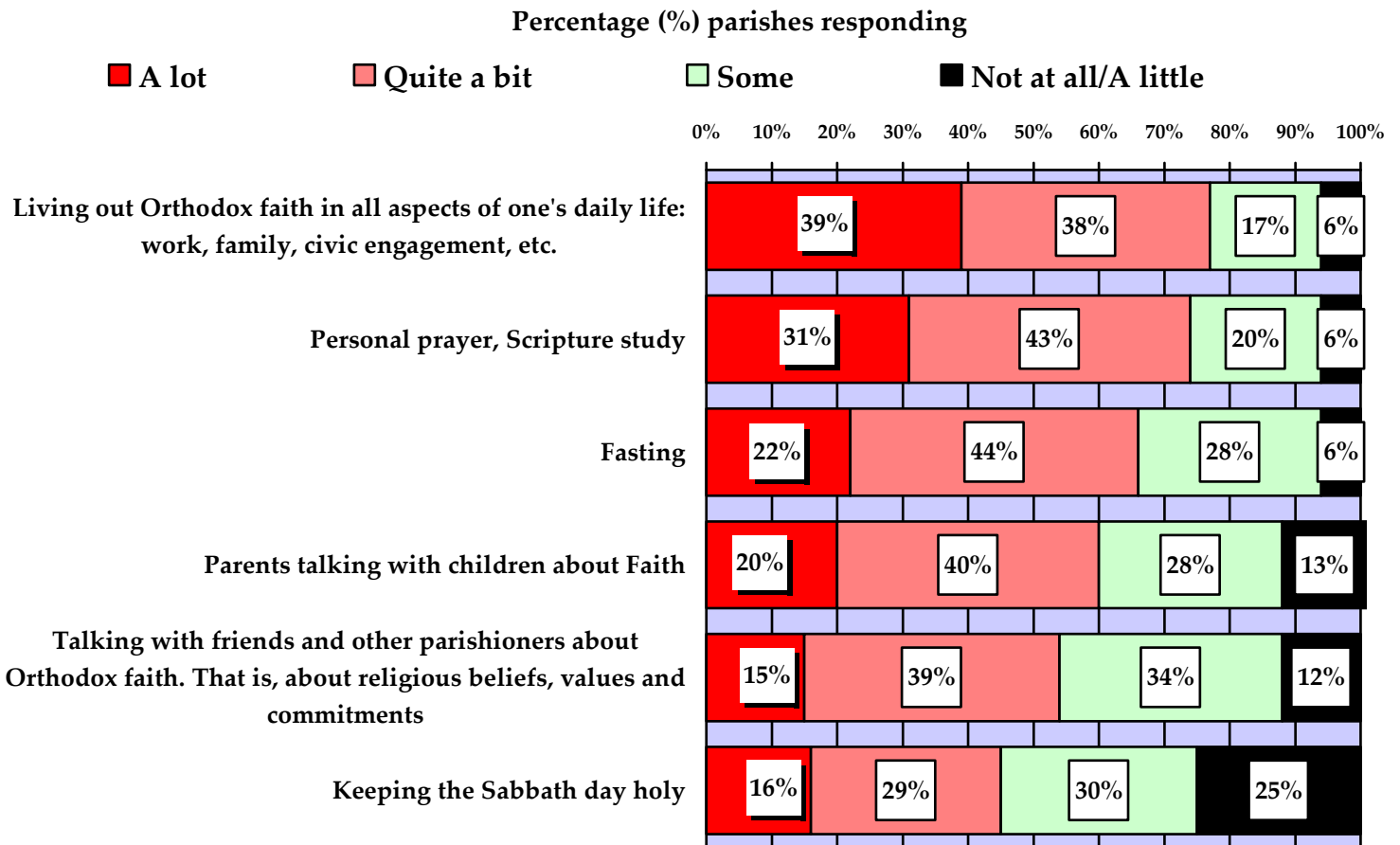


Fig. 51 shows that from the perspective of parish clergy the most important aspect in practicing one's Orthodox faith is the constant awareness of the need to be a good Orthodox Christian at all times and in all situations. Indeed, more than three-quarters of the clergy (77%) said that the practice of "living out Orthodox faith in all aspects of one's daily life" is emphasized "a lot" or "quite a bit" in their parishes.

Very close in importance is the practice of "personal prayer, Scripture study." 74% of clergy reported that their parishes place "a lot" or "quite a bit" of emphasis on this practice. The third in importance is practice of "fasting." It is seen as a very important by two-thirds of American Orthodox priests. Indeed, 66% of them reported that their parishes place "a lot" or "quite a bit" of emphasis on this practice. The fourth and fifth by importance practices are both related to the same area: sharing, discussing and reflecting on one's faith. 60% of the clergy place "a lot" and "quite a bit" of the emphasis on the practice of "parents talking with children about faith," while 54% of the parish priests emphasize "quite a bit" and "a lot" the practice of "talking with friends and other parishioners about the Orthodox faith: about religious values, beliefs, and commitments."

Finally, "keeping Sabbath day holy" is the least important personal religious practice from the perspective of American Orthodox priests.

Are there any significant differences among the parishes of the five jurisdictions in how much emphasis they give to each of the six personal and family religious practices presented in Fig. 51? The answer to this question is: "generally, there is not much significant difference." The slight differences include:

- ❖ More ACROD priests than the priests of other jurisdictions pay attention to, and emphasize the importance of "living out Orthodox faith in all aspects of one's daily life: work, family, civic engagement, etc.," "personal prayer, Scripture study," and "keeping the Sabbath day holy;"
- ❖ More Serbian Orthodox clergy than the priests of other jurisdictions pay attention to, and emphasize the importance fasting.

One more finding deserves attention. Chapter 3 examined the opinions of parish priests about the present and future states of their parishes. Recall, the clergy were asked: "What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?" The clergy could reply: "We are thriving and this should continue;" "We are doing okay and this should continue;" "We are doing okay now, but the future is very uncertain;" "We are struggling, and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future."

The analysis revealed that there is a strong statistical relation between answers to the question about how much emphasis the priests report is given to various personal and family religious practices and their responses to the question about their vision for the future of their parishes. That is, the priests who teach their parishioners to place "a lot" of emphasis on various personal and family religious practices¹⁸ are much more likely to say that their parishes "are thriving and this should continue." Remarkably, by far the strongest positive relation between emphasizing a certain personal religious practice and the sense that the parish community is thriving and this should continue was in the case of the practice "parents talking with children about the faith." Fig. 52 demonstrates this finding.

¹⁸ The only case when there was no any significant correlation was the practice of "keeping Sabbath day holy."

Fig. 52 Emphasis of a Parish on the Practice of "Parents Talking With Children about the Faith" Versus Parish's Sense of the Future

"What of the following best describes your sense of this parish's future?"

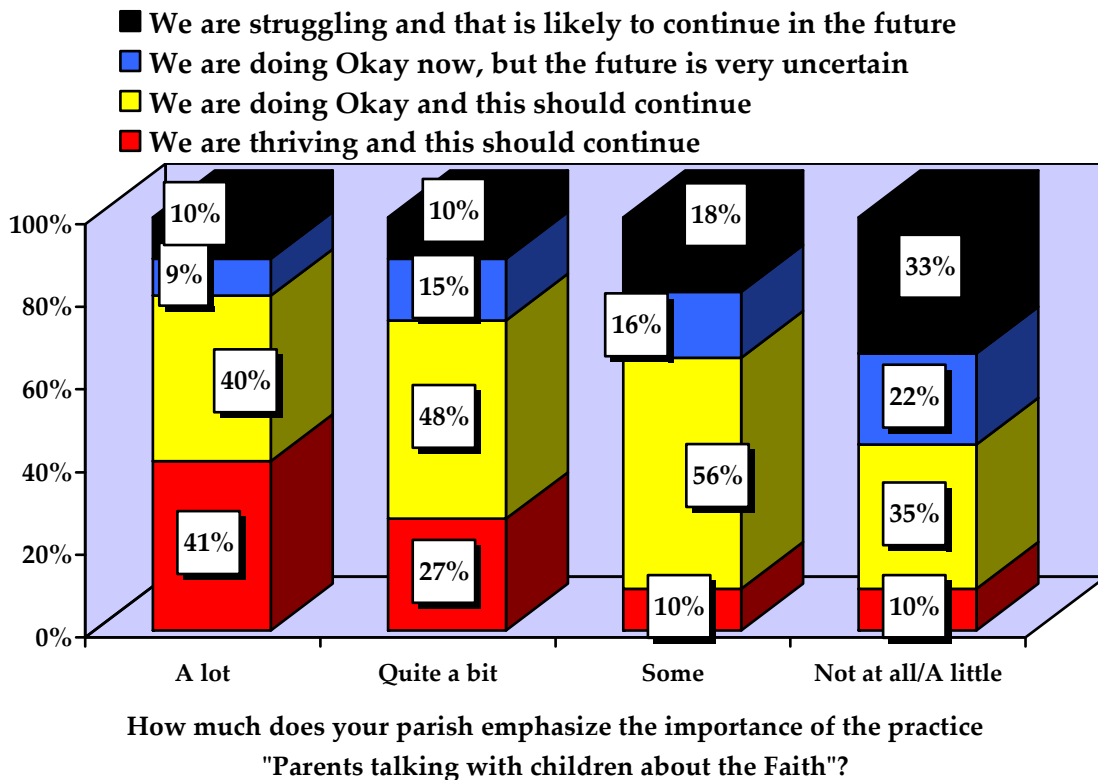


Fig. 52 shows that 41% of the parishes which place "a lot" of emphasis on the practice of "parents talking with children about the faith" describe themselves as parishes that "are thriving and this should continue." Very differently, only 10% of the parishes that place "some" or "not at all/a little" emphasis on the practice of "parents talking with children about the faith" report that "we are thriving and this should continue." In short, paying strong attention to transmitting the Orthodox faith to the next generation (i.e. "parents talking with children about the Faith") is a very powerful predictor for a parish to be a vibrant community with a bright future.

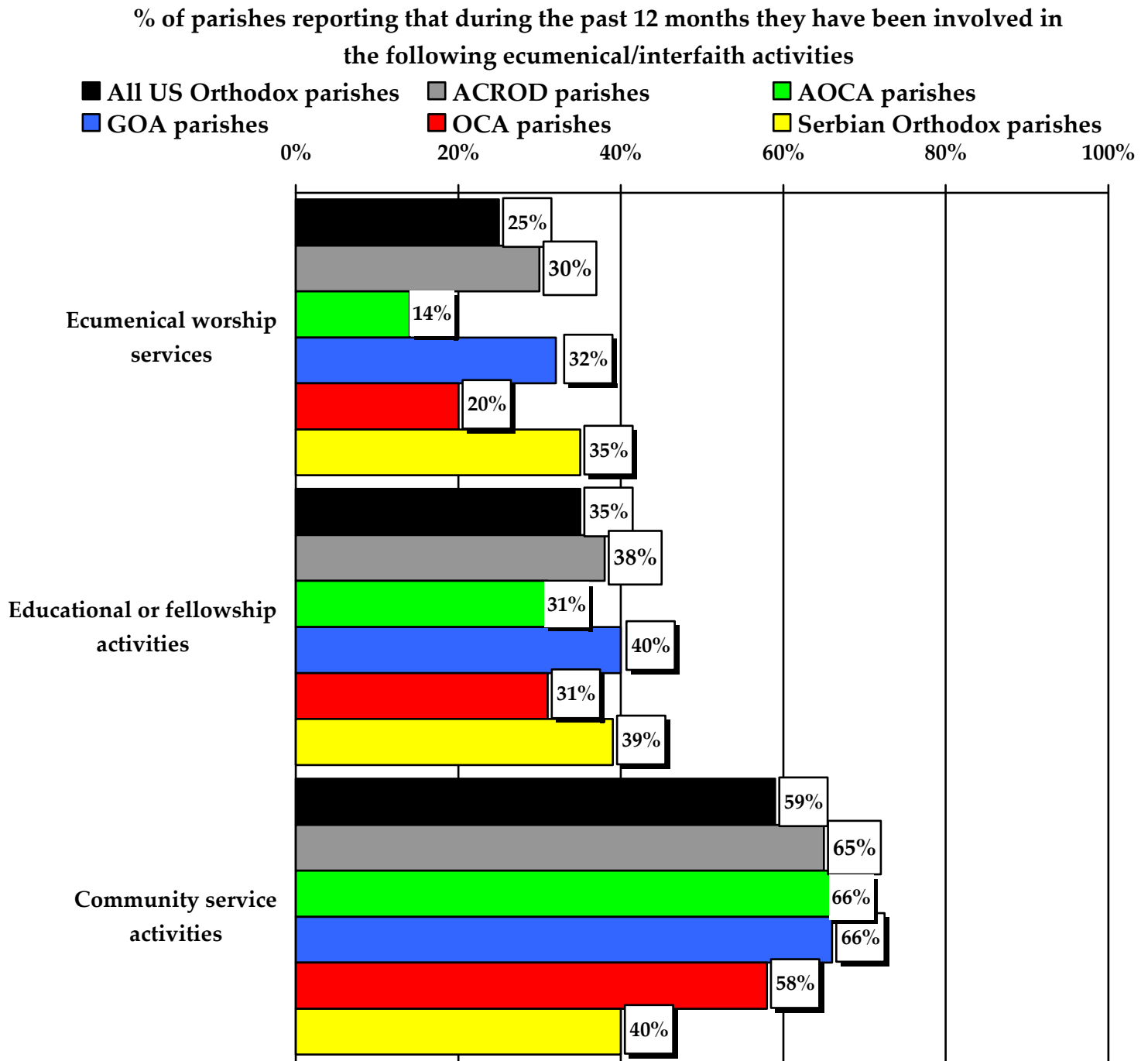
The last question for discussion in this chapter is about the ecumenical involvement of American Orthodox parishes: their communication, interaction and, possibly, cooperation with various non-Orthodox religious congregations. One part of the reality is that "ecumenical involvement and participation" have a somewhat negative connotation in the Orthodox Church. Many parish clergy and laity would frown upon the mention of ecumenical/interfaith activities.

However, another part of the reality is that American Orthodox parishes do not exist in a religious vacuum. In their local neighborhoods, they are surrounded by congregations representing all possible Christian denominations and even non-Christian religions. Historically, religious congregations in America played a significant role in organizing local communities by developing various charitable ministries, engaging in social justice work, etc. If American Orthodox parishes aspire to be "good neighbors" and integral parts of their local communities, they would be also expected to contribute to the lives of their local communities at large. Logically, achieving this goal - serving and helping their local communities - would be easier and more efficient through cooperation with other religious congregations.

Two more considerations could be taken into account as factors encouraging Orthodox parishes to have more contacts with the other religious congregations. First, a person is more aware of his/her religious beliefs and practices by comparing them with the beliefs and practices of other faith communities. That is, church members would have stronger religious identity and understanding of "what is special about Orthodox Christianity" if they would have more exposure to and knowledge of other religions. Second, in many areas of America, inter-Christian clergy associations and alliances have been created. These clerical associations serve as informal support networks for all local clergymen regardless of their religious affiliation: they provide clergy with the possibility to exchange information, to identify common goals and problems, etc. In summary, while ecumenical involvement and contacts are not necessarily a priority for American Orthodox Churches, they are, nevertheless, an important part of American social and religious reality.

The questionnaire asked parish clergy: "During the past 12 months, has your parish been involved in any of the following ecumenical or interfaith activities: a) worship services; b) educational or fellowship activities; c) community service activities?" Fig. 53 presents the answers to this question for all Orthodox parishes combined and for the five jurisdictions.

Fig. 53 Ecumenical Involvement of US Orthodox Parishes: "During the past 12 months, has your parish been involved in any of the following ecumenical or interfaith activities?"



Two observations can be made from Fig. 53. First, only a quarter (25%) of American Orthodox parishes engage in ecumenical worship services and only one-third (35%) of them participate with other religious congregations in various educational and fellowship activities. At the same time, the degree of involvement of Orthodox parishes in interfaith cooperation related to "community service activities" is significantly higher: 59% of parishes reported that they have been involved in ecumenical "community service activities."

These three figures - 25%, 35%, and 59% - are somewhat difficult to judge as being either low or high. On the one hand, the Orthodox Church discourages joint worship with non-Orthodox religious congregations. In this regard, the figure of 25% can be seen as relatively high. On the other hand, however, it may be in accordance with Orthodox Church teachings and practices for Orthodox parishes to conduct educational and fellowship activities with other religious congregations. From this point of view, the figure of 35% can be seen as relatively low.

The second observation is that there are significant differences between the parishes of the five jurisdictions in their involvement with various forms of interfaith activities. When it comes to ecumenical worship events, educational and fellowship activities significantly more Serbian Orthodox and GOA parishes participate in these activities than AOCA and OCA churches. When it comes to ecumenical "community service activities," the Serbian Orthodox parishes are much less engaged with these activities than the churches of other jurisdictions.

We found that two aspects in parish identity¹⁹ have a profound effect on the participation of Orthodox parishes in various ecumenical activities: namely, the agreement of a parish with the statements "our parish is working for social justice" and "our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer." That is, the parishes that agree with these statements are much more likely to be involved in ecumenical worship events, educational, fellowship, and community service activities. Fig. 54a-f demonstrates this finding. These relationships are relatively easy to interpret. Engagement in social justice work indicates a clear desire on the part of a parish community to be actively involved in society at large. Participation of these parishes in various ecumenical activities is another expression of their desire to interact actively with non-Orthodox. Having a strong focus on maximizing the number of small interest groups within a parish community suggests that such a parish appreciates and values the cultural, social and demographic diversity of its members. Therefore is little surprise that such parishes are also more inclined to expand their contacts with religiously diverse congregations.

¹⁹ See Chapter 3 for detailed discussion on the subject of parish identity.

Fig. 54a Participation of Parishes in Ecumenical Worship Services Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is working for social justice"

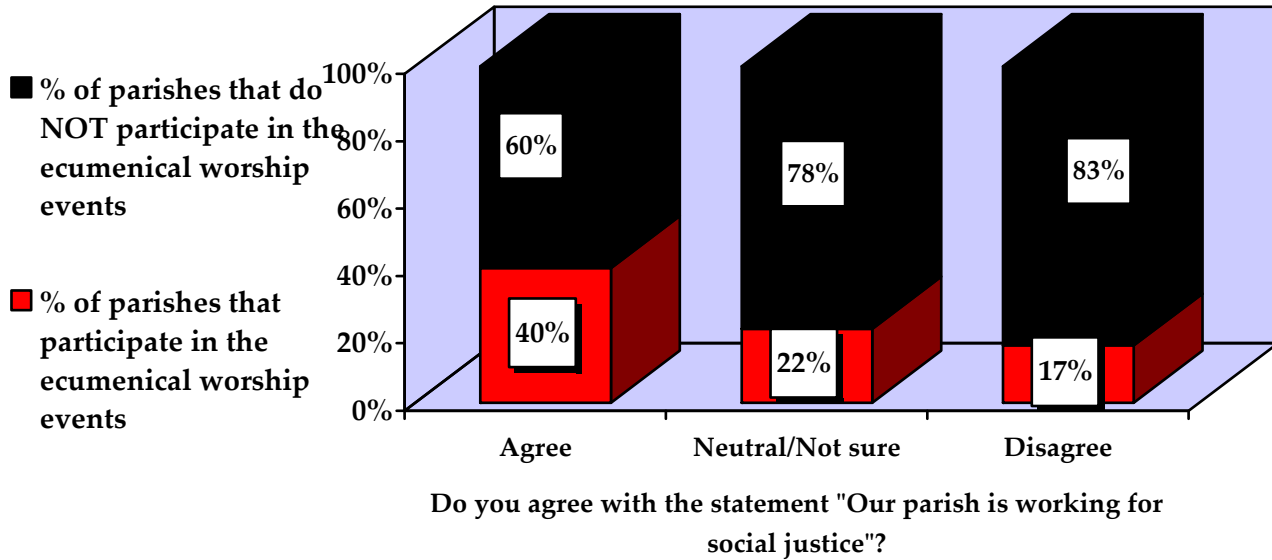


Fig. 54b Participation of the Parishes in Ecumenical Educational and Fellowship Activities Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is working for social justice"

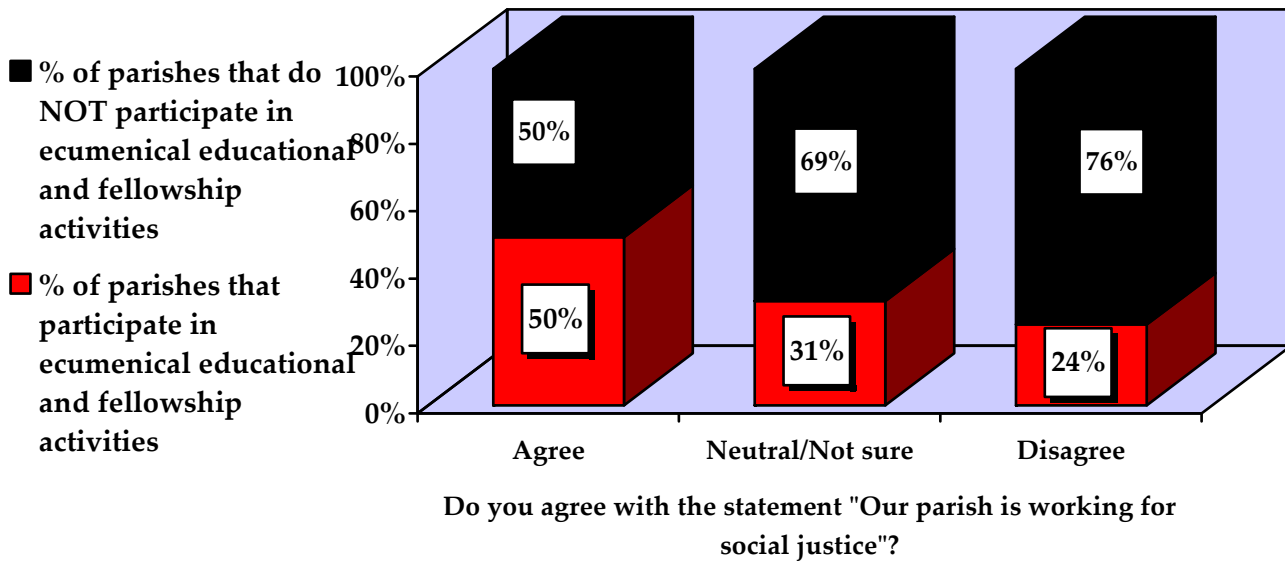


Fig. 54c Participation of the Parishes in Ecumenical Community Service Activities Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is working for social justice"

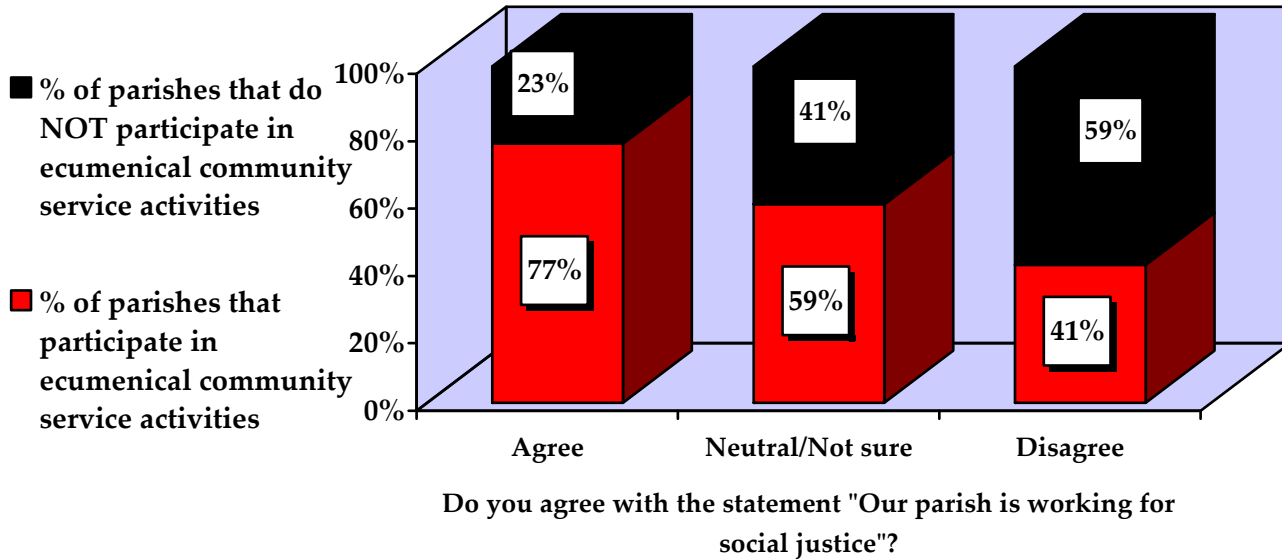


Fig. 54d Participation of the Parishes in Ecumenical Worship Services Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer"

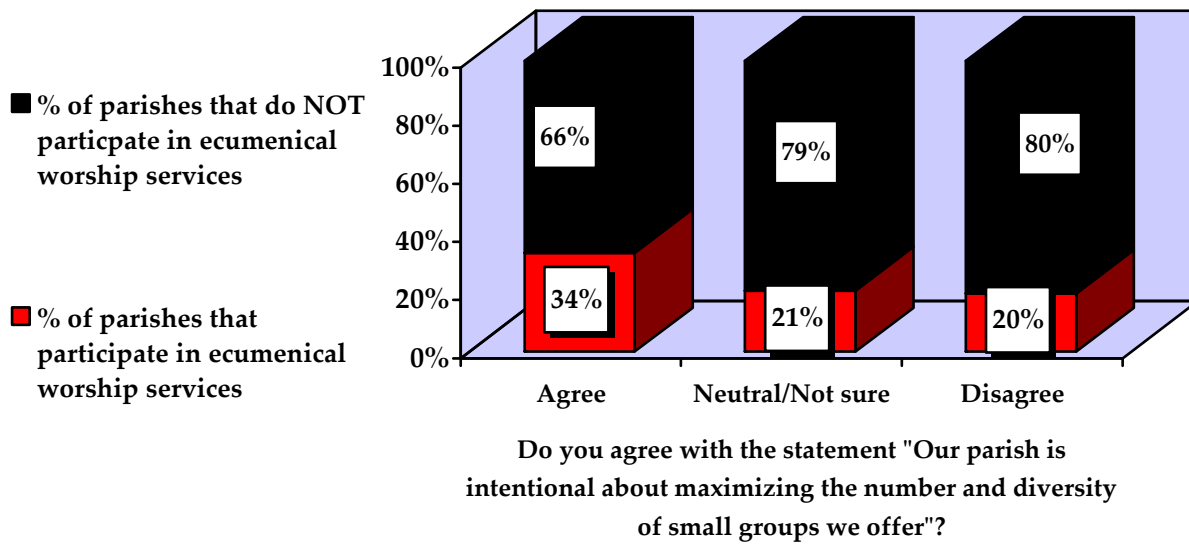


Fig. 54e Participation of the Parishes in Ecumenical Educational and Fellowship Activities Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer"

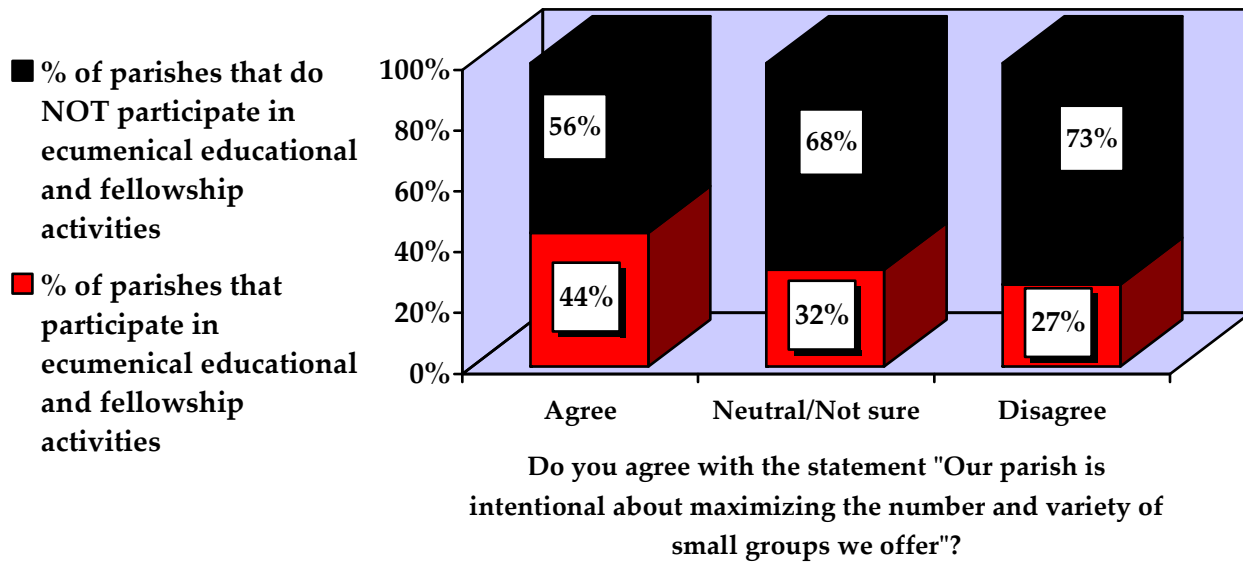
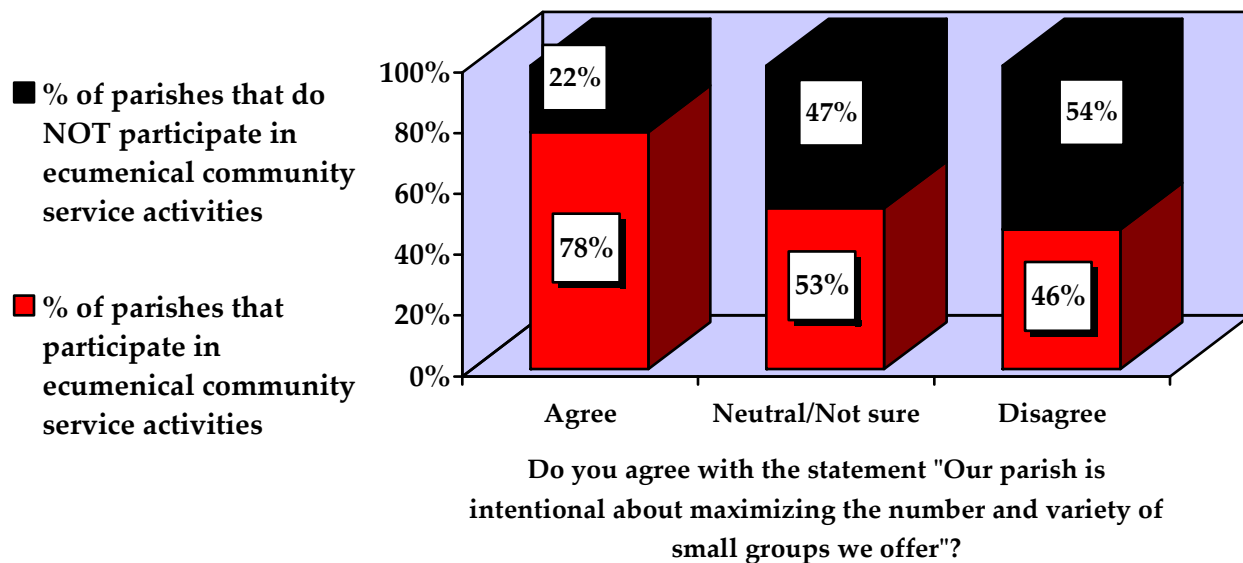


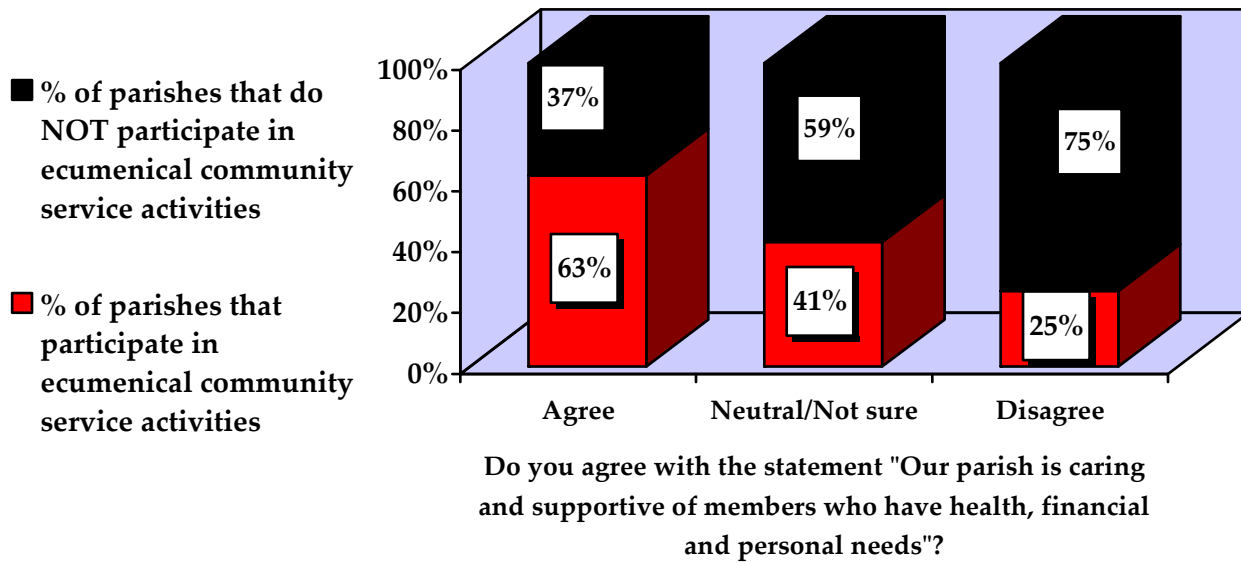
Fig. 54f Participation of the Parishes in Ecumenical Community Service Activities Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is intentional about maximizing the number and variety of small groups we offer"



The powerful predictor of a parish's participation in ecumenical "community service activities" is agreement with the statement "our parish is caring and supportive of members who have health, financial and personal needs."

Fig. 55 shows that many more parishes that agree with this statement are engaged in ecumenical community service activities than the parishes that either disagree or are "unsure."

Fig. 55 Participation of the Parishes in Ecumenical Community Service Activities Versus Parishes Agreement With the Statement "Our parish is caring and supportive of members who have health, financial and personal needs."



A surprising finding about ecumenical involvement of American Orthodox parishes is that the parishes led by younger clergy (up to 40 years old) are much less likely to engage in ecumenical activities than the parishes served by middle-aged priests (40-59 years old) or, especially, older clergy (60 years and older). See Fig. 56a-c. Why are younger priests much more reluctant to participate in ecumenical worship services, educational activities, and community service activities than their older fellow clergy? This is an important question, but it will remain unanswered in this study, because there is no data that permits further exploration.

Fig. 56a The Age of the Clergy and Participation of their Parishes in Ecumenical Worship Services

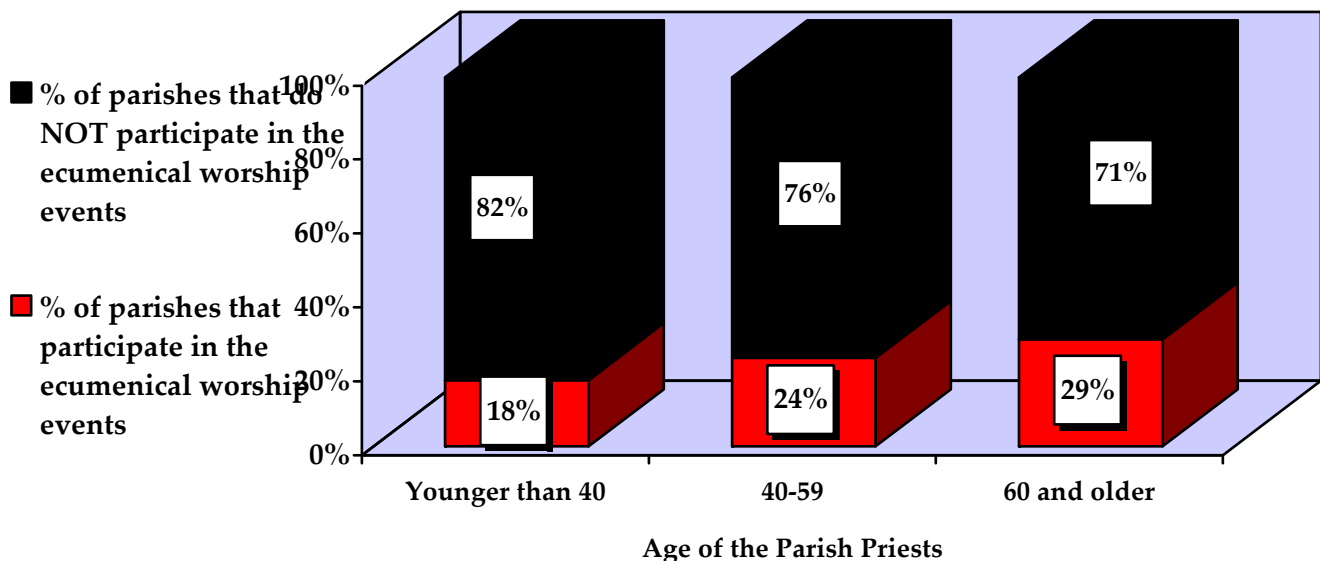


Fig. 56b The Age of Parish Clergy and Participation of their Parishes in Ecumenical Educational and Fellowship Activities

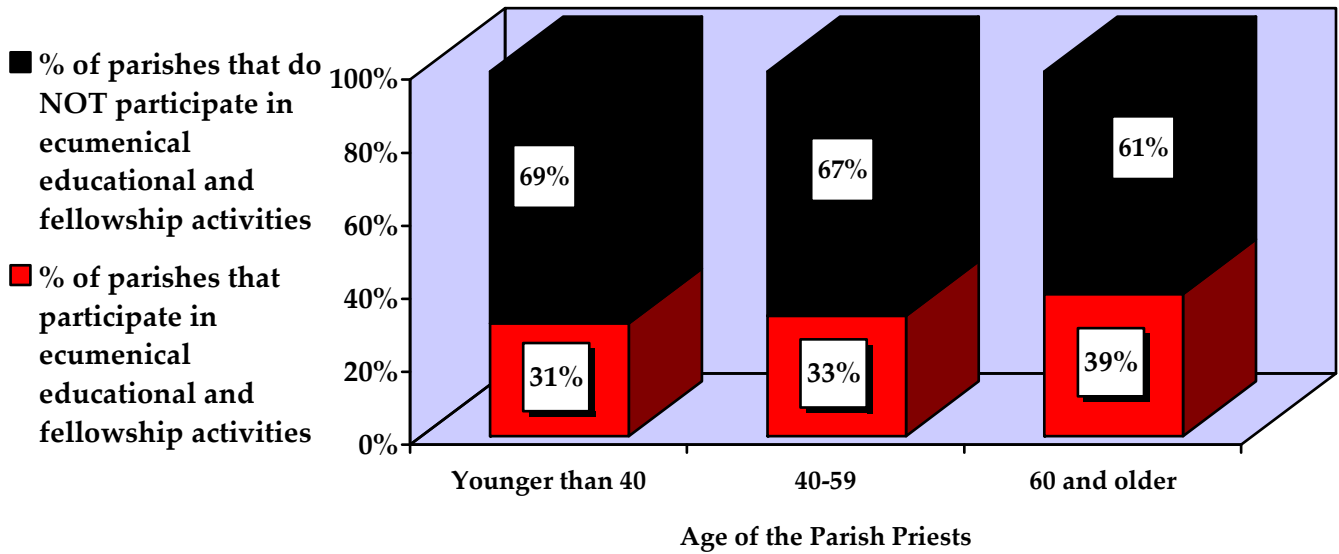
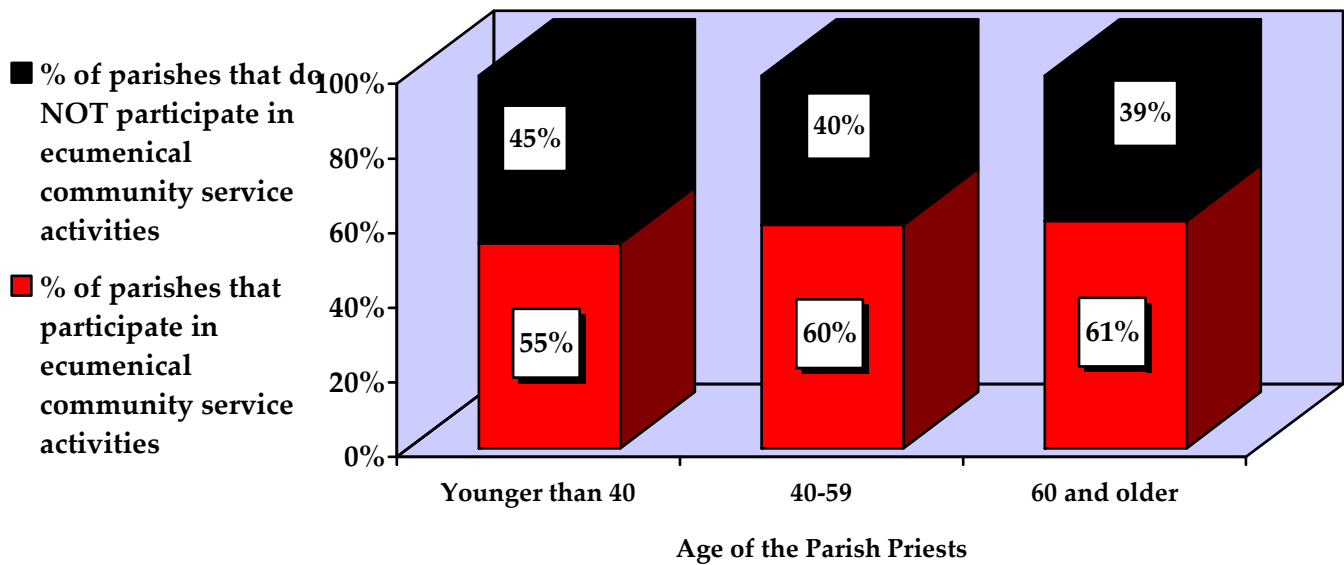


Fig. 56c The Age of Parish Clergy and Participation of their Parishes in Ecumenical Community Service Activities Versus



IX. Virtually Orthodox: the Use of Electronic Technologies in US Orthodox Parishes

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ❖ Already in 2010, 96% of American Orthodox parishes were active users of email and 92% of them maintained parish websites (by 2016, these figures increased to 98% and 95% respectively). From 2010-2016 the use of Facebook by American Orthodox churches has more than doubled: from 33% to 74% of U.S. parishes;
- ❖ There is significant potential for further improvement in the usage of modern technologies and media by American Orthodox parishes. Today, only slightly more than one-third (37%) of them employ online giving, and very few of the parishes use various forms of online meetings (17%), Twitter (12%), blogs (12%) or live streaming of sermons (12%);
- ❖ American Orthodox clergy are strong supporters of the use of various Internet technologies in church life. When asked "Which of the following best expresses your opinion about the use of Internet technologies (email, social media, texting, etc.) in parish life?", more than two-thirds (67%) of them replied, "In today's world, parishes must use modern communication technologies as widely and as well as possible." The age of the clergy does not make a difference in their attitudes towards Internet technologies and social media;
- ❖ An absolute majority of American Orthodox priests are intense users of electronic technologies and social media. When asked, "Does the parish priest use electronic technology and social media?", 53% of clergy replied: "yes, a very frequent user." Only one-fifth (20%) of clergy said that they are either "infrequent users" or "no users." Among different jurisdictions, Serbian Orthodox priests use the Internet and social media the most. Two-thirds of them (66%) reported that they are "very frequent users." OCA clergy are least frequent users of online technologies: only 49% of OCA priests think of themselves as a "very frequent user;"
- ❖ Compared to non-Orthodox religious congregations, American Orthodox churches are better users of more established online technologies. More Orthodox parishes than non-Orthodox religious congregations use email communication (98% versus 91%), websites (95% versus 80%), and e-newsletters (65% versus 46%). However, in the case of newer technologies, American Orthodox churches generally lag behind other U.S. religious congregations. Compared to non-Orthodox religious congregations, fewer Orthodox churches use Twitter (22% versus 12%), live streaming of sermons (19%

versus 12%), blogs (17% versus 12%), online meetings (22% versus 17%), WiFi access in the parish's buildings (71% versus 64%) and texting²⁰ (76% versus 53%);

- ❖ Ideally a parish should develop and maintain both a conventional website and a more "insider oriented" Facebook page. 71% of American Orthodox parishes adopted such a strategy. A quarter of parishes (24%) maintains websites, but do not have Facebook pages. 2% of the parishes have Facebook pages, but no websites. 3% of American Orthodox churches have neither a website nor a Facebook page;
- ❖ In order to evaluate the proficiency of each parish in the usage of Internet technologies and social media the Index of Technological Proficiency (ITP) was calculated. Judging by the average ITP, the GOA and Serbian Orthodox parishes are the most proficient, while ACROD parishes are the least proficient users of various Internet technologies and social media,
- ❖ Based on the values of ITP, the parishes were divided in three categories: "low-tech," "moderately-tech" and "high-tech" users. Five factors are strong predictors for a parish to be either "high-tech" or "low-tech" parish:
 - The strongest predictor for an Orthodox parish to be either "low-tech" or "high-tech" is its affiliation with a particular Orthodox jurisdiction. The GOA has the highest percentage of "high-tech" and smallest percentage of the "low-tech" parishes (44% and 8% respectively). On the opposite end are the churches of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese: only 10% of Carpatho-Russian parishes are "high-tech" while 42% of them are "low tech;"
 - The second factor is overall size of a parish (i.e. the number of regular participants, adults and children combined). Essentially, the bigger a parish community is, the greater the chances are that a parish is a proficient user of various internet techniques and social media;
 - The third factor is the parish's overall annual budget. The wealthier (measuring by the size of a budget) the parish, the more likely it is to actively employ various new technologies. However, the per capita budget has no influence on whether a parish is more or less tech savvy;
 - The fourth factor is the proficiency of a parish priest in the usage of electronic technologies and social media. The clergy who are themselves frequent Internet and social media users are much more likely to lead high-tech parishes than the priests who are "moderately frequent" or "infrequent" users of online tools;

²⁰ The usage of texting by an Orthodox parish could be especially important for reaching out to, and communicating with young people as this is a preferential way of communicating for many of them.

- The fifth factor is the presence of the seniors (age 65+) among the members. The parishes with strong presence of senior citizens among parishioners have high chances to be the "low-tech" parishes. At the same time, variations in the presence of children (age 0-12), preteens and youth (age 13-17), young adults (age 18-34) and adults (age 34-65) have no influence on a fact that a parish is more or less tech savvy. Similarly, the age of the clergy also does not matter for the likelihood of a parish to be either "high-tech" or "low-tech."
- ❖ There is a *clear synergy of a parish's overall high vitality and the fact that a parish is a robust tech user*. That is, there is a strong relationship between various characteristics of parish's vitality and the usage of new internet technologies and social media:
 - The parishes that are robust users of internet technologies and social media are much more likely to report that they "have a clear mission and purpose," "are spiritually vital," and "are willing to change to meet new challenges;"
 - High usage of Internet technologies and social media in parish life goes along with a parish's optimistic opinion about its future viability;
 - High use of tech in a parish is strongly and positively related to creative and engaging worship services. That is the high-tech parishes are much more likely to describe their worship services as "inspirational," "thought-provoking," "joyful," and "nurturing people's faith;"
 - Being a high-tech parish is strongly associated with good or excellent financial health;
 - High tech use by a parish is strongly correlated with placing a high priority on reaching out to young adult parishioners and growth in young adult church members;
 - Compared to other parishes, the high-tech parishes stand out by much greater involvement of parishioners in the every-day life of a parish and stronger emphasis on bringing new members into the parish.

DISCUSSION:

Nothing has changed the world so dramatically and quickly as the Internet and various social media. The blazing speed of distribution of any information, the easy and quick access to virtually any type of data, the instant and basically free of charge communication with someone who is thousands miles away, the possibility to create and participate in multiple "online communities" that share common interests and goals and, in fact, to live simultaneously several "virtual" lives - are just a few implications of these changes.

An important aspect of the revolution in electronic communication is that, while just a few years ago it was an optional luxury item reserved for more technologically advanced persons, today it is an important part of the everyday lives of the vast majority of Americans. According to the Pew Research Center, in early 2000, about half of all U.S. adults were online. Today, roughly nine-in-ten American adults (88%) use the Internet."²¹ According to another study by the Pew Research Center, the speed of proliferation of social networking sites is even more remarkable. By the beginning of 2017, nearly seven-in-ten Americans (69%) were using social networks and social media, up from 5% in 2005.²² Furthermore, the wide usage of smartphones means that today everyone can be present online constantly and have instant access to social networks and social media. More than three-quarters of Americans (77%) now own a smartphone, a sharp uptick over the last six years (in 2011, only 35% of Americans reported that they owned a smartphone²³).

Why is the integration of these technologies into a parish life relevant to and even crucial for American Orthodox Christian Churches? There are several answers. First, when a parish employs Internet technologies and social media, it literally takes the life of a parish community far beyond the physical walls of the church and beyond physical face-to-face gatherings of parishioners. That is, internet technologies and social media give the members of a parish many more opportunities to "meet and be with each other" and do things together via online gatherings, interaction, and communication. Think, for example, about a group of young parishioners who go on a long mission trip, but are still able to communicate each day verbally and visually with their parish priest via any number of platforms, and discuss with him their experiences as well as obtain pastoral guidance and advice. In short, the use of online technologies can increase the number, frequency, and depth of ties and connections among parishioners, therefore contributing to a stronger sense of community.

Second, social media can greatly enhance the presence of the Orthodox Church and Orthodox faith in the daily living of parishioners beyond worship services and beyond other occasions when they are present in church. Think of the Internet as a medium that carries one's faith into everyday life via surfing religious websites, via listening to life-streamed sermons, via posting on Facebook and sharing with friends one's religious experiences, via blogging on any church-related matters, via tweeting quick questions and thoughts related to the life of a parish, etc.

²¹ See report at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband>

²² Pew Research Center report on "Record Shares of Americans Now Own Smartphones, Have Home Broadband" Available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology>

²³ See previous footnote.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the embrace of Internet technologies and social media by a parish demonstrates to church members - and, especially, young and young adult parishioners - that their faith and Church are relevant and fit into contemporary context.

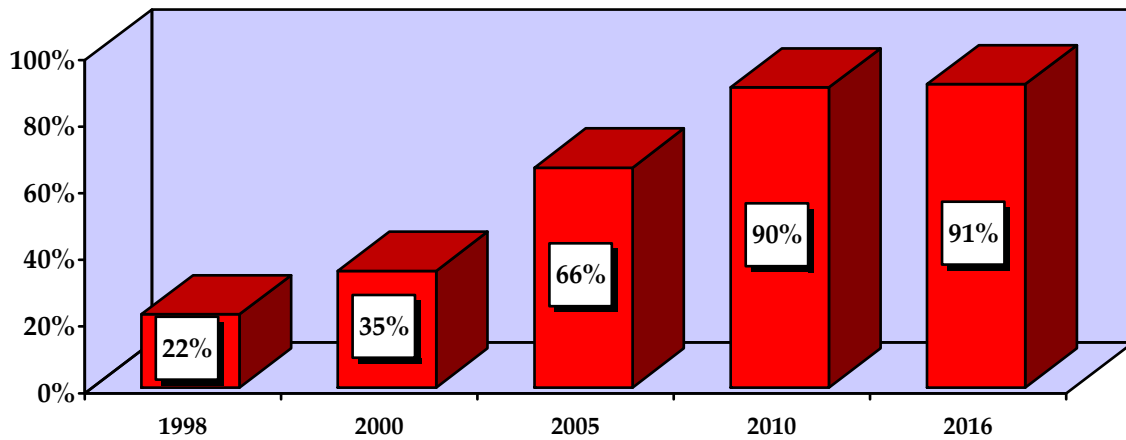
Religious congregations have made dramatic strides in adapting to this reality, though not without unevenness and ineptitude at times. The use of websites or email by the congregations is now almost an old story. As we will see later, the vast majority of US congregations adopted these tools and made them part of their day-to-day lives. Within past several years, however, many more new technologies and media have come into existence and are eagerly embraced by a growing number of congregations. These newer media forms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram; live streaming of services and sermons; technologically-powered screens in worship; interactive member databases which organize and maintain information; blogs, texting, and many other tools transform the ways religious groups interact with society at large and their own members and enhance their sense of community. Today, adaptation to these new tools by religious congregations is no longer a choice as it was in 1990s or early 2000s. The use of electronic technologies and social media in ministerial work has become a necessity. A congregation that bluntly denies new ways of communication and reaching out is likely to be perceived as being out of sync with the local community and society at large. Further, even if a congregation is not concerned with a goal to be "relevant" to the modern world, it still has the members who are very likely to use these technologies in their daily lives. Finally, an efficient use of these new technologies allows congregations to do more with fewer resources.

In this chapter, we will examine the use of various electronic technologies and social media by American Orthodox parishes and identify the positive outcomes for those parishes that embrace the usage of new ways of communication and interaction with their members and the outside world.

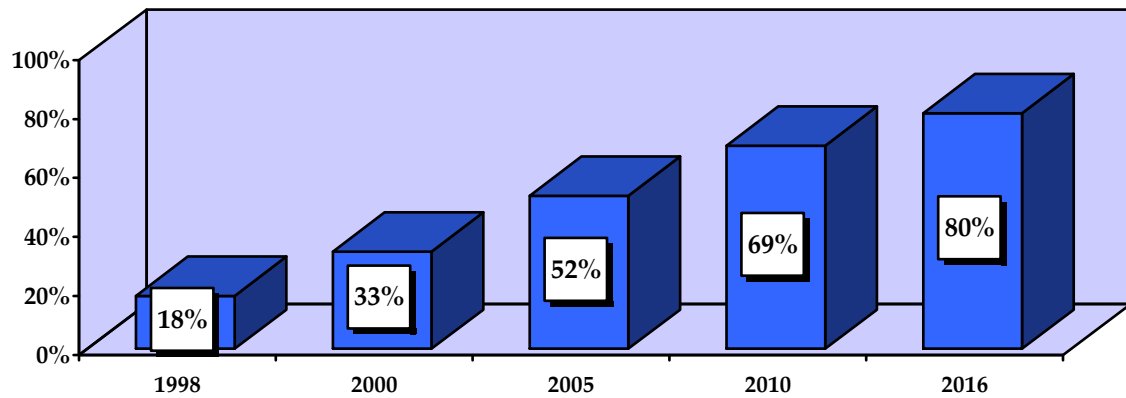
Fig. 57 shows that the vast majority of American religious congregations use email (91%), websites (80%) and Facebook (75%). This is a dramatic difference from a situation only slightly more than a decade ago. Indeed, in 2005, only two-thirds (66%) of American congregations were active users of email, only 52% of them had websites, and Facebook did not yet exist.

Fig. 57 The Use of E-mail, Websites and Facebook by U.S. Religious Congregations²⁴

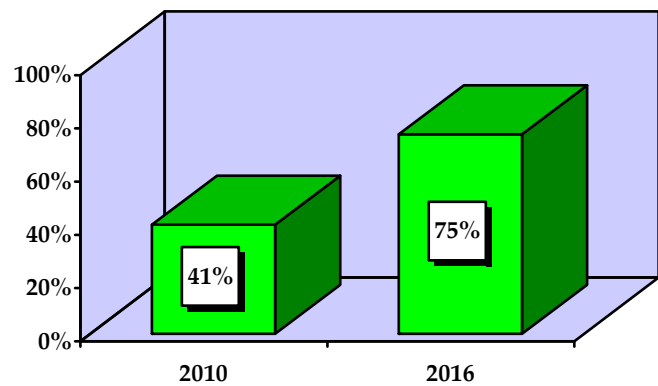
% US Religious Congregations Using Email



% US Religious Congregations Using Websites



% US Religious Congregations Using Facebook



²⁴ Sources of data: 1998 - National Congregations Study wave 1, www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/explore.html; 2000 - Barna Research, <http://www.barna.com/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/172-technology-use-is-growing-rapidly-in-churches?q=media+technology>; 2005 - FACT survey, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/all/themes/factzen4/files/American%20Congregations%202005%20pro.pdf>; 2010 - FACT survey, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/overall-findings-2010>; 2016 - FACT survey, <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/Faith-Communities-Today-2015-Final-Survey-with-Frequencies.pdf>

We do not have such longitudinal data for American Orthodox Churches, but we have the possibility to compare the use of four electronic technologies (email, websites, Facebook, and blogs) by American Orthodox parishes in 2010 and 2016. See Fig. 58.

Fig. 58 Change in the Use of Various Technologies by US Orthodox Parishes: 2010-2016²⁵

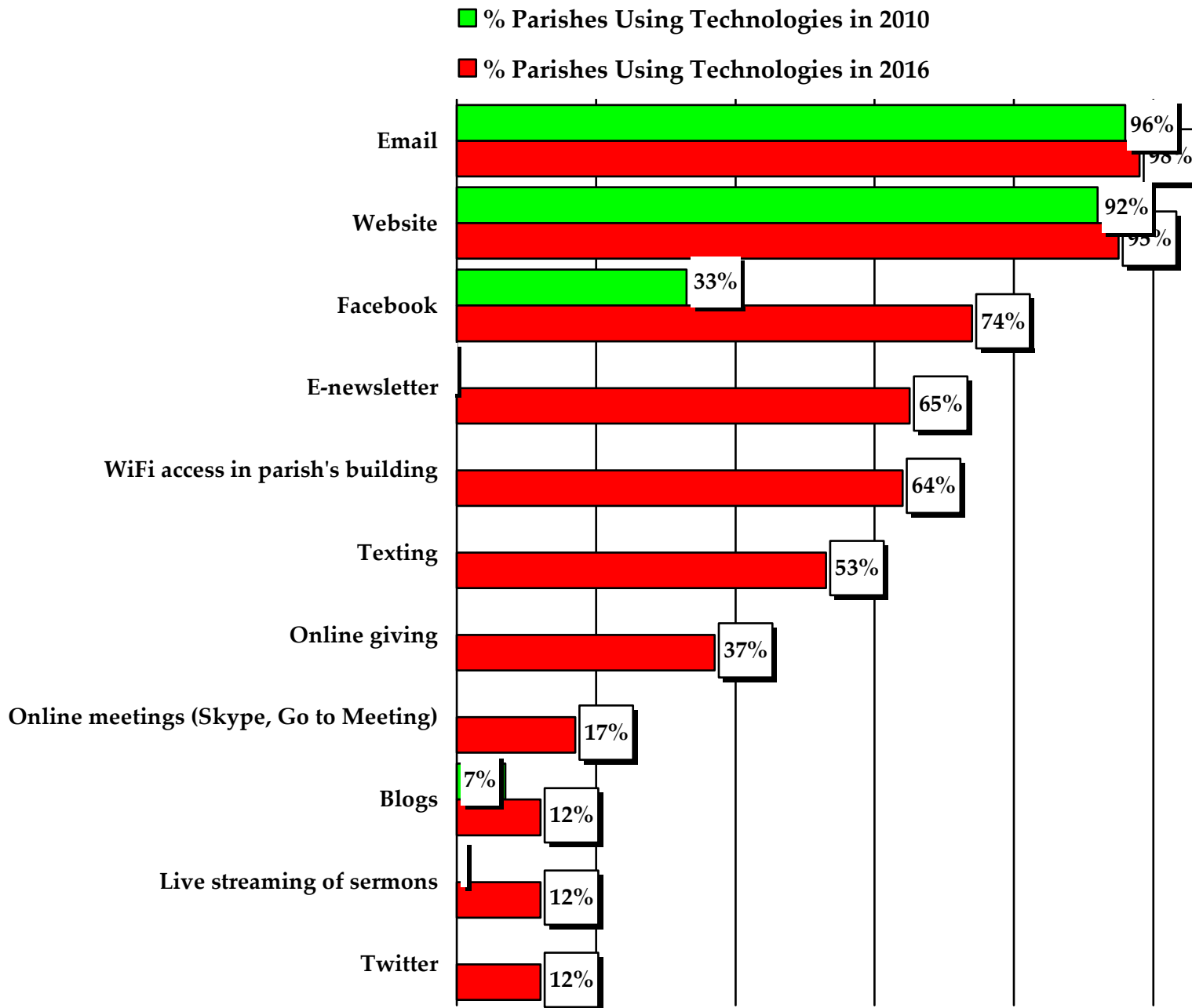


Fig. 58 allows for two observations. First, it shows that between 2010 and 2016 there was little change in percentage of parishes that use email and websites, because already in 2010, 96% of American Orthodox parishes were active users of email and 92% of them maintained parish websites. At the same time, from 2010-

²⁵ The 2016 questionnaire asked about a number of technologies that were not present in 2010 questionnaire. Therefore, the chart provides only a partial comparison between 2010 and 2016

2016 the use of Facebook by American Orthodox churches has more than doubled: from 33% to 74% of parishes.

Second, Fig. 58 indicates that there is still a lot of room for improvement in the usage of modern technologies and media by American Orthodox churches. Only slightly more than one-third of them (37%) employ online giving, and very few parishes use various forms of online meetings (17%), Twitter (12%), blogs (12%), or live streaming of sermons (12%).

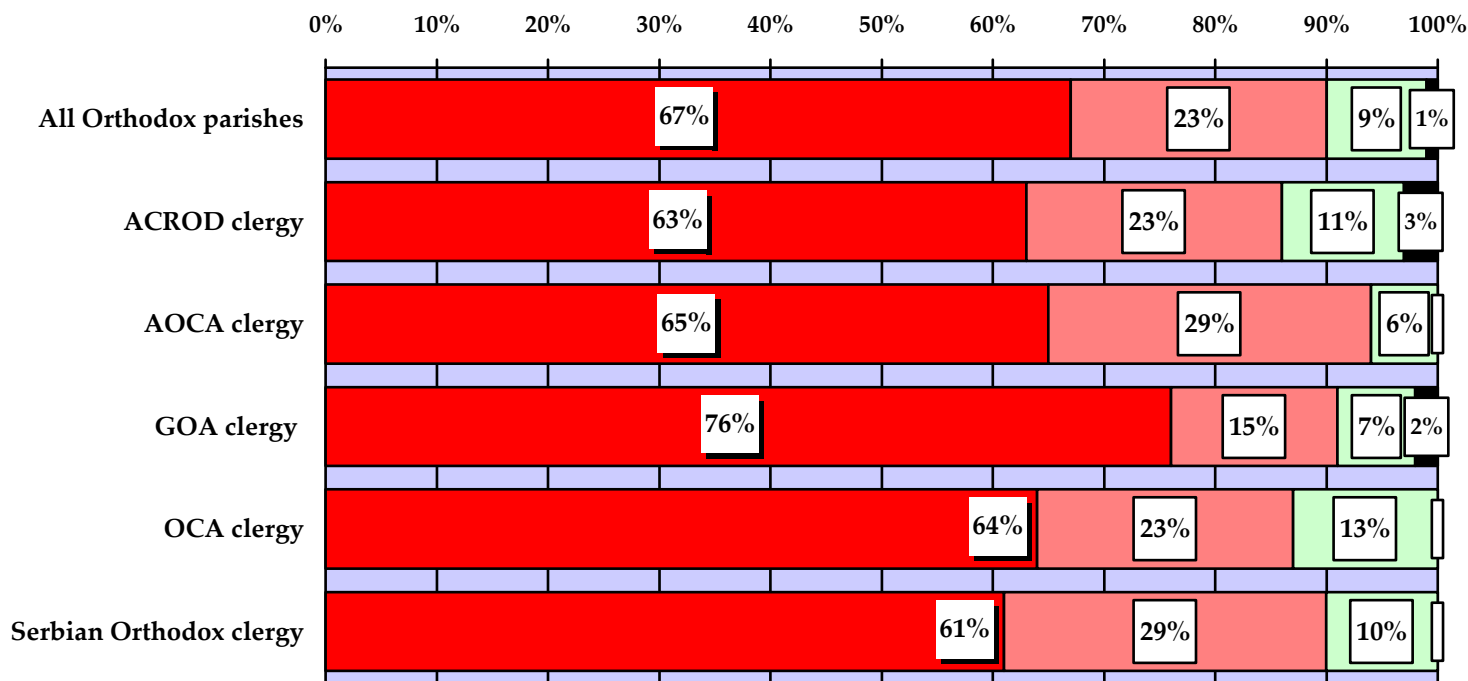
It should be noted that American Orthodox clergy are strong supporters of the use of various Internet technologies in church life. See Fig. 59. When asked "Which of the following best expresses your opinion about the use of Internet technologies (email, social media, texting, etc.) in parish life?", more than two-thirds (67%) of them replied, "In today's world, parishes must use modern communication technologies as widely and as well as possible." Among the five jurisdictions studied, GOA priests have the most favorable attitudes towards the usage of new technologies in church life. More than three-quarters (76%) of the GOA clergy believe that "in today's world, parishes must use modern communication technologies as widely and as well as possible," compared to only 61-65% among the priests from other jurisdictions. Only 1% of U.S. Orthodox priests think that the use of various online technologies is likely to do more harm than good. Remarkably, the age of the clergy does not make a difference in their attitudes towards Internet technologies and social media. Younger, middle-aged and senior priests were equally likely to embrace new technologies.

Fig. 59 Opinion of Clergy of Various Jurisdictions about Usage of Internet Technologies in Church Life:

"Which of the following best expresses your opinion about the use of Internet technologies (email, social media, texting, etc.) in parish life?"

Percentage (%) of clergy responding

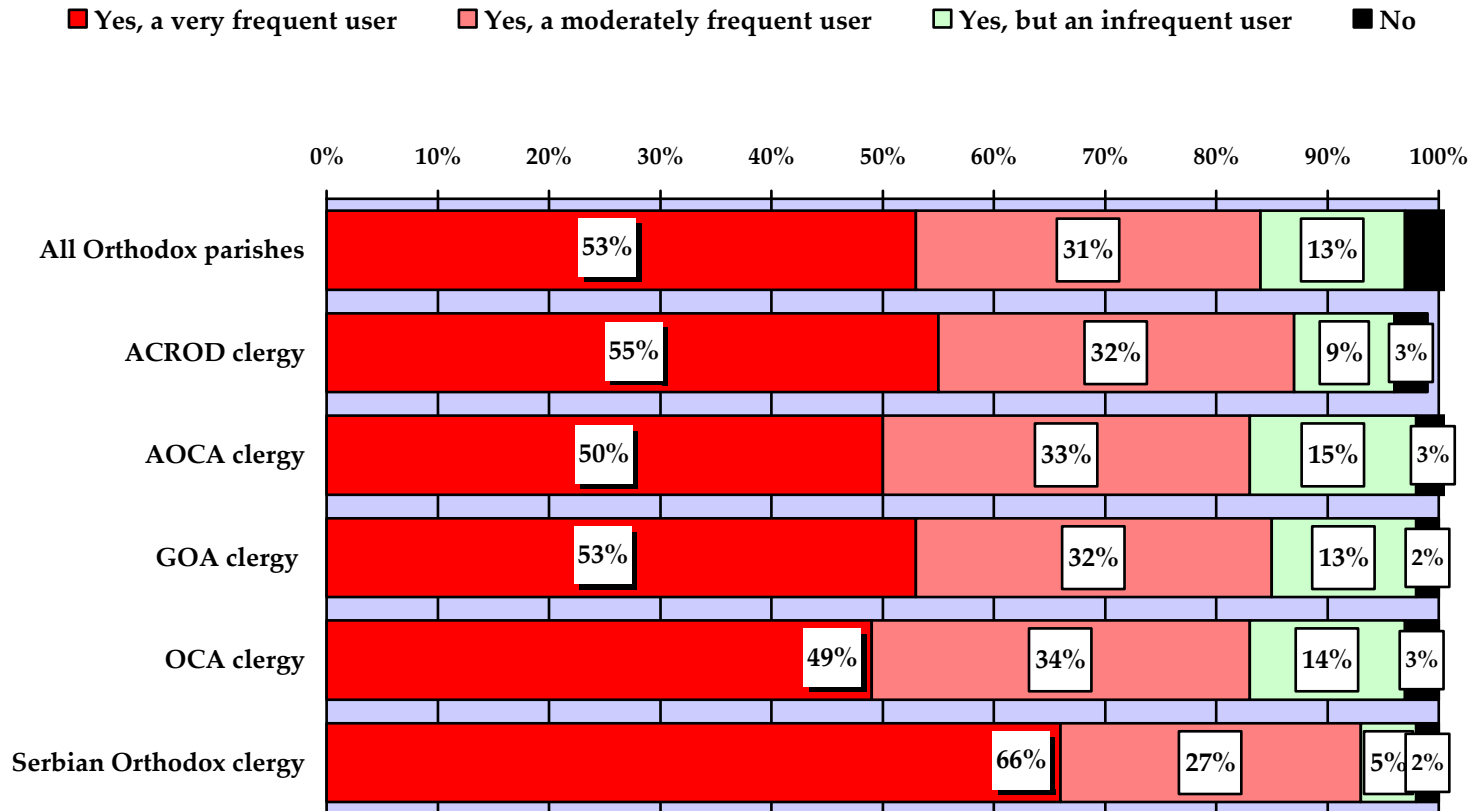
- In today's world, parishes must use modern communication technologies as widely and as well as possible
- They can be helpful, but aren't really crucial for the parish's vitality or success
- Difficult to tell, mixed feelings
- If used, they are likely to do more harm than good



Not only do American Orthodox priests overwhelmingly favor the use of online technologies, but also an absolute majority of them think of themselves as proficient users of electronic technologies and social media. Fig. 60 shows, when asked, "Does the parish priest use electronic technology and social media?", 53% of clergy replied: "Yes, a very frequent user." Only one-fifth (20%) defined themselves as either "infrequent users" or "no users." Among individual jurisdictions, Serbian Orthodox priests are the most prolific Internet and social media users with two-thirds of them (66%) being "very frequent users," while the OCA clergy are the least frequent users (only 49% of OCA priests think of themselves as a "very frequent user").

Fig. 60 The Use of Electronic Technologies and Social Media by the Clergy of Various Orthodox Jurisdictions: "Does the parish priest use electronic technologies and social media?"

Percentage (%) of clergy responding



How do Orthodox churches compare to other American religious congregations in the usage of modern technologies and social media? Because the study of U.S. Orthodox parishes was part of a much larger national study of American religious congregations²⁶ we have the data to answer this question. See Fig. 61.

²⁶ Faith Communities Today national survey of congregations contains responses from 4,436 congregations. The summary report is available at <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>

Fig. 61 The Usage of Various Technologies and Social Media by U.S. Orthodox Parishes Versus Other American Religious Congregations

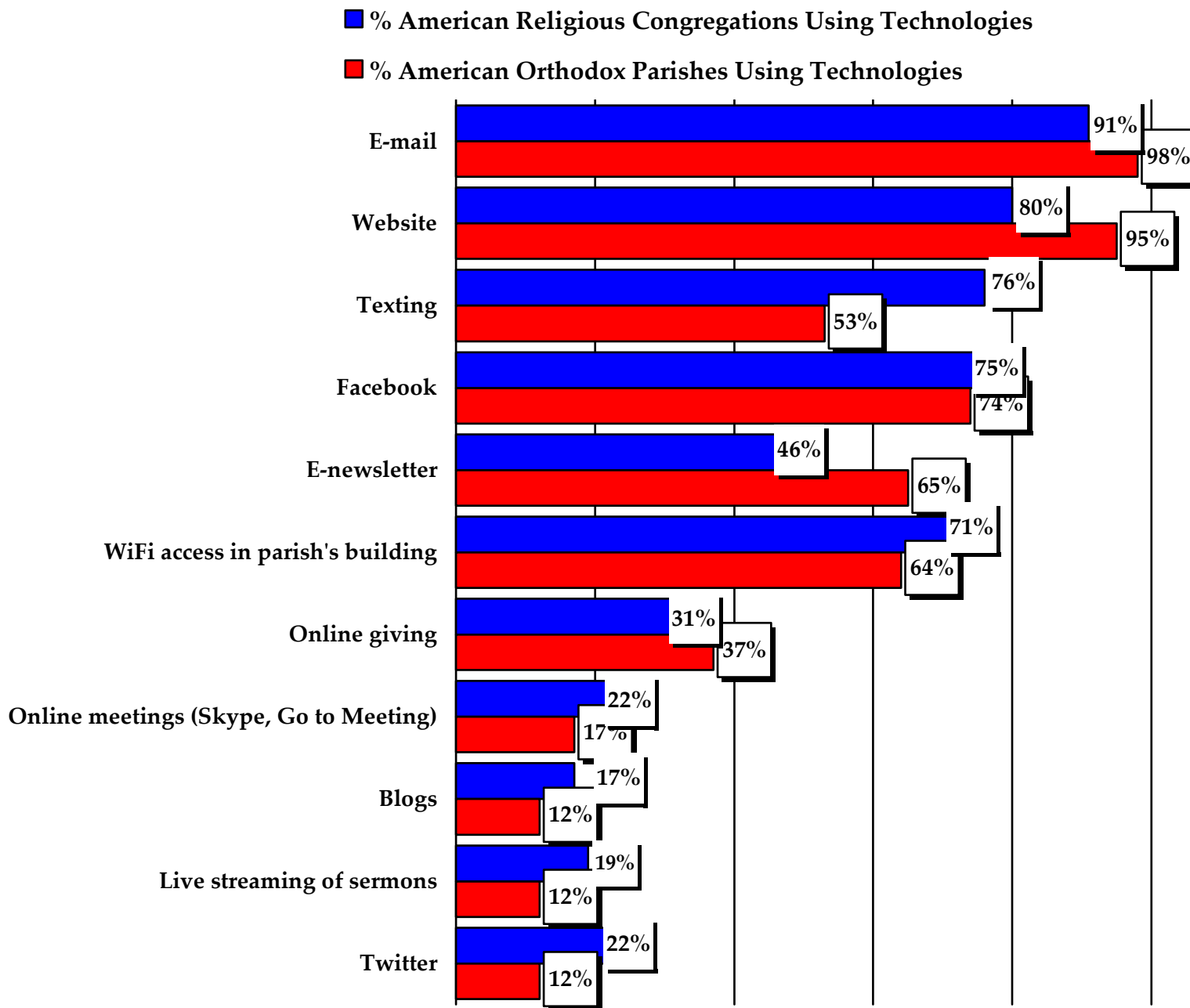


Fig. 61 shows that compared to U.S. non-Orthodox religious congregations, American Orthodox churches are better users of more established online technologies. Indeed, more Orthodox parishes than non-Orthodox religious congregations use email communication (98% versus 91%), websites (95% versus 80%) and e-newsletters (65% versus 46%). However, in the case of newer technologies American Orthodox churches generally lag behind other US religious congregations. Indeed, fewer Orthodox churches than non-Orthodox religious congregations use Twitter (12% versus 22%), live streaming of sermons (12% versus 19%), blogs (12%

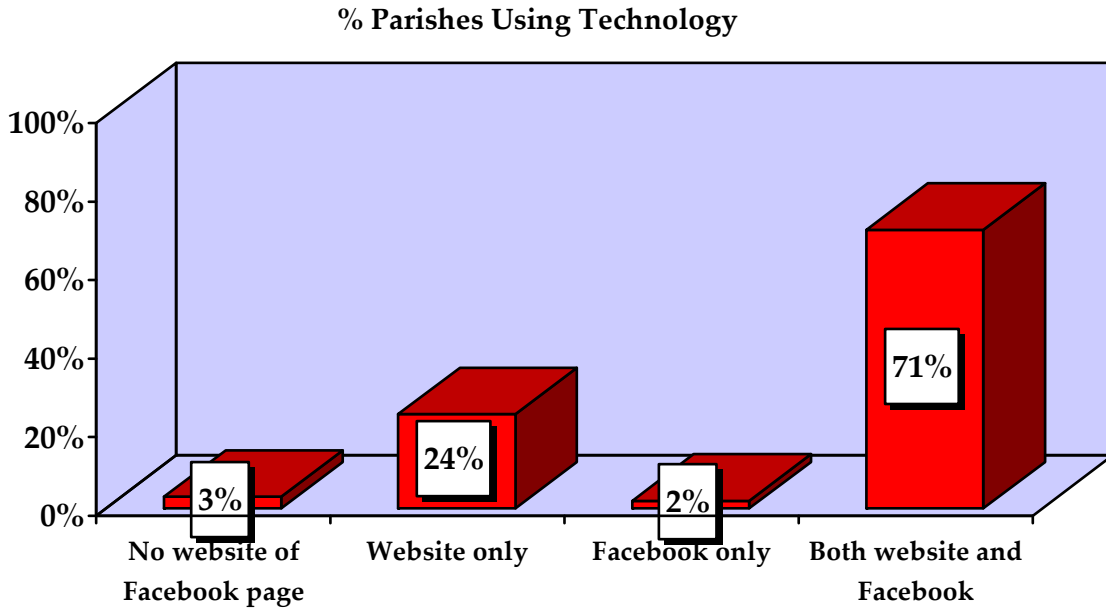
versus 17%), online meetings (17% versus 22%), Wi-Fi access in parish' buildings (64% versus 71%) and texting²⁷ (53% versus 76%).

Clearly, Fig. 61 presents a simplified picture as there are significant differences among the parishes of various jurisdictions as well as among congregations that belong to various religious denominations. Nevertheless, it is a good starting point to judge and examine the use of modern technologies and social media in American Orthodox churches.

Among various newer online technologies and social media, Facebook is definitely by far most popular today among the general American population and U.S. religious congregations (including Orthodox parishes). A question that may surface is whether a broad embrace of Facebook by religious congregations may signal a shift towards replacement of conventional congregational websites by Facebook pages. There is a good reason for this question. The truth is that the websites of many congregations (including Orthodox parishes) are not interactive and are infrequently updated. In this regard, Facebook pages offer a much higher dynamic quality: they are much more easily updated and provide timely and very relevant information to the members and friends of a congregation. The typical drawback of congregational Facebook pages, however, is that they normally provide less useful information for outsiders - people who are not associated with a congregation. Such information as, for instance, the history, mission statement, description of the congregation and its religious tradition, etc. is rarely present on Facebook. Ideally, then, a parish should develop and maintain both a conventional website and a Facebook page. Fig. 62 shows that 71% of U.S. Orthodox parishes adopted such a strategy. A quarter of parishes (24%) maintain websites, but do not have Facebook pages. 2% of the parishes have Facebook pages, but no websites. Finally, 3% of American Orthodox churches exist without any online presence.

²⁷ The usage of texting by an Orthodox parish could be especially important for reaching out to and communicating with the young people for many of whom this is a preferential way of communicating

Fig. 62 The Usage of Websites and Facebook Pages by U.S. Orthodox Parishes



There are significant variations among the parishes of the five jurisdictions in how much they use various electronic technologies and social media. Fig. 63a and 63b show percentages of ACROD, AOCA, GOA, OCA and Serbian Orthodox parishes that employ various online "tools" in their daily lives. Overall, GOA churches tend to be ahead of other jurisdictions in how much use they make of various electronic technologies and social media, while ACROD parishes tend to be the least proficient users of these technologies.

Fig. 63a The Use of More Traditional (email, website, e-newsletter) Electronic Technologies in the Parishes of Various Jurisdictions.

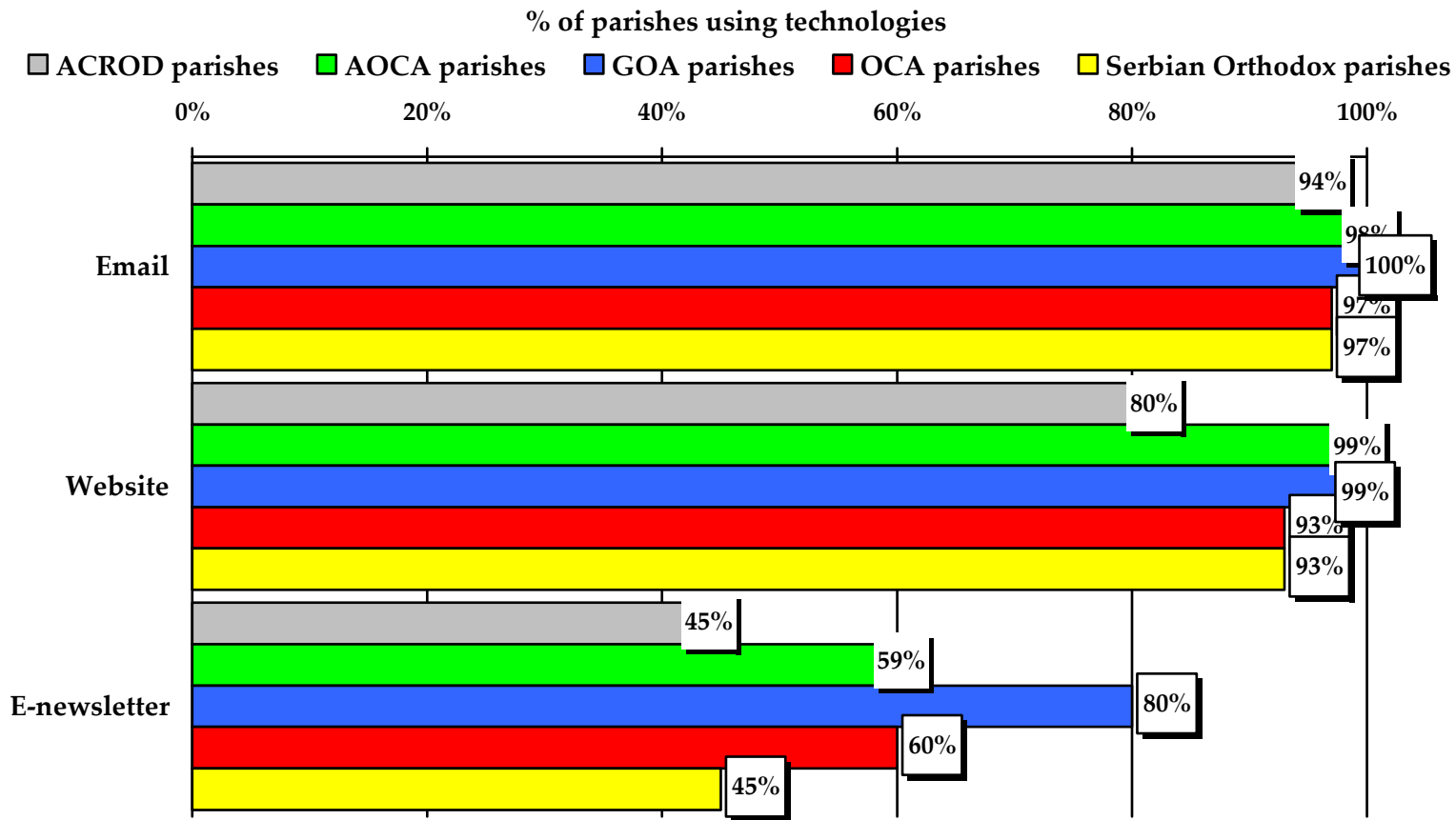


Fig. 63b The Use of the Newer Electronic Technologies in the Parishes of Various Jurisdictions.

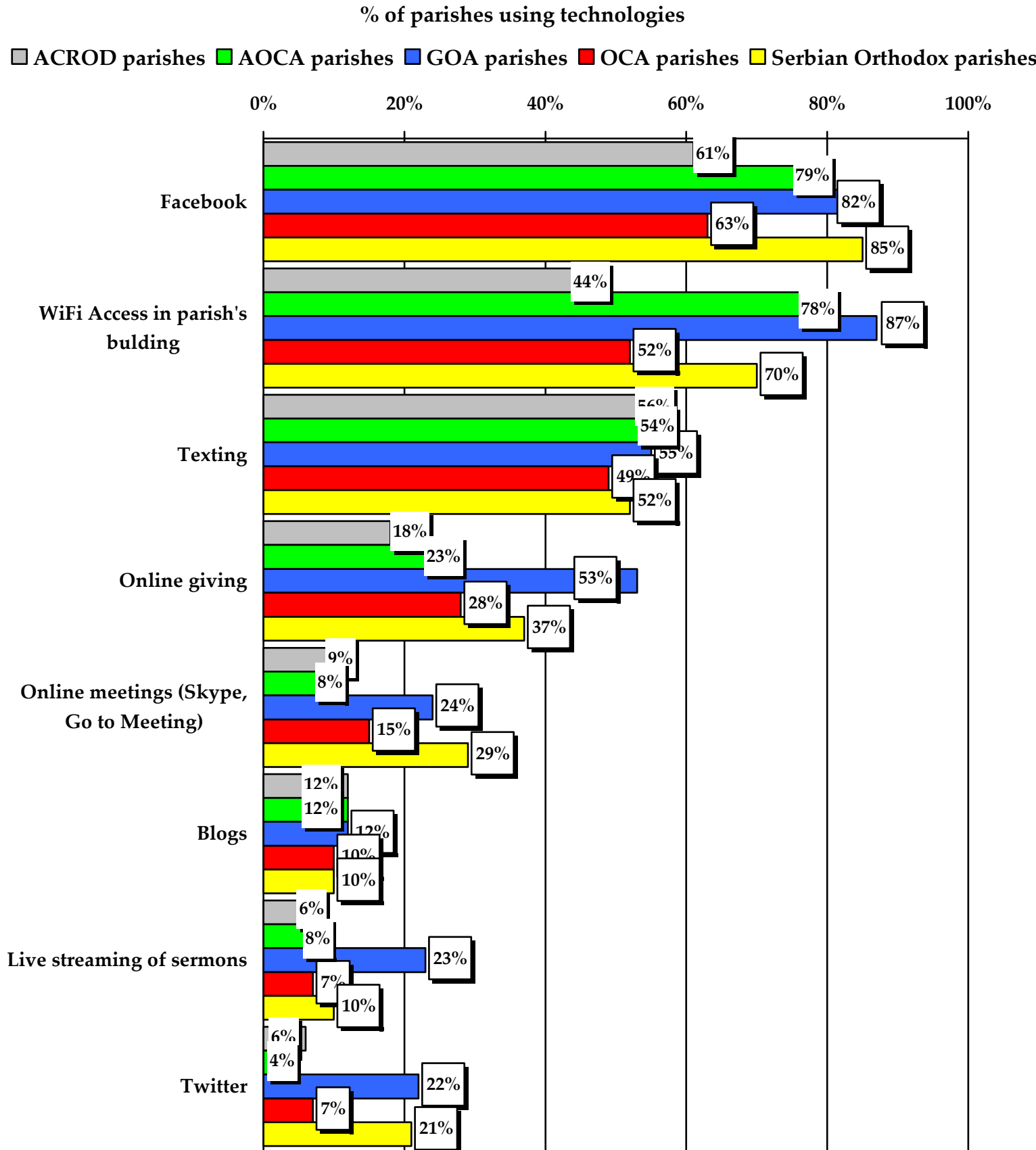
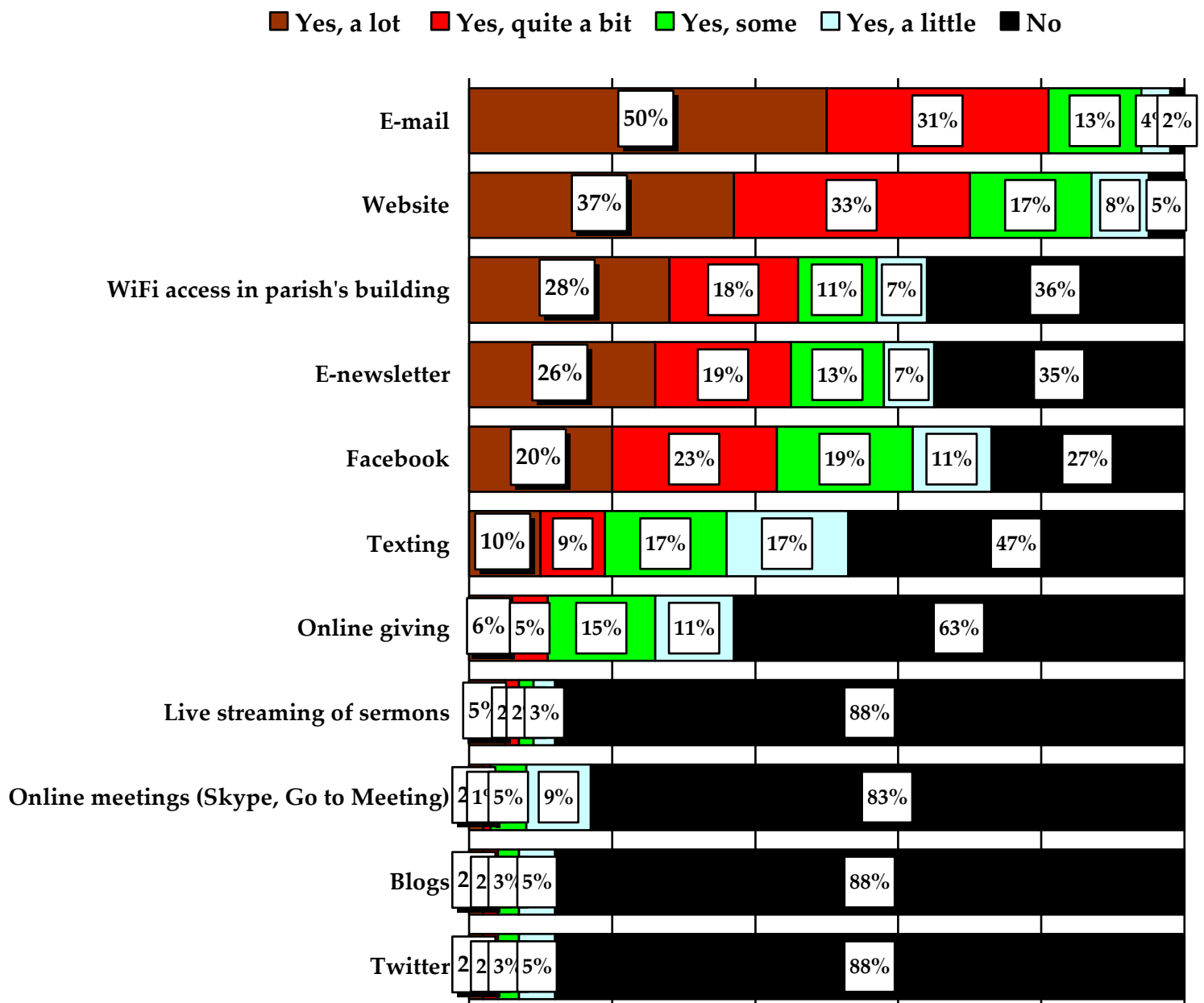


Fig. 64 shows the percentages of parishes reporting that they use various internet technologies. The reality is more complex, because some churches are only occasional, light users of these technologies, whereas other parishes can be described as "high-tech churches" that employ these technologies regularly, in a variety of forms and applying them to many areas of parish life. Fig. 56 provides a good picture of how many parishes are robust users and how many of are light users of various internet technologies and social media.

Fig. 64 The Usage of Various Internet Technologies and Social Media by U.S. Orthodox Parishes:

"Does your parish use any of the following Internet technologies. If yes, how much emphasis is given to each?"



One can see that even in the case of the most established online technologies, only 37% of U.S. Orthodox parishes can be qualified as robust website users and only quarter of them (26%) are prolific users of e-newsletters. As to the newer technologies, less than 10% of the parishes are truly proficient in the usage of online meetings and online giving, life streaming of sermons, blogs, and Twitter. The vast majority of parishes either do not employ these technologies at all or use them lightly and occasionally.

In order to more accurately judge each parish in terms of being "high-tech," "moderate-tech" or "low-tech" we calculated the Index of Technological Proficiency (ITP). In summary, the ITP was constructed out of responses of the parishes with regard to each item in Fig. 56 (except usage of email). The ITP could vary from 0 (if a parish responded "no" to all items in Fig. 56) to 8 (if a parish responded "yes, a lot" to all items in Fig. 56). A higher ITP means that a parish employs a greater variety of social media and Internet techniques and that it uses them at "a lot" level. In simple words, the higher ITP is, the more prolific and proficient a parish community is in the usage of Internet technologies and social media.

Tab. 10 shows average ITP value for all American Orthodox parishes and for the parishes of the five individual jurisdictions. Two comments should be made. First, the average ITP for all American Orthodox parishes combined is 2.4. This figure is much lower than 4, which would be the value of ITP *if* all the parishes would use all the techniques presented in Fig. 56 at the "yes, some" level. Most of the Internet technologies remain very underused by the majority of American Orthodox parishes. Second, judging by the average ITP, the GOA and Serbian Orthodox parishes are the most high-tech, while ACROD parishes are the least proficient users of various Internet technologies.

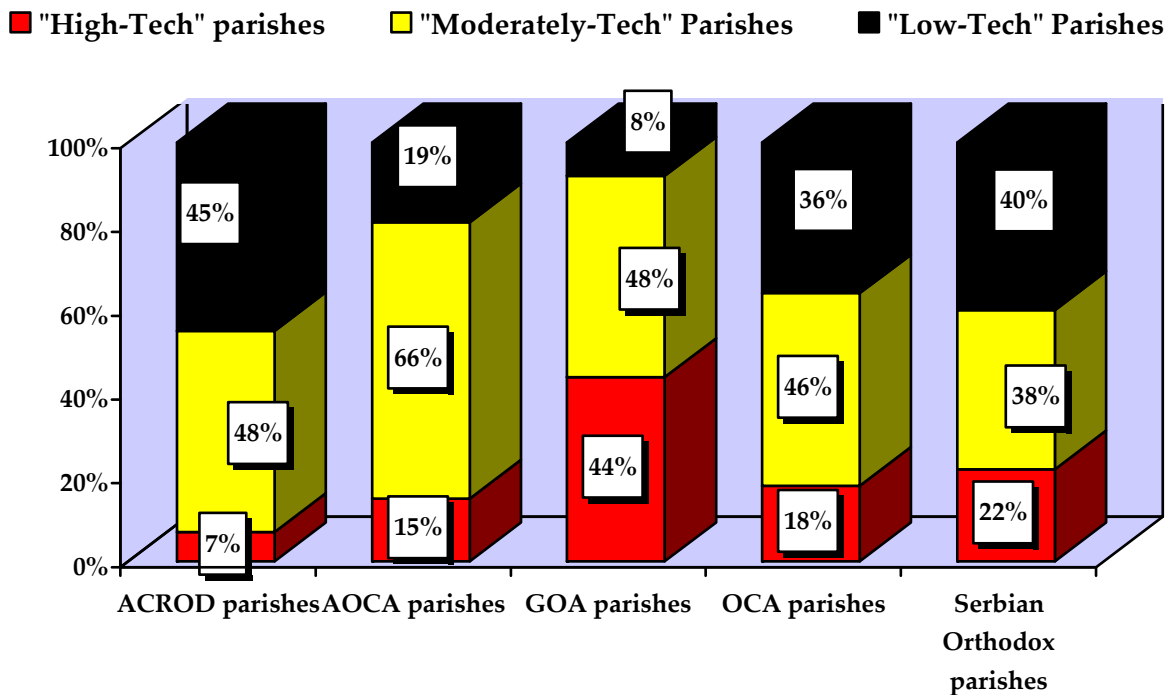
Tab. 10 Average Value of the Index of Technological Proficiency

	All US parishes	ACROD parishes	AOCA parishes	GOA parishes	OCA parishes	Serbian parishes
Average ITP	2.4	1.6	2.1	3.0	2.0	2.8

All parishes participating in the study were ranked in the descending order by the value of ITP. The top quarter of the parishes (25%) with the highest values of ITP were defined as high-tech parishes. The next two quarters from the top (i.e. 50% of all parishes) were defined as moderate-tech parishes. The bottom quarter (25% of the parishes with the lowest values of ITP) were defined as low-tech parishes.

Then an analysis was performed with the goal of identifying the most important factors that are strong predictors for a parish to be in a low-tech, moderately-tech, or high-tech category. Surprisingly, there were relatively few such factors. Controlling for various variables, the strongest predictor for an Orthodox parish to be either low-tech or high-tech is its affiliation with a particular Orthodox jurisdiction. Fig. 65 shows that GOA has the highest percentage of high-tech and smallest percentage of the low-tech parishes (44% and 8%, respectively). On the opposite end are the churches of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese: only 7% of Carpatho-Russian parishes are high-tech, while 45% of them are low-tech. The parishes of the Serbian Orthodox Church are in an interesting situation, having the second-largest percentages of both high-tech and low-tech parishes (after GOA and ACROD, respectively). At the same time, compared to other jurisdictions, the Serbian Orthodox Church has the smallest percentage of the moderate-tech parishes. What this means is that compared to other jurisdictions, the Serbian Orthodox Church is most “polarized” by the degree of technological proficiency of her parishes.

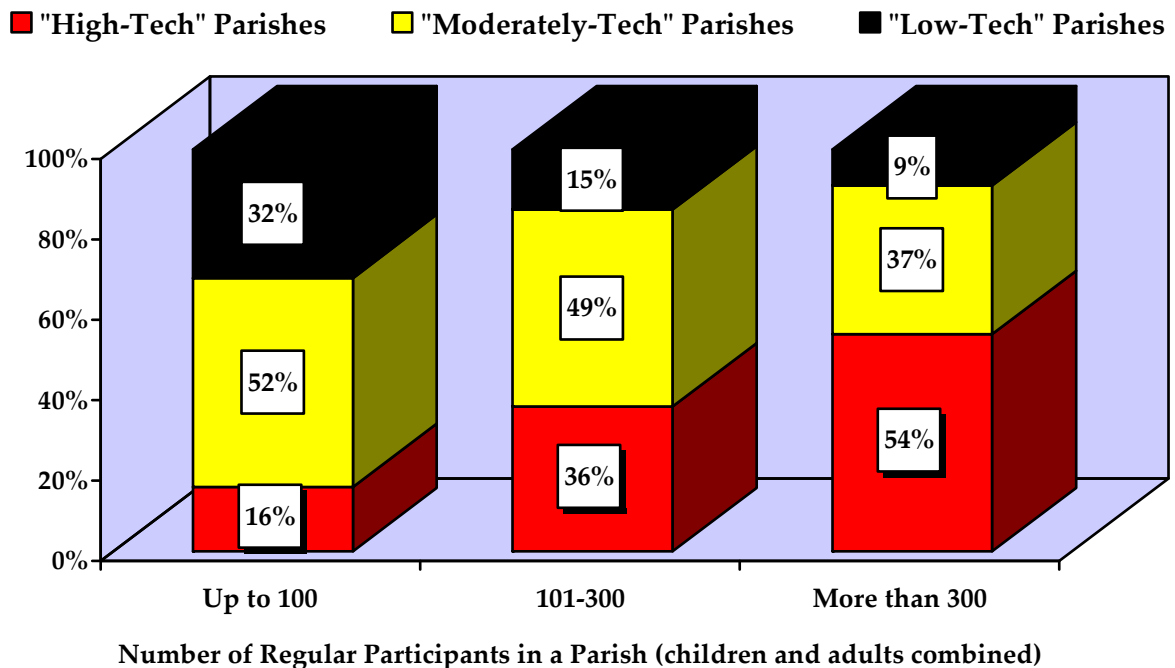
Fig. 65 Percentage of "Low-Tech," "Moderately-Tech," and "High-Tech" Parishes among the Parishes of Various Jurisdictions



Besides jurisdictional affiliation and controlling for various variables four other factors have a significant influence on the level of tech use by a parish. The first factor is the overall size of a parish community (i.e. the number of regular participants, adults and children combined). Essentially, the larger a parish is, the greater the chances are that it is a proficient user of various Internet technologies. Fig. 66 shows that when applying our three-point technology scale nearly one-third (32%) of small parishes (up to 100 regular participants) are technological luddites. In contrast, more than half of parishes (54%) with over 300 regular participants are high-tech. This finding is true for all American Orthodox parishes combined and for the parishes of the five jurisdictions. But, do larger parishes use more technology because they are big or did they become larger parishes due to their use of technology? Scott Thumma, the dean of Hartford Seminary and an expert on American megachurches argues that "both are true; tech is increasingly necessary as a congregation grows larger as well as the more tech it uses, the more likely it is to grow."²⁸

Fig. 66 The Bigger Parish Community the Higher Chances to Be "High-Tech" Parish

**Percentage (%) of "High-Tech," "Moderate-Tech" and "Low-Tech" Parishes
Among the Parishes in Different Size-Categories**



The second factor is parish's overall budget. The wealthier the parish is (measuring by the annual budget) within any size category, the more likely it is to employ various new technologies. See Fig. 67. This finding is true for all American Orthodox parishes combined and for the parishes of the five jurisdictions. At the same

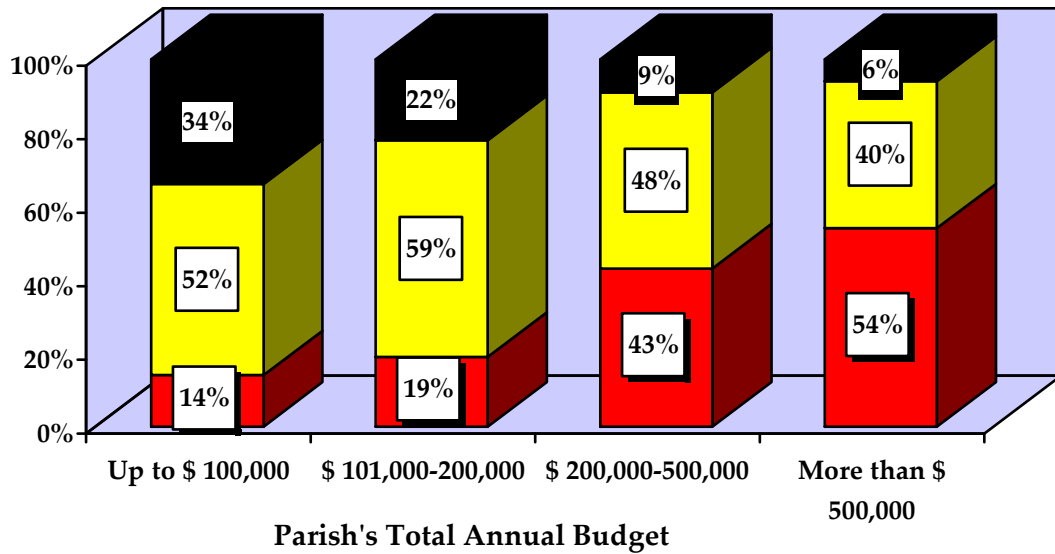
²⁸ See his report on "Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations." Available at: <http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/research/technology-Internet-use.html>

time, it was found that the per capita budget has no influence on the fact that a parish is more or less tech savvy.

Fig. 67 The Bigger Parish Budget the Higher Chances to Be "High-Tech" Parish

Percentage (%) of "High-", "Moderately-" and "Low-Tech" Parishes Among the Parishes in Different Budget Categories

■ "High-Tech" Parishes ■ "Moderately-Tech" Parishes ■ "Low-Tech" Parishes

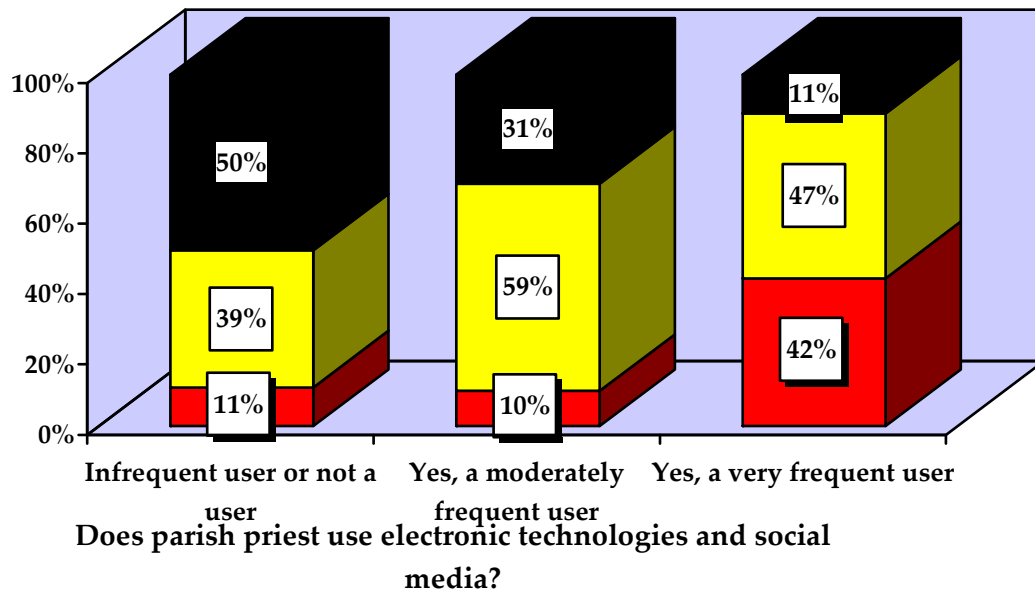


The third factor is the proficiency of a parish priest in the usage of electronic technologies and social media. The clergy who are themselves frequent Internet and social media users are much more likely to lead high-tech parishes than the priests who are moderately frequent or infrequent users of online tools. See Fig. 68.

Fig. 68 The Priests Who Are Frequent Internet Users Are Very Likely to Be in Charge of "High-Tech" Parishes

Percentage (%) of "High-", "Moderately-" and "Low-Tech" Parishes Led by the Clergy With Different Degree of Internet Proficiency

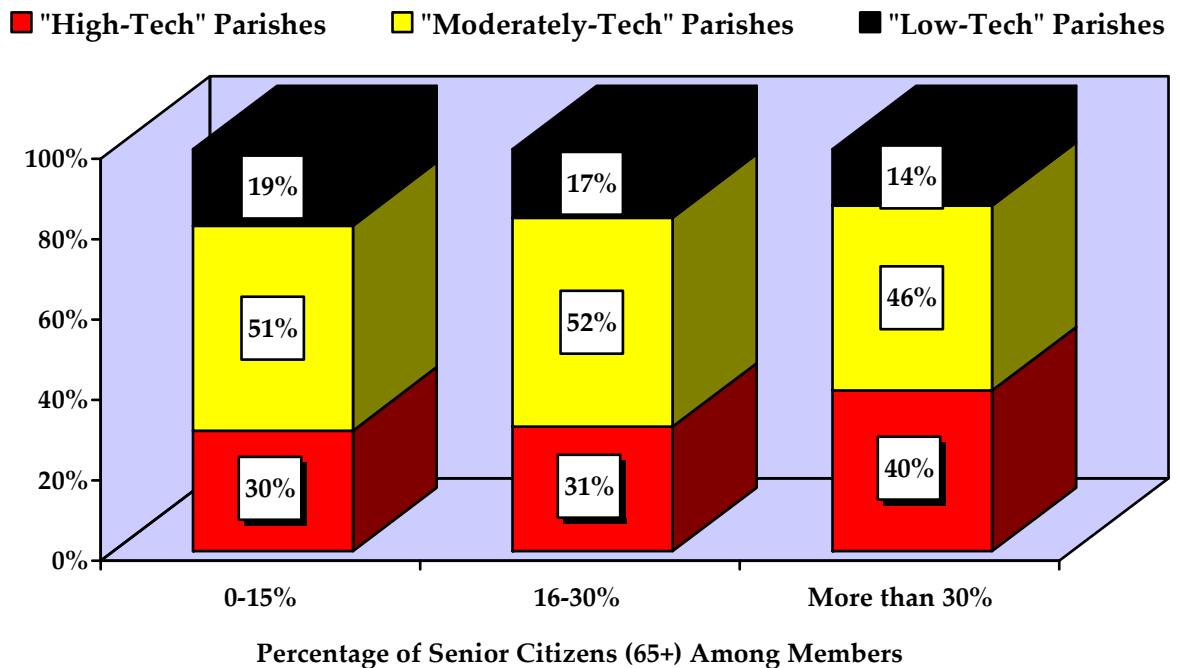
■ "High-Tech" Parishes ■ "Moderately-Tech" Parishes ■ "Low-Tech" Parishes



The last factor affecting likelihood of a parish to be either low-tech or high-tech is the age of the parishioners. However, this factor has only a limited influence. More specifically, the parishes with a high presence (over 30%) of older parishioners are much more likely than other parishes to be low-tech. See Fig. 69. At the same time, variations in the presence of children (age 0-12), preteens and youth (age 13-17), young adults (age 18-34) and adults (age 34-65) have no influence on a fact that a parish is more or less tech savvy. Furthermore, the age of the clergy also does not matter for the likelihood of a parish to be either high-tech or low-tech.

Fig. 69 High Presence of Senior Citizens Among Parishioners Means High Chances to Be "Low-Tech" Parish

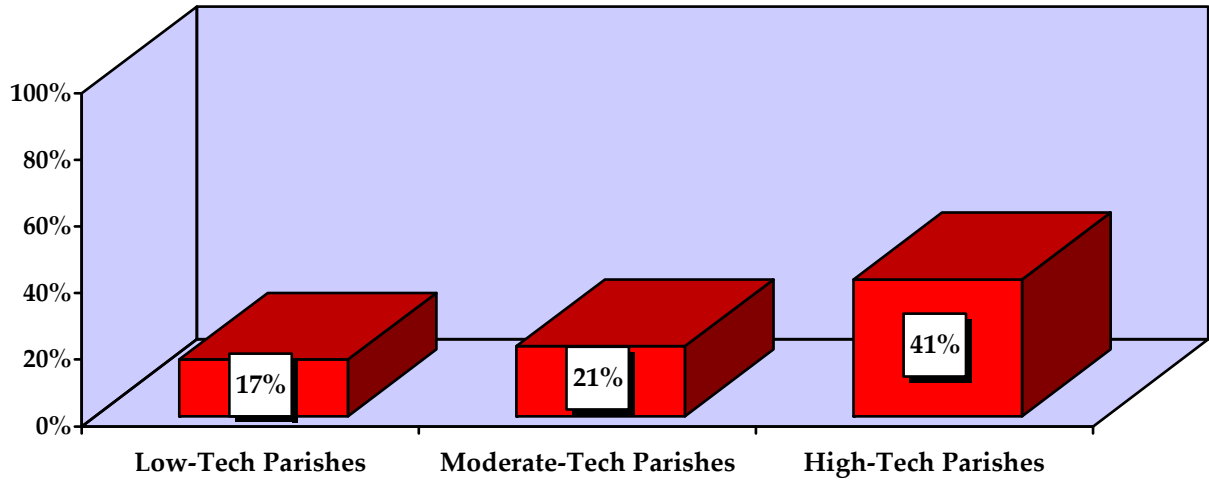
Percentage (%) of "High," "Moderately" and "Low-Tech" Parishes Among the Parishes With Different Presence of Senior Members



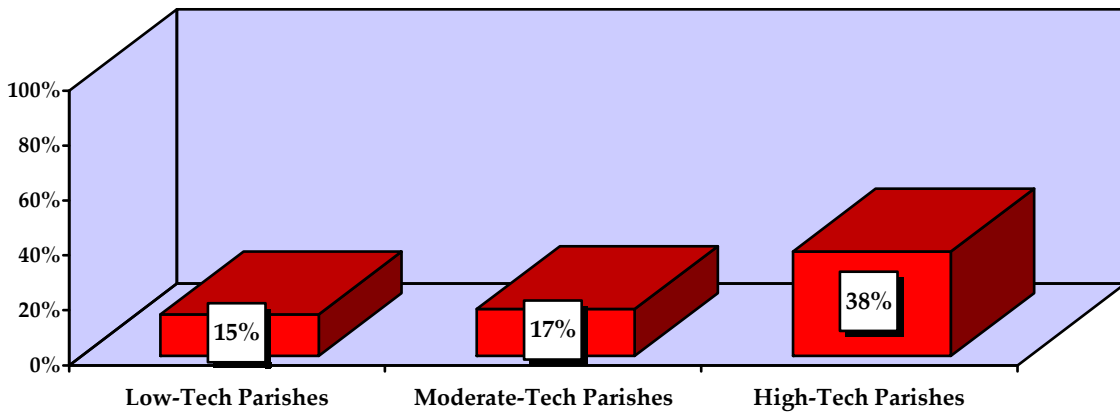
It should be emphasized that there is a *clear correlation between a parish's overall high vitality and a parish's robust usage of Internet technologies*. First, the parishes that are robust users of Internet technologies and social media are much more likely to report that they "have clear mission and purpose," "are spiritually vital," and "are willing to change to meet new challenges." See Fig. 70.

Fig. 70 "High-Tech" Parishes Are Spiritually Vital, Have Clear Mission and Purpose and Are Willing to Change

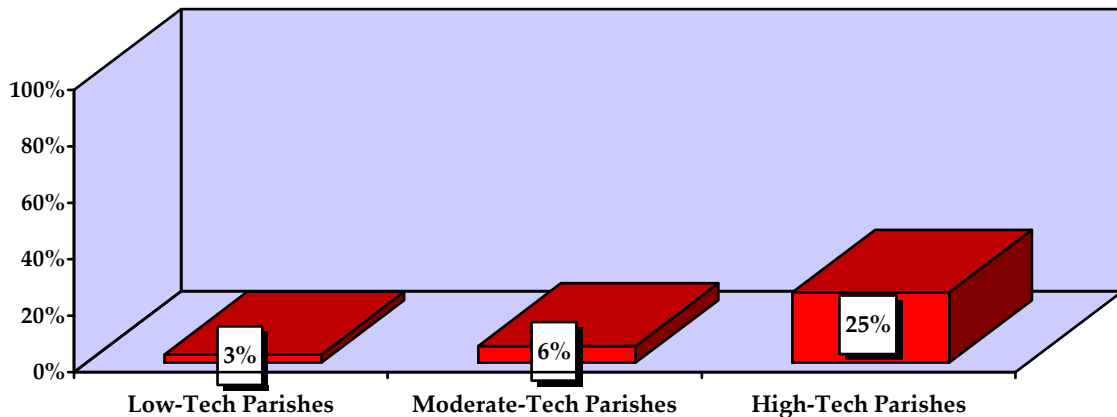
Percentage of Parishes that "STRONGLY AGREE" with Statement "Our Parish Has Clear Mission and Purpose"



Percentage of Parishes that "STRONGLY AGREE" with Statement "Our Parish Is Spiritually Vital and Alive"

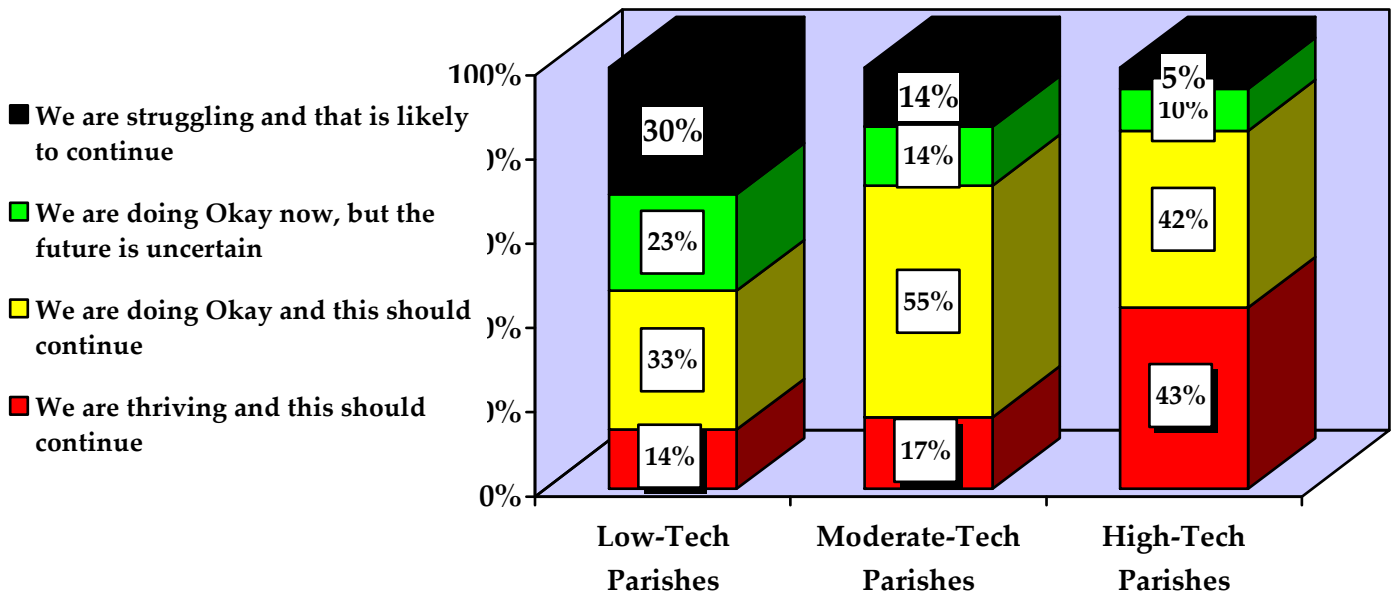


Percentage of Parishes that "STRONGLY AGREE" with Statement "Our Parish Is Willing to Change to Meet New Challenges"



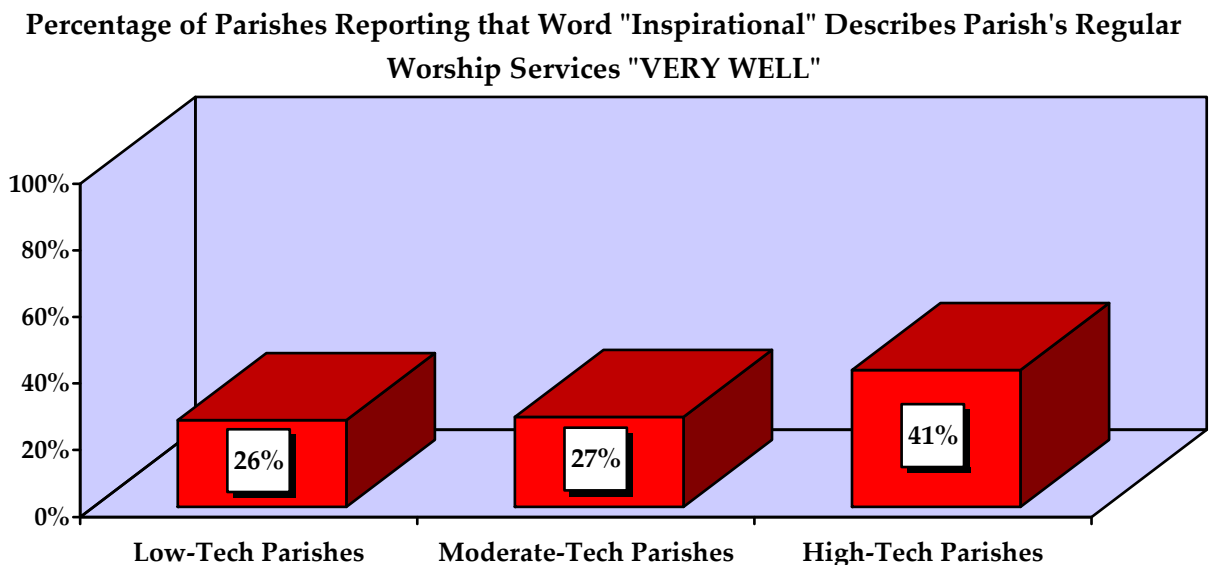
Second, high usage of Internet technologies and social media goes along with a parish's optimism about its future viability. See Fig. 71.

Fig. 71 Three "Tech-Use" Categories of the Parishes and Their Vision for the Future

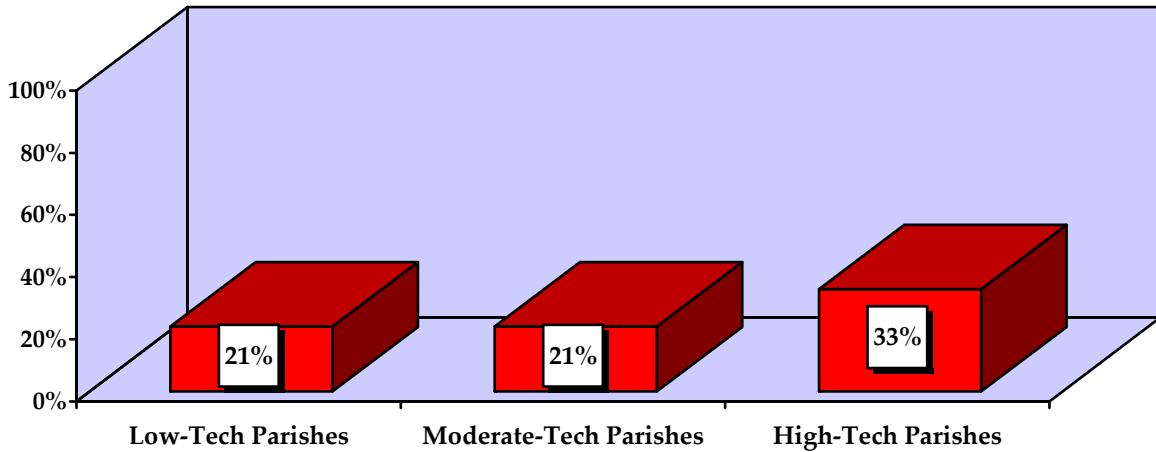


Third, high use of Internet technologies in a parish is strongly and positively related to creative and engaging worship services. That is, the high-tech parishes are much more likely to describe their worship services as "inspirational," "thought-provoking," "joyful," and "nurturing people's faith." See Fig. 72.

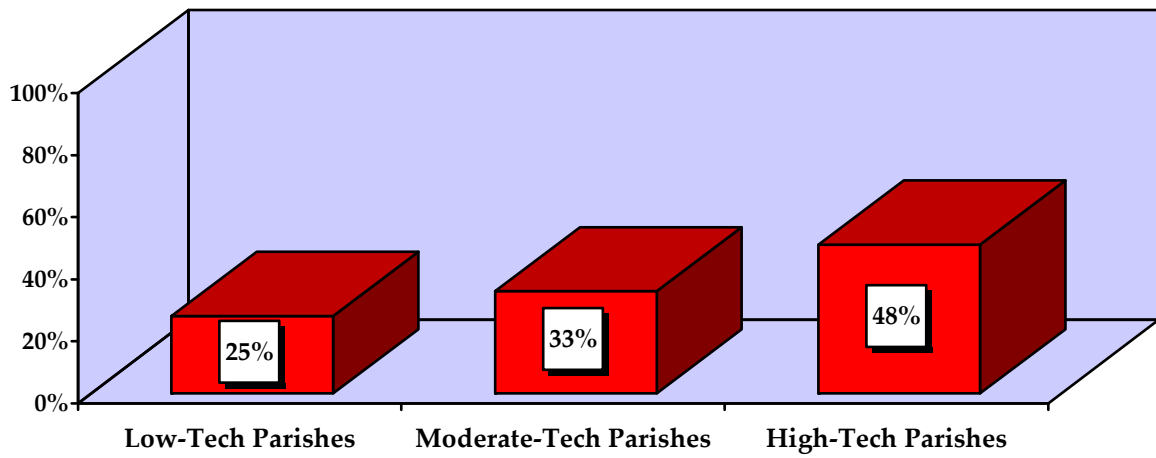
Fig. 72 High-Tech Parishes Have "Inspirational," "Thought-Provoking," "Joyful," and "Nurturing People's Faith" Worship Services



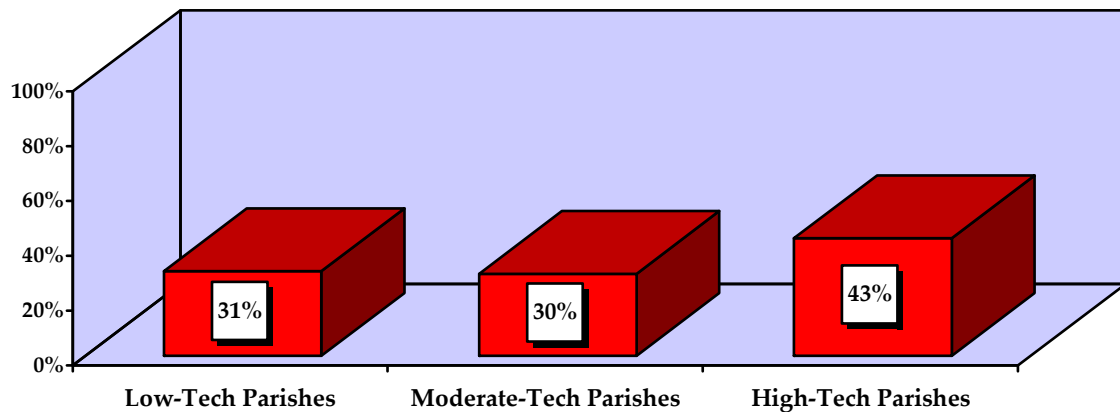
Percentage of Parishes Reporting that "Thought Provoking" Describes Parish's Regular Worship Services "Very Well"



Percentage of Parishes Reporting that the Word "Joyful" Describes Parish's Regular Worship Services "VERY WELL"

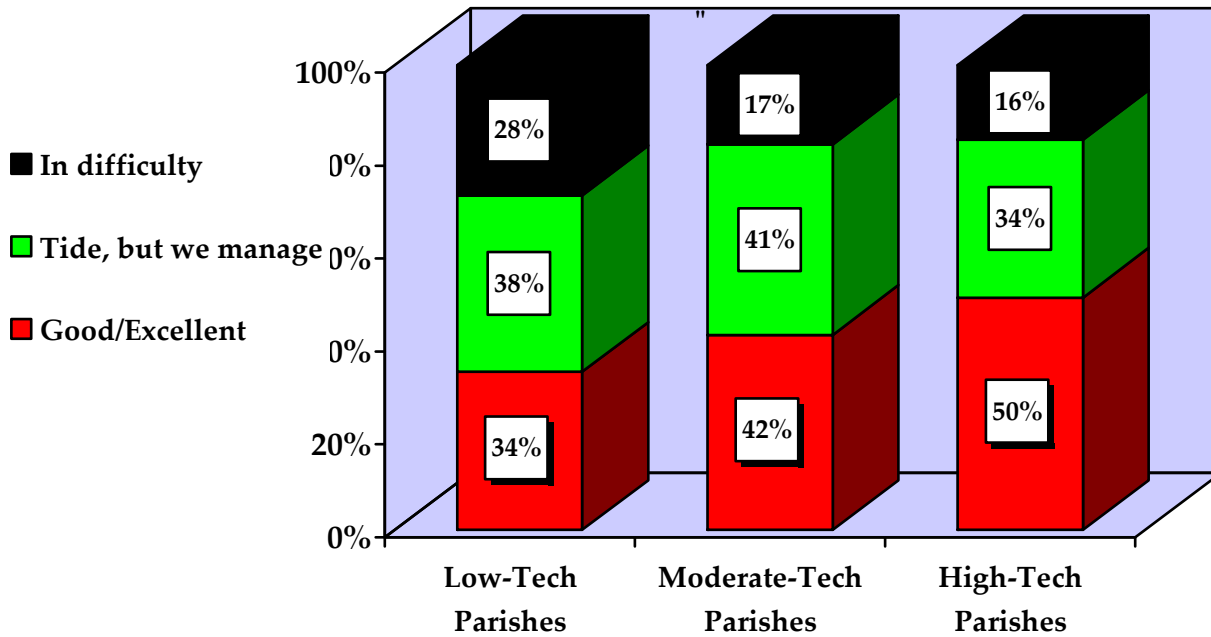


Percentage of Parishes Reporting that "Nurturing People's Faith" Describes Parish's Regular Worship Services "VERY WELL"



Fourth, being a high-tech parish is strongly associated with good or excellent financial health. See Fig. 73.

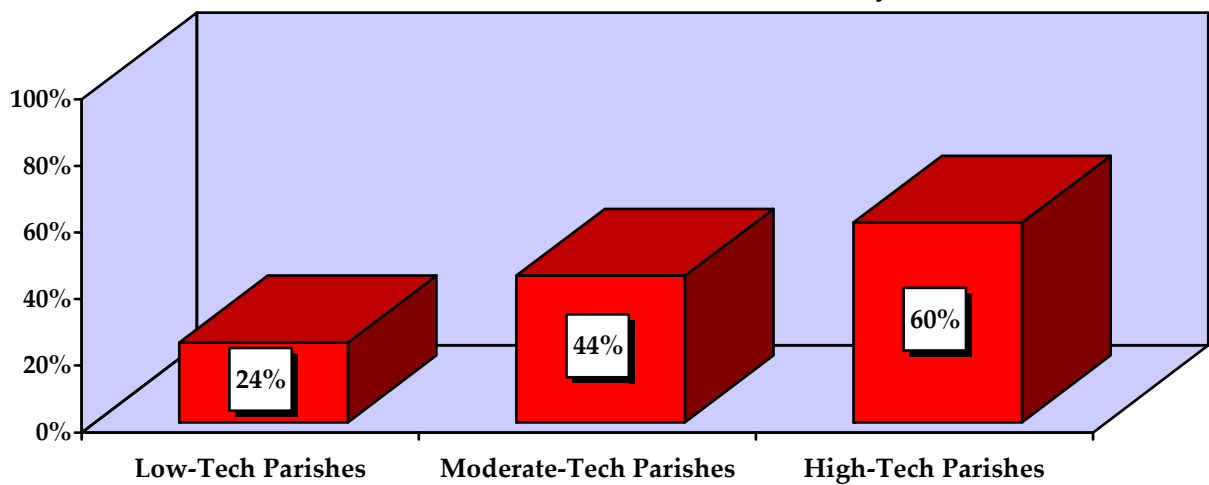
Fig. 73 Three Categories of Parishes and Their Overall Financial Health:
"How Would You Describe Your Parish's Overall Financial Health?"



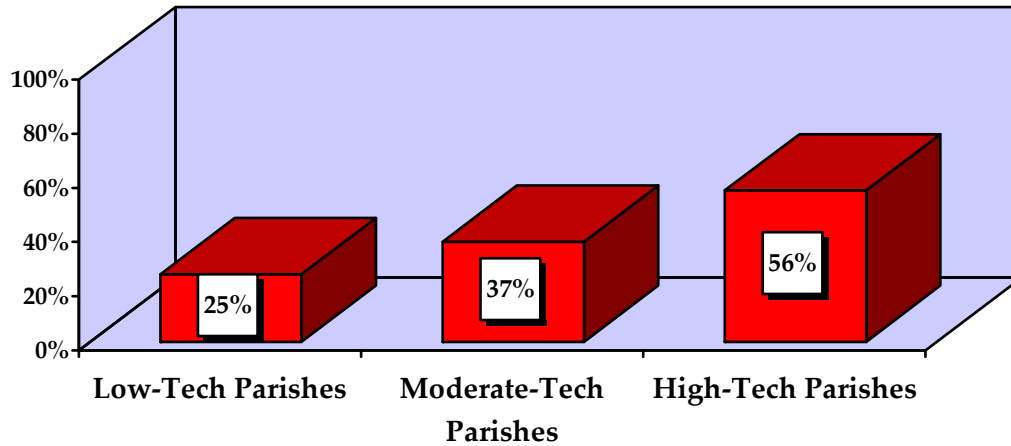
Fifth, high tech use by a parish is strongly correlated with placing a high priority on reaching out to young adult parishioners and growth in young adult church members. See Fig. 74.

Fig. 74 High Tech Use in a Parish Goes Hand-in-Hand With Reaching Out to Young Adult Parishioners and Growing in Young Adult Members

Percentage of Parishes Reporting that Engaging Young Adults (age 18-34) in the Life of a Parish is Their "MAIN" or "TOP" Priority



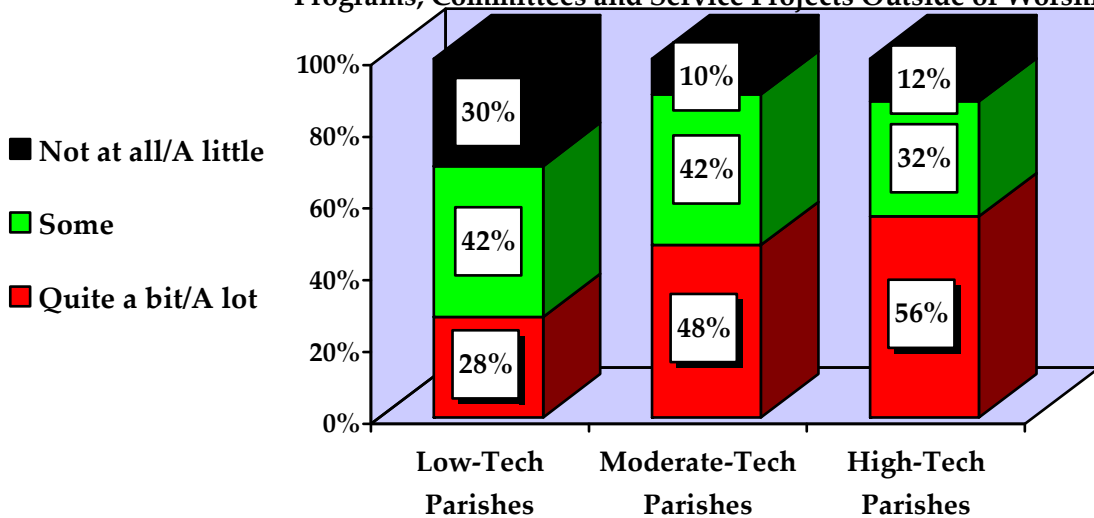
Percentage of Parishes Reporting INCREASE in the Number of Young Adults in the Past Three Years



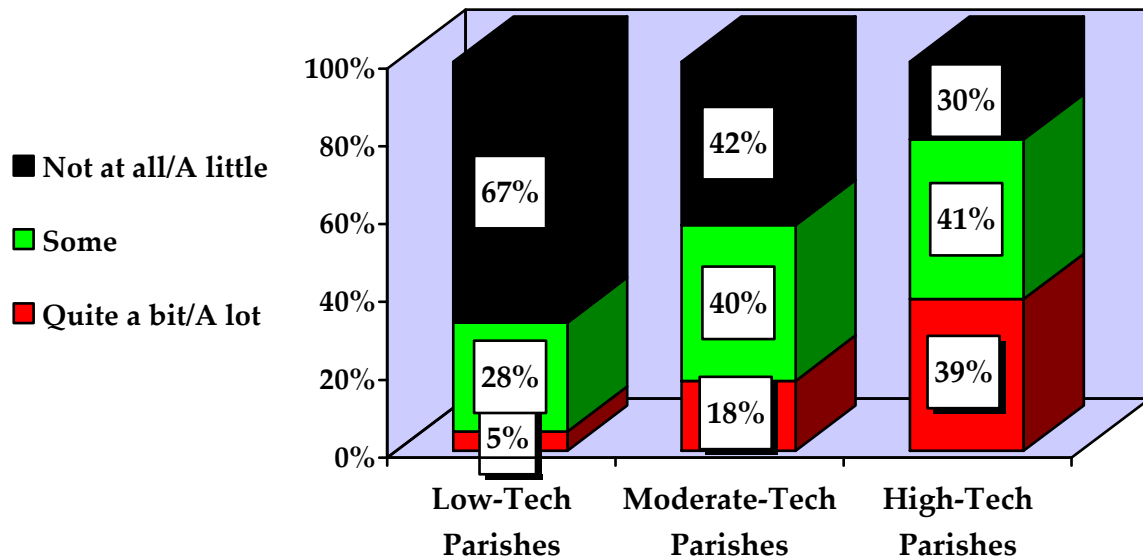
Finally, compared to other parishes, the high-tech parishes stand out by much greater involvement of parishioners in the daily life of a parish and stronger emphasis on bringing new members into a parish community. See Fig. 75.

Fig. 75 The "High-Tech" Parishes Have High Degree of Involvement of Their Parishioners and They Place Strong Emphasis on Bringing Into Parish New Members

Overall, to What Extent Are Your Parishioners Involved in the Parish's Various Programs, Committees and Service Projects Outside of Worship



**Overall, to What Extent Are Your Parishioners Involved in Bringing New Members
Into this Parish?**



Does this mean that turning a parish into a high-tech church is a "silver bullet" for achieving high vitality and guaranteeing a bright future for a parish community? Definitely not. Clearly, technology is not an end in itself. Rather, it has to be employed strategically and intentionally as an important component of the overall ministry effort of the parish. With such an approach, the proficient use of multiple modern technologies is a powerful tool which allows a parish community to do more with fewer resources available and to reach out more efficiently both to parish's members and further into parish's local community. In short, technology enhances greatly the vitality, thus, making it more likely that a high-tech parish would become a flourishing Christian community.

X. Ten Facts about American Orthodox Parishes that Make Them Different from American Protestant Congregations

HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS:

- ❖ In terms of their locations, American Orthodox parishes can be described as much more "urban" and "suburban," while American Protestant congregations are more "rural" or "small-townish;"
 - ❖ Orthodox parishes are more prone to internal conflicts and disagreements among their members than Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations;
 - ❖ Liturgical worship in Orthodox parishes is best described with the word "reverent," while worship services in Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations are better described with the words "joyful," "innovative" and "thought-provoking;"
 - ❖ Compared to members of Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations, the members of American Orthodox churches are less involved in the lives of their parishes beyond worship services;
 - ❖ When it comes to the life of a congregation outside of worship services, Orthodox parishes engage less than Protestant congregations in various activities and programs;
 - ❖ Compared to Protestant congregations, Orthodox parishes are much less involved in various ecumenical and interfaith activities. This is true not only for joint worship services, but also for the joint "educational or fellowship activities" and "community service activities;"
 - ❖ In their religious education programs and compared to Protestant congregations, Orthodox parishes pay more attention to "relating the Orthodox faith's beliefs and practices to each age level." Differently, compared to Orthodox parishes, Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations place greater emphasis on "teaching their members about love and justice toward others" and on "engaging church members in nurture and fellowship;"
 - ❖ Orthodox parishes have a much stronger sense of having a distinct religious identity than Protestant congregations;
 - ❖ American Orthodox priests are greater supporters of the use of the Internet technologies in the church life than Protestant clergy;
 - ❖ A smaller percentage of Orthodox parishes than Protestant congregations evaluate themselves as being "spiritually vital and alive." Similarly, fewer Orthodox parishes than Protestant congregations have a clear sense of the parish's purpose and mission.
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DISCUSSION

The study "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America" was part of a much larger national study of American religious congregations titled "Faith Communities Today" (FACT).²⁹ The FACT study was conducted by the "Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership" (CCSP), an interfaith coalition of religious researchers representing a broad spectrum of American faith communities. Originally, the "Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas" (SCOBA) and currently the "Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America" has been, and remains, one of the founding partners in CCSP cooperative project. More about CCSP research partnership and numerous reports from CCSP various study projects can be found at: www.faithcommunitiestoday.org.

Nearly 4,500 congregations representing various Christian denominations participated in the FACT survey and study. This short chapter is devoted to the comparisons of the various aspects in the lives of American Orthodox parishes, on the one hand, and Protestant congregations, on the other hand. More specifically, the following pages will provide a glimpse into what are the most remarkable differences between Orthodox Christian parishes and the Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations (beyond, of course, entirely different theologies and worship practices).

Three preliminary comments should be made first. First, in terms of church governance, theology, and worship practices the Orthodox Church is much closer to the Roman Catholic Church than to various Protestant denominations. Regrettably, however, the Roman Catholic parishes did not participate in FACT study and, therefore, we cannot include them into this comparative analysis with Orthodox parishes.

Second, despite significant differences in theology and worship practices, all religious congregations share many traits. When it comes to social ministries, work with youth, usage of Internet technologies, providing religious education for church members, finances, governance of a local congregation, interaction with the local community, etc., all American congregations share many common features.

Third, the following ten facts about the differences between American Orthodox parishes and Protestant congregations highlight only those characteristics where there is a significant gap between Orthodox parishes and both Mainline and Evangelical Protestant churches. In other words, it was found that in many aspects of

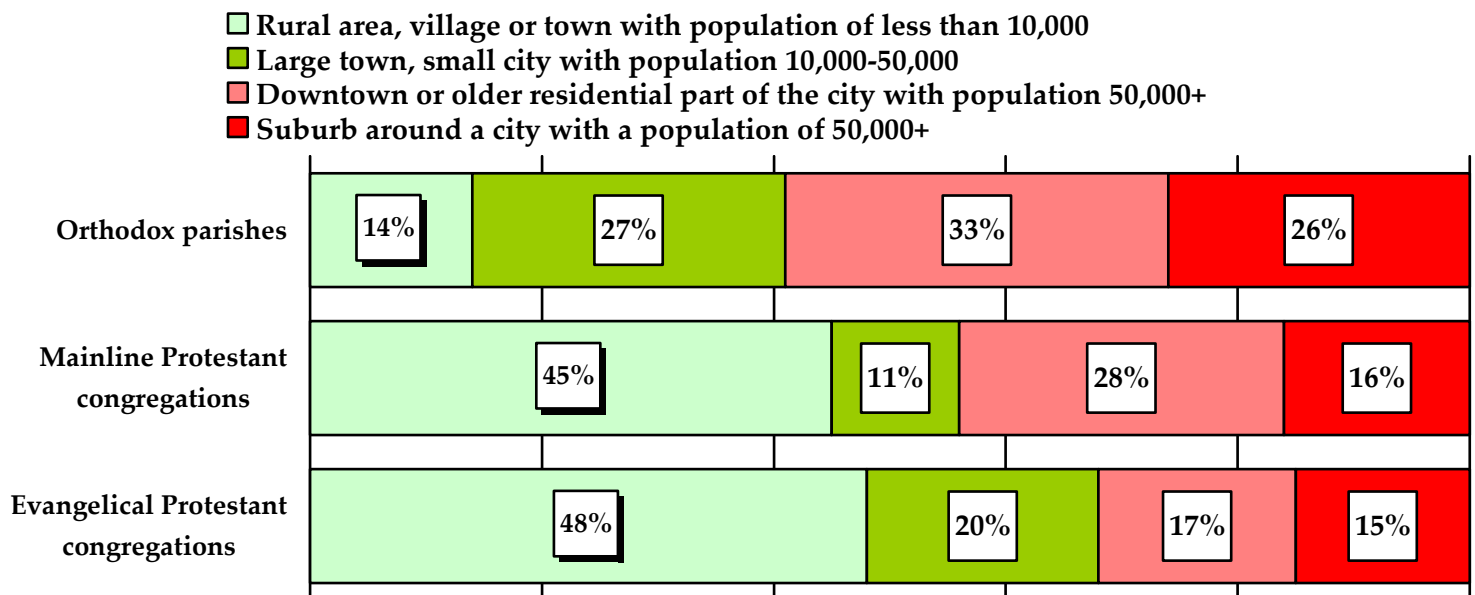
²⁹ The national report on FACT study "American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving" is available at: <http://www.faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>

local church life the Orthodox parishes are sometimes similar to Mainline Protestant churches (more often) and, sometimes, to Evangelical congregations (less often). A relatively few characteristics and features make Orthodox parishes significantly different from both Mainline and Evangelical Protestant churches.

Fact 1. About location.

In terms of their locations, US Orthodox parishes can be described as much more "urban" and "suburban," while American Protestant congregations are more "rural" or "small-townish." Fig. 68 shows that only 14% of U.S. Orthodox churches are situated in rural areas or in towns with population of less than 10,000 in comparison with 45% Mainline and 48% Evangelical Protestant congregations. To the contrary, 59% of American Orthodox parishes are either in or near cities with population of 50,000+ in comparison with only 44% of Mainline and 32% of Evangelical Protestant congregations.

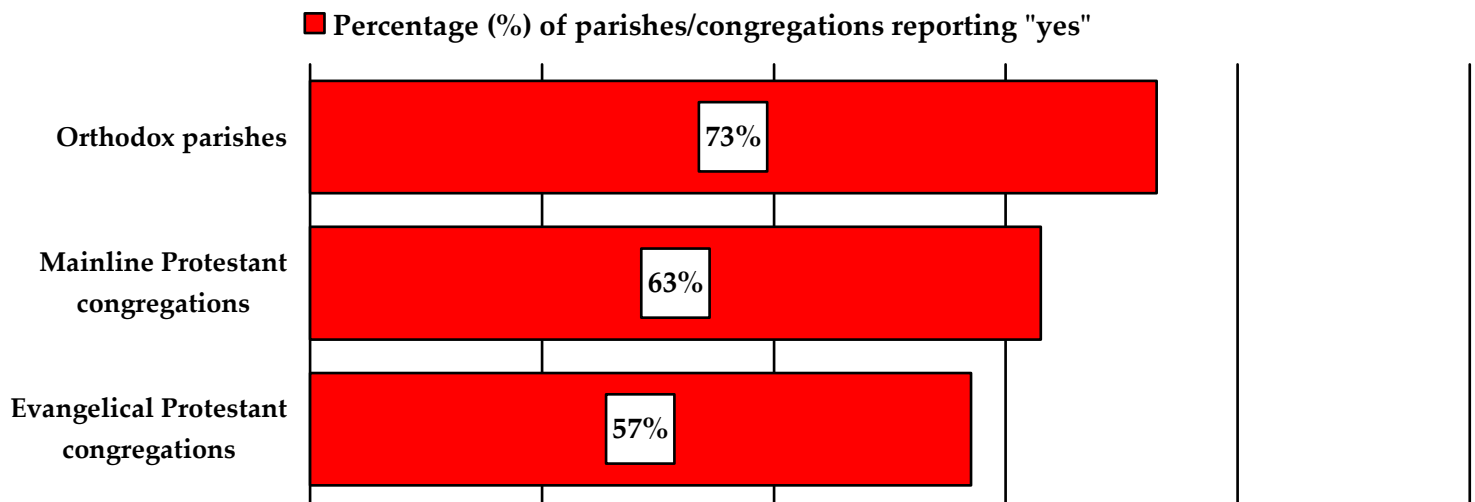
Fig. 76 "How Would You Describe the Location of Your Church?"



Fact 2. About internal conflicts and disagreements among the church members.

Survey data indicated that American Orthodox parishes are more prone to internal conflicts and disagreements among their members than Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations. Answering question, "During the past 5 years has your parish/congregation experienced any disagreements or conflicts?", nearly three-quarters (73%) of Orthodox parishes reported "yes" in comparison with only 63% of Mainline and 57% of Evangelical Protestant congregations.

Fig. 77 "During the past 5 years has your parish/congregation experienced any disagreements or conflicts?"

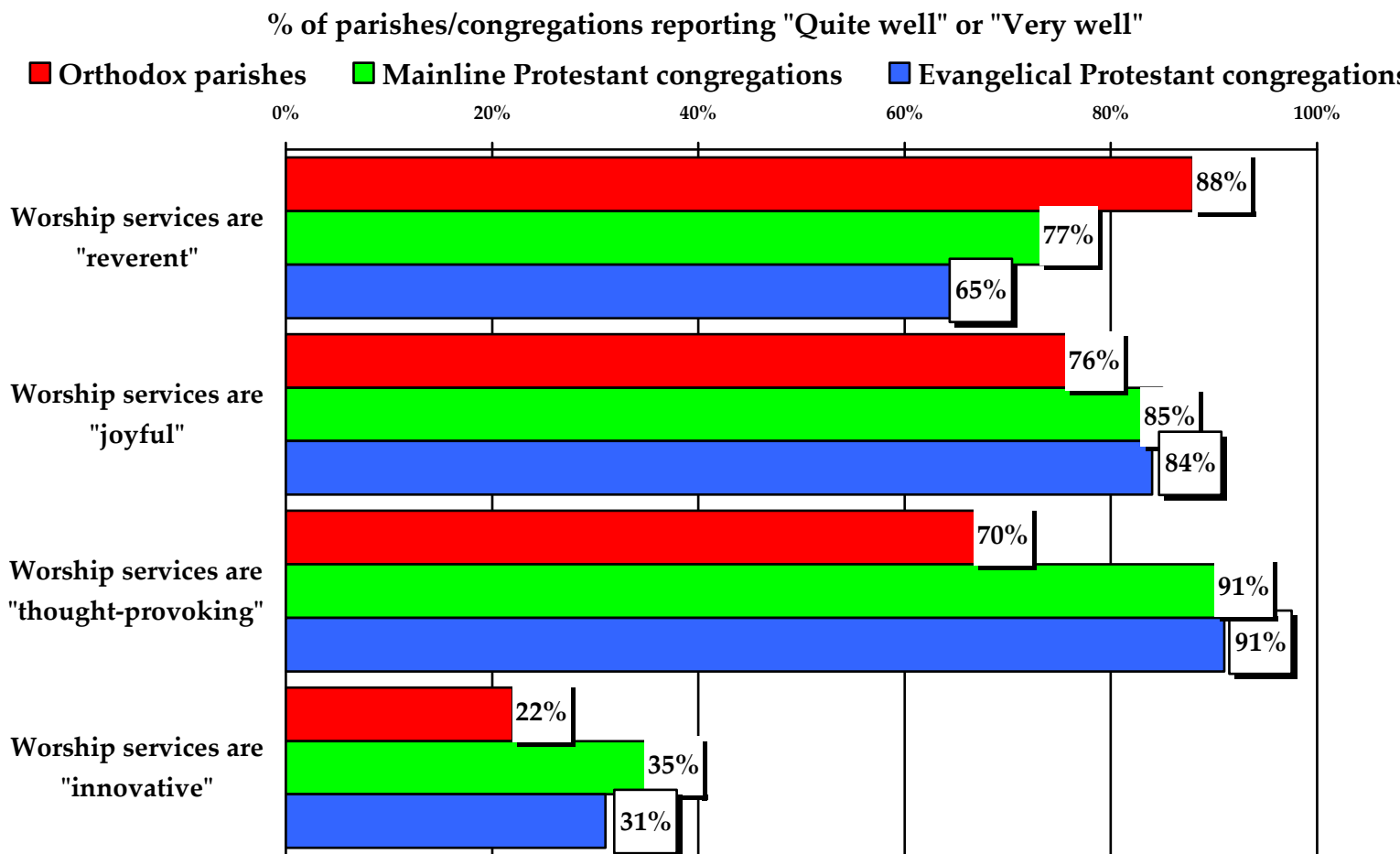


Fact 3. About the style of worship.

The liturgical worship in U.S. Orthodox parishes is best described with the word "reverent," while worship services in Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregation tend to be more "joyful," "innovative" and "thought-provoking."

Fig. 78 shows, when asked to describe their regular Sunday worship services significantly more Orthodox parishes (88%) than Mainline (77%) and Evangelical (65%) congregations have chosen the word "reverent" as describing their Sunday worship "quite well" or "very well." Differently, more Mainline and Evangelical congregations than Orthodox parishes reported that their worship services are "innovative," "joyful" or "thought provoking."

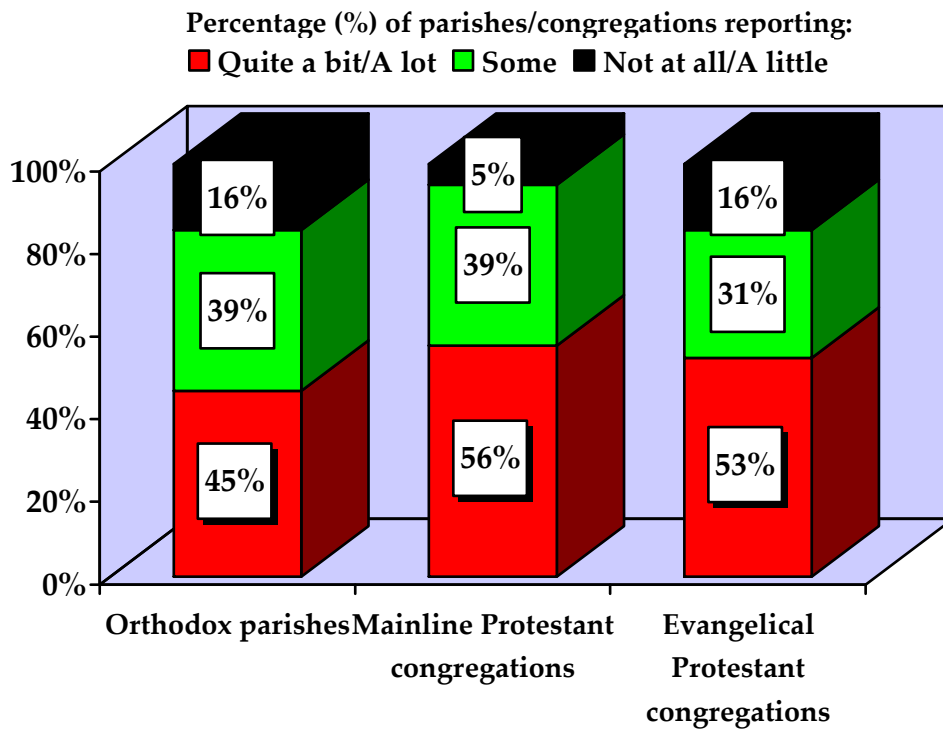
Fig. 78 "How well do the following words describe your parish's/congregation's regular Sunday worship service?"



Fact 4. About involvement of the church members in the life of a parish/congregation beyond worship services.

Compared to members of Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations, the members of American Orthodox churches are less involved in the lives of their parishes beyond worship services. When asked, "Overall, to what extent are your members involved in parish's/congregation's various programs, committees and projects outside of worship?", only 45% of the Orthodox parishes reported "quite a bit/a lot" in comparison with 56% of the Mainline and 53% of the Evangelical Protestant congregations.

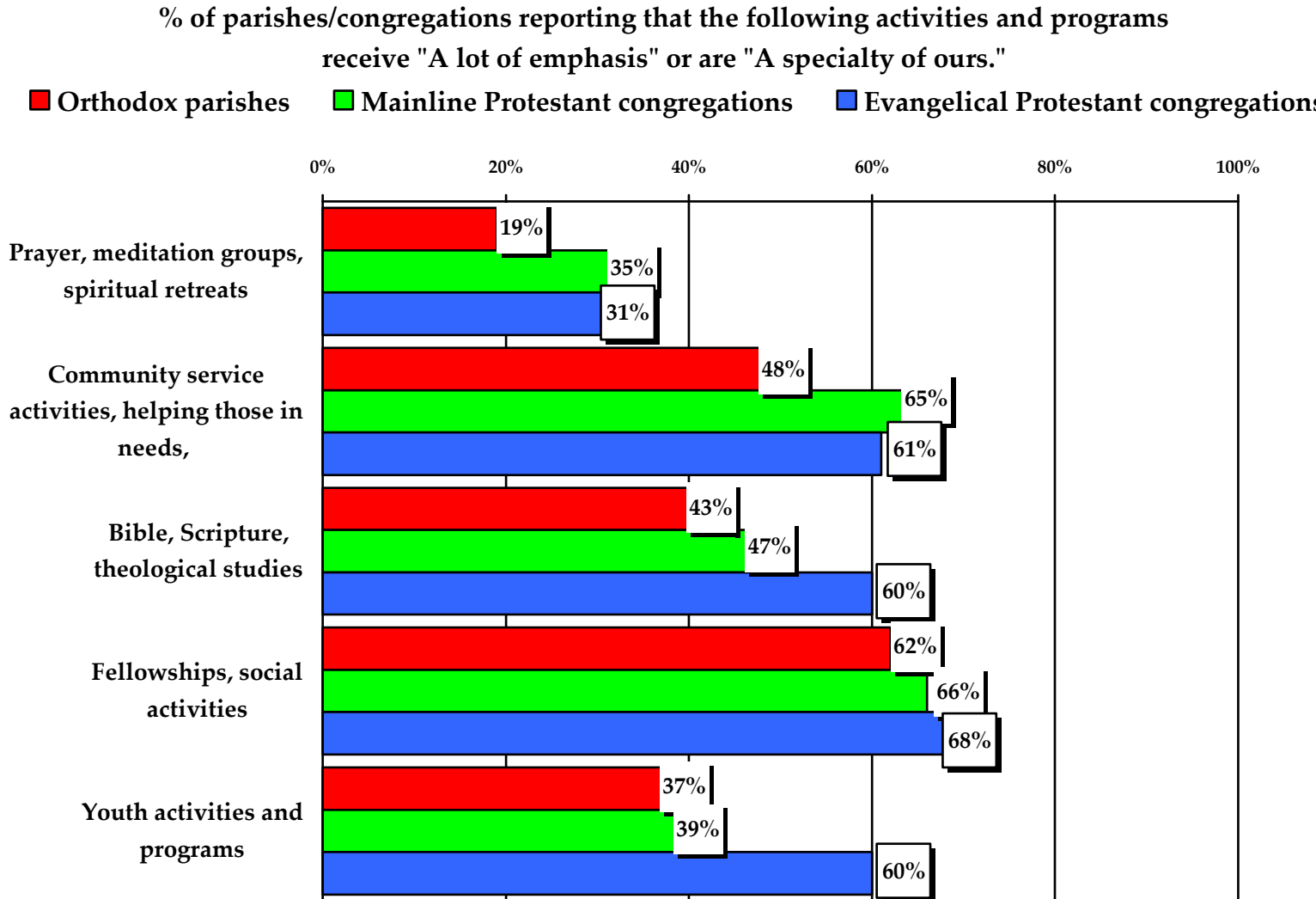
Fig. 79 "Overall, to what extent are your members involved in parish's/congregation's various programs, committees and projects outside of worship?"



Fact 5. About what parishes/congregations do beyond worship services.

When it comes to the life of a congregation outside of worship services, Orthodox parishes engage less than Protestant congregations in various activities and programs. In particular, compared to Protestant congregations, Orthodox parishes are much less likely to develop "prayer groups and spiritual retreats" and "community service activities." See Fig. 80.

Fig. 80 "Does your parish/congregation have any of the following programs or activities? If "yes," how much emphasis is given to each activity?"

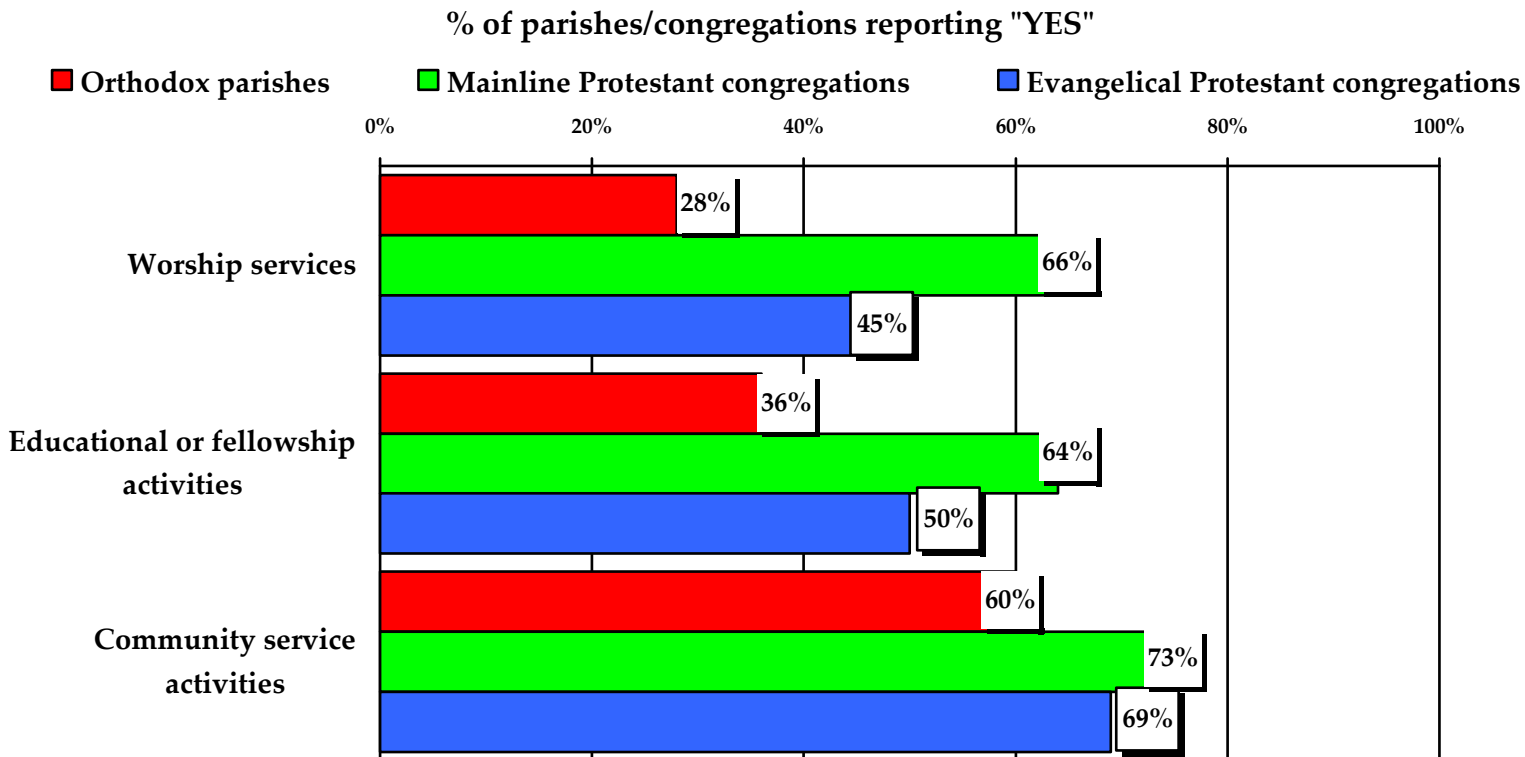


Fact 6. About ecumenical and interfaith involvement with non-Orthodox religious congregations.

Compared to Protestant congregations, Orthodox parishes are much less involved in various ecumenical and interfaith activities. This is true not only for joint worship services, but also for the joint "educational or fellowship activities" and "community service activities." See Fig. 81.

Only 28% of the Orthodox parishes reported that during past 12 months they have been involved in ecumenical worship services in comparison with 66% Mainline and 45% Evangelical Protestant congregations. Similarly, only 36% of Orthodox parishes were involved in some ecumenical "educational and fellowship activities" versus 64% among Mainline and 50% among Evangelical Protestant congregations.

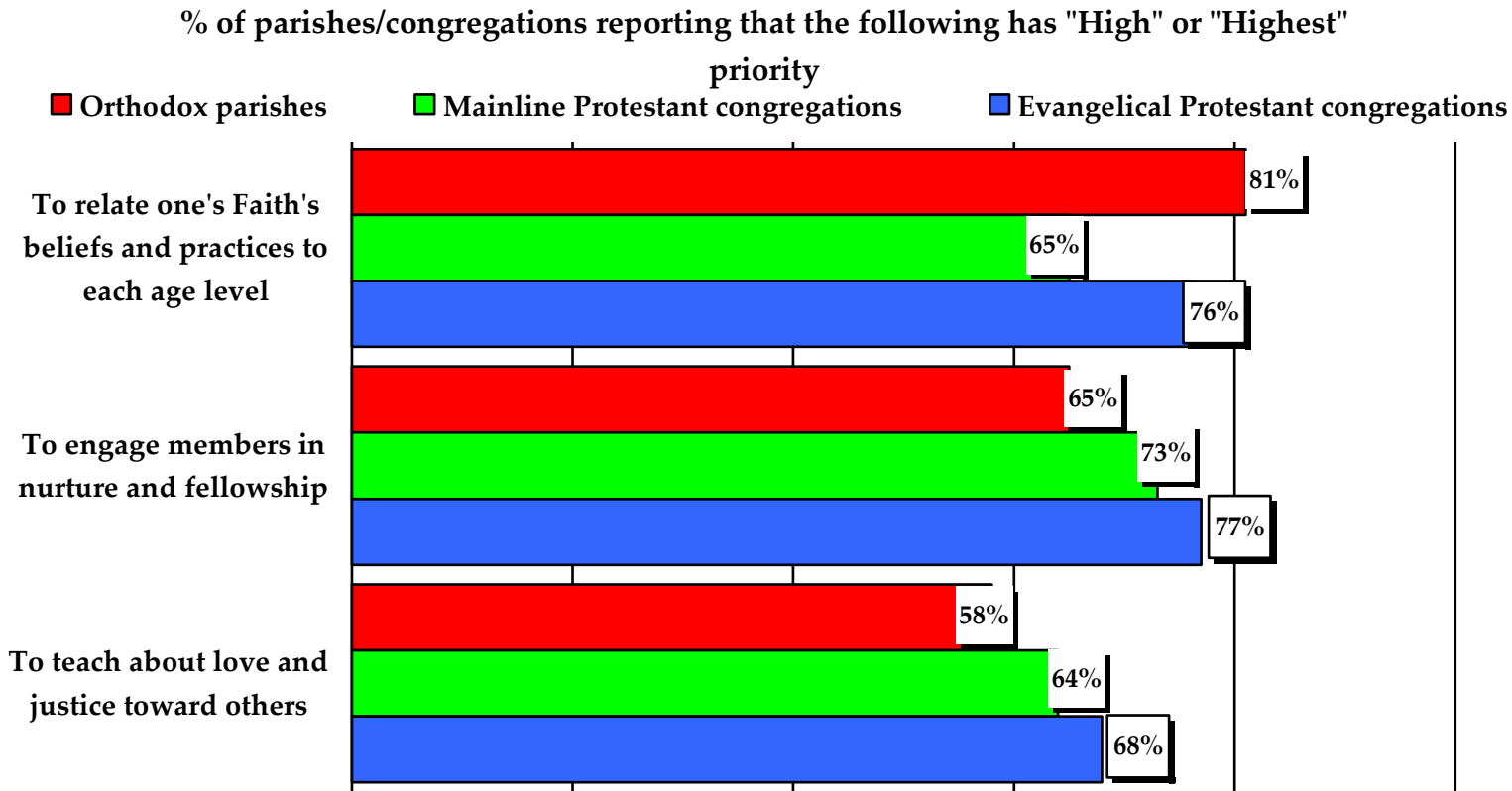
Fig. 81 "During the past 12 months, has your parish been involved in any of the following ecumenical or interfaith activities?"



Fact 7. About religious education.

American Orthodox parishes and Protestant congregations have somewhat different priorities in their religious education programs. Compared to Protestant congregations, Orthodox parishes pay more attention to "relating the Orthodox faith's beliefs and practices to each age level." Differently, compared to Orthodox parishes, Mainline and Evangelical Protestant congregations place greater emphasis on "teaching their members about love and justice toward others" and on "engaging church members in nurture and fellowship." See Fig. 82.

Fig. 82 "How high or low a priority is each of the following in your Religious Education programs?"



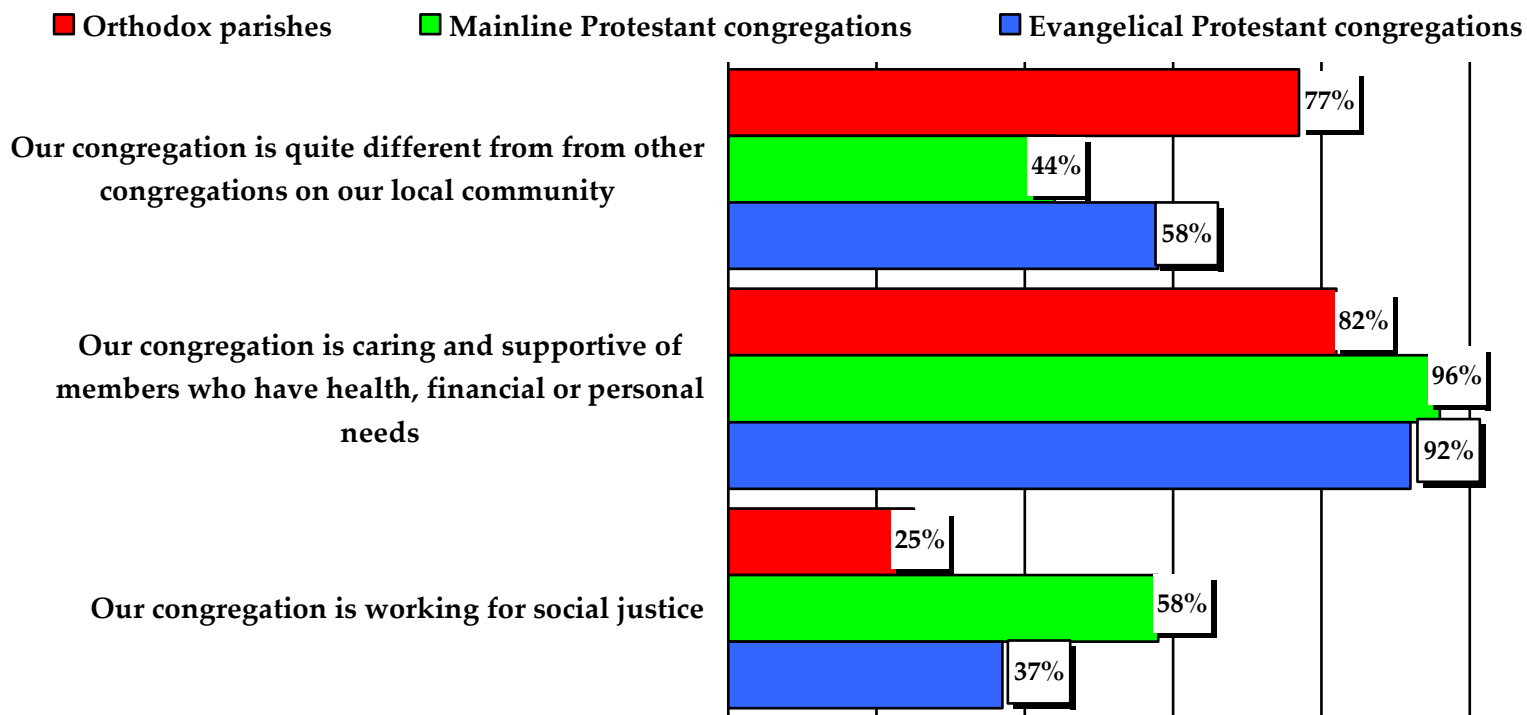
Fact 8. About some differences in "what matters" in the life of a local parish/congregation

Orthodox parishes have a much stronger sense of their distinct religious identity than Protestant congregations. More than three-quarters (77%) of American Orthodox parishes agreed with the statement "Our congregation is quite different from other congregations in our community" compared to only 44% of Mainline and 58% of Evangelical Protestant congregations.

At the same time, compared to Protestant congregations, Orthodox parishes appear to be less caring about their own members and less concerned with social justice advocacy. Indeed, Fig. 83 shows that significantly fewer Orthodox parishes than Protestant congregations agreed with the statements "Our congregations is caring of members who have health, financial and personal needs" and with the statement ""Our congregation is working for social justice."

Fig. 83 "Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your parish/congregation?"

% of parishes/congregations that "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement

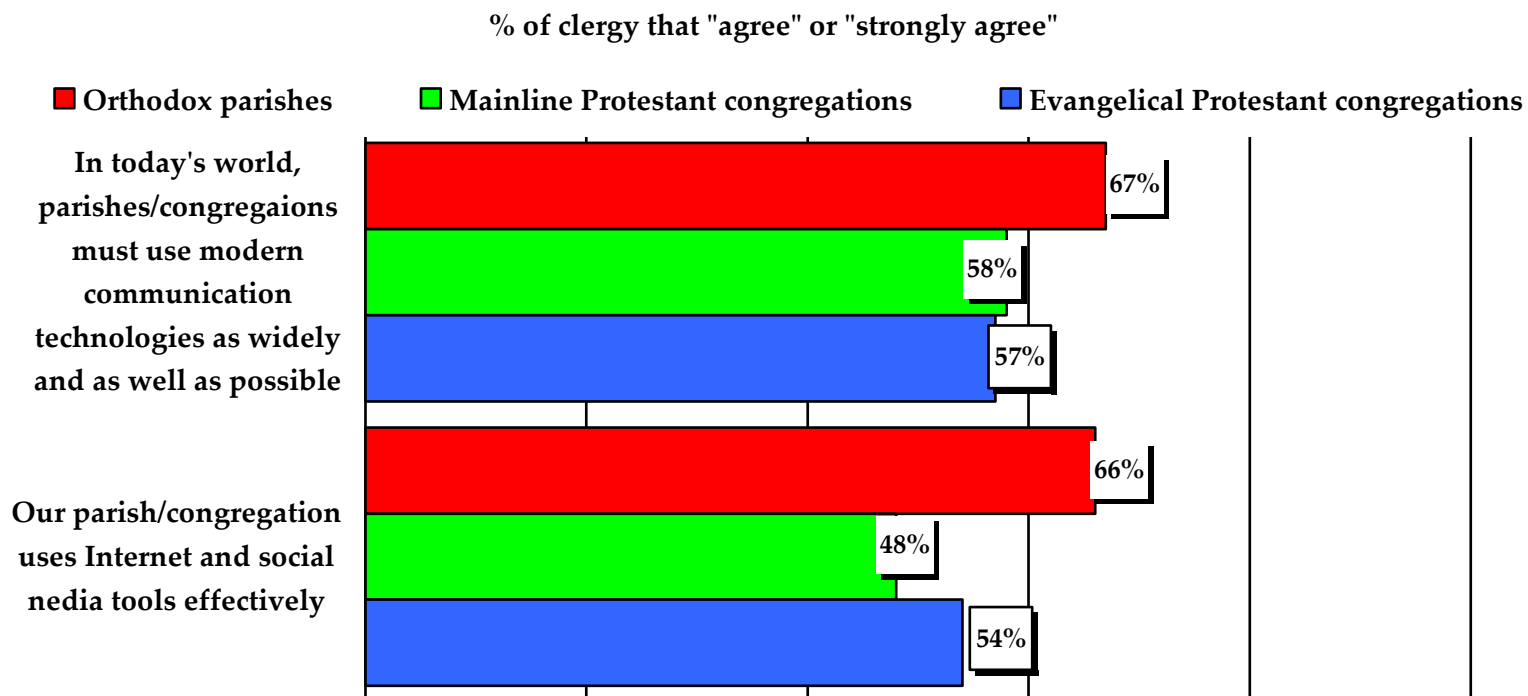


Fact 9. About attitudes of the clergy towards the use of Internet technologies in their parishes and congregations

Survey data indicate that American Orthodox priests are greater supporters of the use of the Internet technologies in church life than their fellow Protestant clergy. When asked, "Which of the following best expresses your opinion about the use of Internet technologies (email, social media, texting, etc.) in parish life?", 67% of Orthodox clergy have chosen the answer: "In today's world, parishes must use modern communication technologies as widely and as well as possible." Only 58% of the Mainline Protestant pastors and 57% of the Evangelical Protestant ministers have chosen the same answer.

Accordingly, many more Orthodox priests (66%) than the Mainline Protestant pastors (48%) or Evangelical Protestant ministers (57%) think that "our congregations uses Internet and social media effectively." See Fig. 84.

Fig. 84 Opinions of Clergy about Use of Internet Technologies in Their Parishes and Congregations

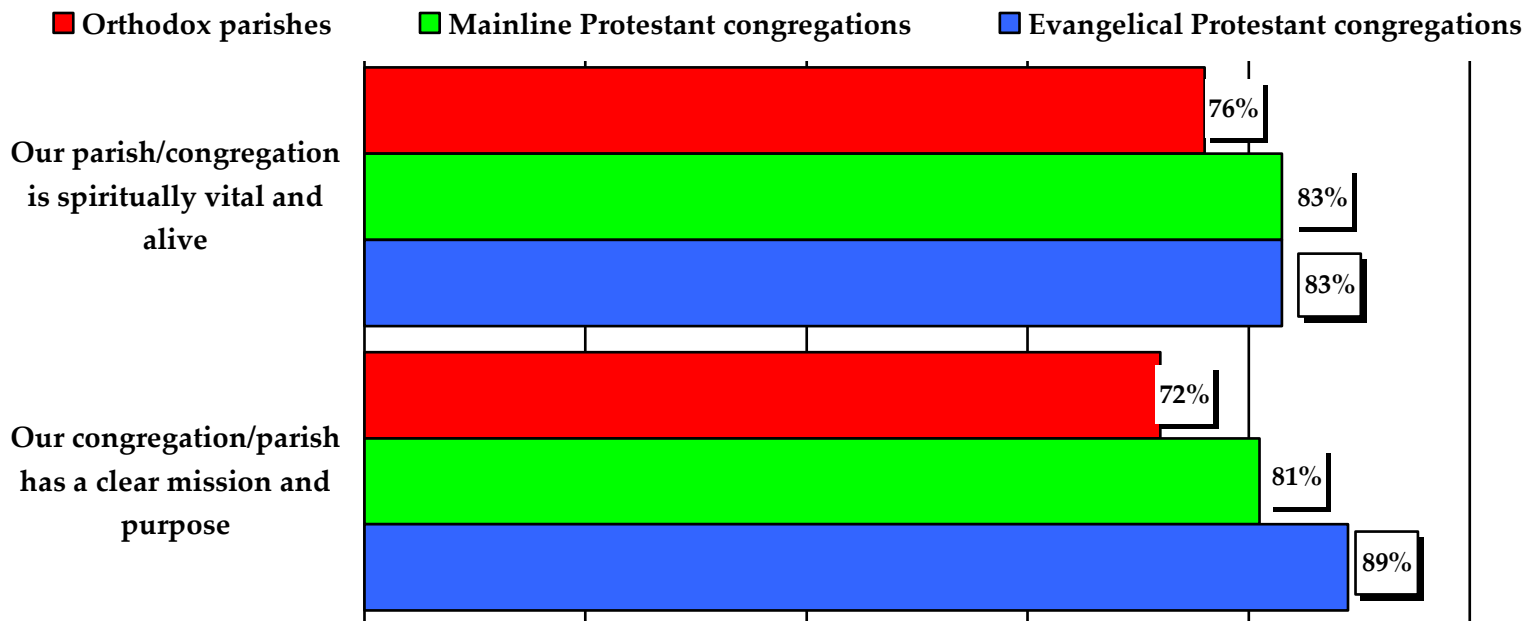


Fact 10. About spiritual vitality of the parishes/congregations and their sense of mission and purpose

We saw in Fact 8 that Orthodox parishes have a strong sense of identity and distinctiveness from other religious congregations. At the same time, a smaller percentage of Orthodox parishes than Protestant congregations evaluate themselves as being "spiritually vital and alive." Similarly, fewer Orthodox parishes than Protestant congregations have a clear sense of the parish's purpose and mission. See Fig. 85.

Fig. 85 Spiritual Vitality of the Congregations and Their Sense of Mission and Purpose

% of parishes/congregations that "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements



XI. A Few Concluding Remarks and Questions for the Future.

In offering this report to the wide and diverse audience (lay church members, parish clergy, diocesan and national church leadership) our hope is three-fold. First, for the laity and, especially, those church members who serve in various parish leadership positions, this report shows what type of statistically reliable information and data on American Orthodox Churches is available to them. The truth is that the lives of the most lay church members are limited to their home parish communities. This report provides the opportunity for all the "people in the pews" to look at American Orthodox Church life beyond the walls of their home parishes.

Second, for parish clergy, this report offers the possibility to look at and assess various characteristics and areas in the lives of their parishes by making comparisons between the average national situation (as presented in this report) and the particular circumstances of their own parishes. In other words, looking at the data presented in this report, a local parish priest can place his parish community in a wider context and answer a crucial question: "How is my parish faring in this or that area of church life compared to the typical parishes of my respective jurisdiction?" Sure, most of parish clergy can, probably, answer this question simply based on their personal ministerial experiences. However, such self-assessment would be based on anecdotal information and a subjective perception that each parish priest has. This report provides verified figures and objective data that the clergy can use as the benchmarks when looking at and comparing national standards and national trends with their local situation.

Third, for diocesan and, especially, national church leadership this report serves as a strategic overview of the state of their local parishes. Clearly, diocesan and national church headquarters collect plenty of data from their parishes and some of these data are, probably, more comprehensive and accurate than the information obtained in this survey. However, unlike the data collected by the dioceses and national jurisdictions, this report:

- ❖ Looks at the different aspects of church life in their integrity and complexity and examines how different areas of parish life are related to each other;
- ❖ Examines several areas of church life for which the dioceses and jurisdictions are unlikely to have their own data (e.g. young adults and young adult ministries, usage of Internet technologies and social media, attitudes of clergy towards Church unity in America, etc.);
- ❖ Offers fully comparable data and allows for accurate comparisons between the parishes of five jurisdictions: ACROD, AOCA, GOA, OCA, and Serbian Orthodox Church.

Where do we go from here: what type of next steps can be made in order to further enhance and deepen our understanding of Orthodox parish life in 21st century America? Answering this question, at least two immediate goals can be set. First, in many ways, the *underlying motive of all chapters of this study report was the issue of the parish's vitality and viability*. How efficient are the parishes in developing various programs and ministries? How good are they at addressing the needs of their young adult church members? How proficient are the parishes in the usage of Internet technologies? How good are the parishes in dealing with necessary changes and adjustments and how clear is their vision for the future? All these and many other questions discussed in the report essentially boil down to the subject of the vitality and viability of a local parish community. Accordingly, the next immediate step will be the work on developing a reliable and measurable instrument (or set of criteria) that would assess a parish's overall vitality and health in its complexity and integrity.

Second, the data analyzed in this study report came from key-informants - parish clergy who completed questionnaires and provided information on behalf of their parish communities. While this is a standard and reasonably reliable approach in studying religious congregations, the opinions of lay members about their parish communities may not always be in tune with opinions of their priests. It would be important and desirable to launch a study of various aspects of Orthodox parish life in America through the eyes of the "people in the pews" with a particular goal in mind: to look at similarities and, to the contrary, discrepancies in the approaches of the shepherds and their flock.