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# The Orthodox Church Today

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## **A National Study of Parishioners and the Realities of Orthodox Parish Life in the USA**

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## I. Introduction: What Is this Study About?

Very little has been done so far to study systematically *contemporary* patterns and trends in American Orthodox Christianity. The study “Orthodox Church Today” was designed to address this subject and provide 1,5 million strong American Orthodox community with reliable and unbiased information on the various aspects of Orthodox Church life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century America. In brief, it is first *nationally representative and comparative* study of the laity – non-ordained ordinary church members - in two largest American Orthodox jurisdictions (denominations): the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA) and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Combined, the GOA and OCA account for more than half of all American Orthodox Christians and parishes. Hence, to a certain extent the outcomes of the “Orthodox Church Today” study reflect the “profile” of the American Orthodox community at large.

The “Orthodox Church Today” study was made possible through a grant from the Louisville Institute (Louisville, KY) and we are very grateful for this generous financial support.

The following study report addresses three general questions:

- Who are the members of the two largest American Orthodox Churches (denominations)?
- What do the church members think about the everyday patterns of life in their local parishes (congregations)?
- What are their general religious attitudes and approaches to the “big” Church related issues such as future of Orthodox Christianity in America, the role of laity in the Church, ordination of women, relation to the outside non-Orthodox community, etc?

With regard to these broad questions, special attention has been paid to the differences among various generations of American Orthodox faithful, between the “cradle” Orthodox and “convert” to Orthodoxy, and between those who identified their theological stance and general approach to the Church life as either “liberal,” “moderate,” “traditional,” or “conservative.”

The “Orthodox Church Today” study also placed particular emphasis on two subjects. The first subject is the relationship between American Orthodox clergy and laity. To a large degree, the “Orthodox Church Today” study was built upon results from and as a continuation of the earlier national study of American Orthodox parish priests - “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America” (Krindatch 2006). In this regard, the “Orthodox Church Today” study attempted to examine two questions:

- To what extent do the social and religious attitudes of American Orthodox laity reflect those of their clergy?
- What does it take to be a “good Orthodox parish priest” at the beginning of a third millennium from the perspective of the ordinary “people in the pews?”

The answers to these questions are crucial for the Church’s future. In his book *God’s Potters*, a renowned American scholar of religion Jackson Carroll views the clergy as producers of a congregational culture who “give shape to a congregation’s particular way of being a congregation – that is, to the beliefs and practices characteristic of a particular community’s life and ministry.” At the same time, he admits that the pastor’s work of creation of a congregational culture is undertaken *in interaction* with congregational participants (Carroll 2006: 25). Further, Carroll indicates also that the laity’s perspectives of church life are strongly affected by the changing activities and social networks in which lay people are involved outside the Church. On the contrary, clergy tend to network with other clergy, thus, reinforcing their allegiance to established beliefs and church practices (Carroll 2006: 53).

Hence, a situation is possible when the “shepherds” and their “flock” would go in different directions and would have differing visions (both locally and nationally) for the present arrangement and future direction of their commonly shared spiritual home. The questions which need to be answered are: “What is the role of pastors vis-a-vis the ‘people in the pews’ in the creation of congregational culture in Orthodox parishes in 21<sup>st</sup> century America?” and “Is the Orthodox ‘flock’ happy with and willing to follow their ‘shepherds’?”

The second subject of “Orthodox Church Today” deals with the issue of the “conservative-liberal” divides in Church life. Theologically, Orthodox Christianity in the US is seen by many as essentially homogeneous. This is, indeed, true in terms of *orthodoxy* as a doctrine or with regard to “macro-theology” that is historical, patristic, biblical, and liturgical scholarly inquiries on “big questions.” At the same time, there exists significant diversity in “micro-theology” across American Orthodox jurisdictions (denominations) and among their local parishes (congregations).

Based on their personal understandings of Orthodox doctrine and traditions and interpreting them differently in the context of mainstream American culture, clergy and laity organize the lives of their parishes, and interact with the outside (non-Orthodox) community in very different ways.

It was not until recently that the Orthodox theologians have begun to notice the growing conservative-liberal gap (Whitesides 1997) and increasing fragmentation (Papanikolau 2008) within American Orthodox Christian community. At this point, no systematic research has been done to examine how Orthodox teachings and established traditions are personally and communally interpreted and how these “local interpretations” shape the social and religious behavior of American Orthodox clergy and laity and the culture of American Orthodox congregations.

To – at least partially – address this subject this study uses the concept of the *four types orthopraxy* proposed by Anton Vrame (Vrame 2008). These four types of orthopraxy are based on the willingness of Orthodox individuals and communities to accept changes and to adapt to life in a culturally and religiously pluralistic society. Vrame identifies four types of orthopraxy as:

- *Conservative (Fundamentalist) Orthopraxy*. It rejects changes and emphasizes the exactness of once and forever developed practices in spite of changing local contexts. It also separates itself deliberately from the mainstream American culture.
- *Traditional Orthopraxy*. It strives to observe Orthodox tradition and cherishes church heritage immensely, but accepts evolutionary changes, permitting praxis to evolve slowly over time.
- *Moderate (Reform) Orthopraxy*. It supports intentional changes and is willing to “fit in” and be “accepted” by the wider American society and by mainstream American religious life.
- *Liberal (Reconstructionist) Orthopraxy*. It seeks to introduce “innovative” practices, to generally “rethink” orthopraxy and to develop a new expression for America.

In this study we attempted to examine how personal identification with either “conservative-traditional” or “liberal-moderate” orthopraxy affects the approach of Orthodox laity to the various aspects of Church life such as authority and structure in the Church, personal piety, relationships inside local parish community, ecumenism and religious pluralism, etc.

## II. How this Study Was Conducted?

The “Orthodox Church Today” study was conducted by the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute during September 2007 – May 2008. The information presented in this study report was gathered in two ways. First, we administered a mail survey of a nationally representative sample of lay members of the two largest American Orthodox Churches (denominations): the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America (GOA) and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Nearly one thousand respondents from 103 Orthodox parishes situated in various parts of the country completed an eight-page questionnaire. The questions in the survey instrument were divided into five major categories dealing with:

- personal backgrounds of the respondents;
- patterns of church life in the local parishes of the respondents;
- respondents’ vision for the Orthodox Church in the US in general;
- respondents’ vision of the Orthodox priesthood in general and with regard to their particular parish clergy;
- respondents’ vision of the various Church related subjects and issues.

A significant number of questions in the survey were identical with questionnaire used in the 2006 study of American Orthodox parish clergy (Krindatch 2006). This allowed for numerous comparisons of clergy and lay attitudes and opinions.

The GOA and OCA members, and male and female parishioners were almost equally present among survey participants. See Tab. 1A and 1B.

**Tab. 1A Composition of survey participants**

- **GOA - respondents from the parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America**
- **OCA - respondents from the parishes of the Orthodox Church in America**

	GOA	OCA	Total
Number of respondents	442	494	936
% in whole sample	47%	53%	100%

**Tab. 1B Gender of survey participants: What is your gender? (%)**

	Male	Female
GOA, %	52	48
OCA, %	50	50
Total, %	51	49

After analysis of the results of the survey, in-depth personal interviews and focus-groups were conducted with clergy and parishioners in fifteen GOA and OCA parishes located in various types of environments (small towns, suburban areas, large urban centers) and in three different parts of the country: New England (Massachusetts and Connecticut), Midwest (Illinois, Michigan, Indiana) and South (Florida and Louisiana).

The focus group participants were requested to complete *prior to the focus group* a short questionnaire with five open-ended sentences:

- “What I REALLY LIKE and value most about our parish is...”
- “I think MORE PARISHIONERS would be really active in parish life if ...”
- “If I could change JUST ONE THING about this parish, it would be...”
- “If I moved to another area and had to choose a new parish to attend, the most important thing for me about the NEW PARISH, would be ...”
- “If I moved to another area and had to choose a new parish to attend, the most important thing for me about the PRIEST in this new parish, would be ...”

The 1.5 – 2 hours long focus groups further followed on these questions, but also touched on several additional subjects: challenges of being Orthodox Christian in America, challenges of being the parish priest in this particular church community, desirable changes in the Orthodox Church and desirable changes about church hierarchs – the Orthodox bishops.

### **III. Who Are Parishioners in GOA and OCA Parishes: the Profile of the Regular Church Attendees.**

#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Average age of the active Orthodox parishioners is 52 years. There is no difference in this regard between GOA and OCA. One third of parishioners are under 45 years and one quarter are senior citizens over 65;
- GOA and OCA laity are equally well educated: more than two thirds of parishioners are college graduates and almost one third of them have advanced (Master’s or Doctoral) degrees;
- Nine out of ten members in both GOA and OCA parishes are American-born;
- GOA laity maintain much stronger ties to an ethnic identity and heritage than the OCA members. 86% of GOA respondents are American-born, but only 58% of them said that English is their first language. This gap is much smaller among OCA members: 92% of them were born in North America and 85% said that English is their “mother” tongue;



- Today, dominant majority (51%) of OCA parishioners are converts to Orthodoxy in comparison with only 29% of GOA members raised in the other (non-Orthodox) religious traditions;
- In the OCA, there are more converts to Orthodoxy among clergy than among lay members, while GOA presents the opposite situation;
- GOA and OCA are remarkably similar by the proportion of lay members who hold either more conservative or more liberal theological outlooks and who demonstrate either more conservative or more liberal approaches to patterns of Church life;
- A “reform oriented” camp among American Orthodox laity is relatively small in comparison with much larger group of those who are keen to “keep the things the way they are;”
- The fact that some church members identify themselves as theologically “liberal” or “moderate” while the others say that they are “traditional” or “conservative” is not related to their education or age;
- Cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy are equally likely to be present in either “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal” Church camps: the survey does not support the commonly shared stereotype that American converts to Orthodoxy tend to be more conservative and “Orthodox” than cradle Orthodox Christians;
- Conservative-liberal “profile” of American Orthodox laity resembles that of the parish clergy: the “shepherds” and their “flock” have similar proportion of persons who think of themselves as theologically either “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal.”

The “Orthodox Church Today” survey provided comprehensive information on personal backgrounds of the laity in two largest American Orthodox Churches - the “Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America” (GOA) and the “Orthodox Church in America” (OCA). More precisely, the survey tells us who are *the active and regularly involved members* in the GOA and OCA parishes. Indeed, in each participating parish, the survey participants were chosen by the parish clergy who, in turn, were given instructions on the selection of respondents. Therefore, the chances are great that most of our respondents were persons participating in church life regularly and actively, thus, being more likely available to the clergy to complete the questionnaires.

Indeed, Tab. 2 shows that 90% of respondents said that they go to the church either once a week (56%) or even several times a week (34%).

**Tab. 2 Regularity of attendance:** Approximately, how frequently do you typically go to the church? (%)

	Several times a week	About once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month or less
GOA, %	27	57	13	3
OCA, %	41	55	3	1
Total, %	34	56	8	2

Similarly, Tab. 3 indicates that significant proportion of our respondents hold various leadership positions in their churches: 25% are parish council members, 22% are church choir members or directors, 15% are Sunday school teachers and coordinators.

**Tab. 3 Position in a parish:** What is your position in this parish? (%)

	Parish council member	Sunday school teacher/director	Church choir member/director	Regular member, not in a leadership position currently
GOA, %	19	16	13	61
OCA, %	30	14	29	49
Total, %	25	15	22	55

**Note:** the respondents can make multiple choices in this question (e.g. they could be simultaneously parish Council members, choir members and Sunday school teachers). Therefore the sum total on each row exceeds 100%.

Hence, we recognize the fact that the results of this study are skewed towards the most active and involved church members. At the same time, these are actually persons who have most significant impact on the patterns of everyday life in their parishes and whose opinions and attitudes are especially important to examine.

Somewhat predictably, most of the active church members grew up in families with a strong commitment to the Church. The questionnaire asked “When you were a child, was the Church a part of regular life in your family?” In both GOA and OCA parishes, 7 out of 10 respondents answered “Yes, my parents were active in church and we attended church regularly,” and only one in ten reported that “My parents were not interested in church, and it was not part of my family life when I was a child.” See Tab. 4.

**Tab. 4 Religious upbringing:** When you were a child, was the Church a part of regular life in your family? (%)

	GOA, %	OCA, %	Total, %
Yes, my parents were active in church and we attended church regularly	70	67	68
We attended church occasionally, when our family life and other circumstances allowed	23	22	23
My parents were not interested in church, and it was not part of my family life when I was a child	7	11	9

Dominant majority of our respondents are well familiar and stayed with their churches for a significant duration of time. Indeed, more than half of them (53%) attended in their current parishes for more than ten years. Only one in ten (11%) of the survey participants is relatively new to his/her parish and attended for two years or less. One should note, however, that GOA and OCA parishioners differ somewhat in duration of their membership in the parishes.

On the average, the members of GOA churches are affiliated with their parishes longer than the respondents from OCA. A “typical” active parishioner from GOA holds membership in his/her current parish for 22 years in comparison with only 18 years in the case of “average” OCA member. See Tab. 5.

**Tab. 5 Duration of attendance in a parish:** Approximately, how many years have you attended this parish?

	2 years or less	3-10	11-20	More than 20 years	<b>Average duration of membership in a parish, years</b>
GOA, %	9	31	20	40	<b>22</b>
OCA, %	13	40	15	33	<b>18</b>
Total, %	11	36	17	36	<b>20</b>

The average age of the active members in two largest American Orthodox Churches involved in our study is 52 years and there is little difference in this regard between GOA and OCA. One third of their parishioners are younger persons under 45 years, while about one quarter are senior citizens in the age 65+. See Tab. 6.

**Tab. 6 Age:** What is your age? (%)

	Younger than 45	45-64	65 and older	<b>Average age, years</b>
GOA, %	31	43	26	<b>53</b>
OCA, %	34	45	21	<b>51</b>
Total, %	33	44	23	<b>52</b>

The survey tells us that GOA and OCA laity are equally well educated. In both churches more than two thirds of respondents are college graduates and almost one third of them have advanced (Master’s or Doctoral) degrees. See. Tab. 7.

**Tab. 7 Education:** What is the highest level of your education? (%)

	High school or less	Some college or technical school	College graduate: Bachelor’s Degree	Master’s degree	Doctoral degree
GOA, %	8	22	37	24	9
OCA, %	10	23	36	24	7
Total, %	9	22	37	24	8

It should be noted, however, that there is significant difference in the level of education between various generations of American Orthodox laity. Three quarters of the younger (under 45) and middle-aged (45-64 years old) parishioners are college graduates, but only half of senior (65+) parish members have college degrees. We attribute this difference to the general increase in the education level in the US during recent decades.

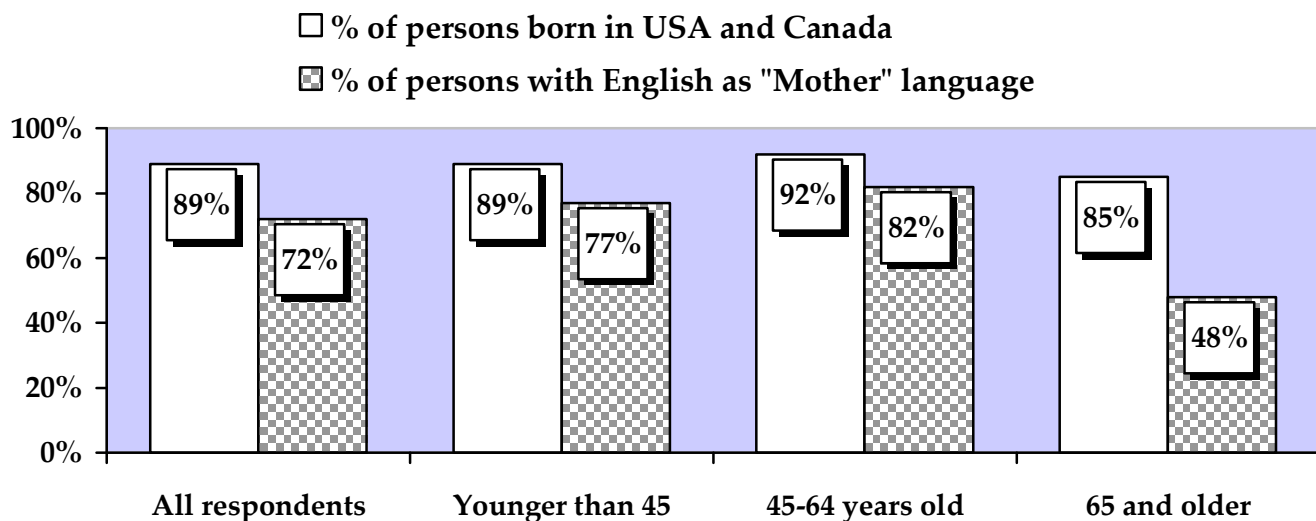
There is little secret that American Orthodox parishes are still perceived by many – especially outside of the Orthodox community – as “immigrant churches.” The reality is that today approximately 9 out of 10 members in both GOA and OCA parishes are American-born. See Tab. 8.

**Tab. 8 Place of birth:** Where you were born? (%)

	North America: USA + Canada	Eastern Europe (incl. former USSR)	Western Europe	Greece and Middle East	Other
GOA, %	86	2	1	10	1
OCA, %	92	4	3	1	0
Total, %	89	3	2	5	1

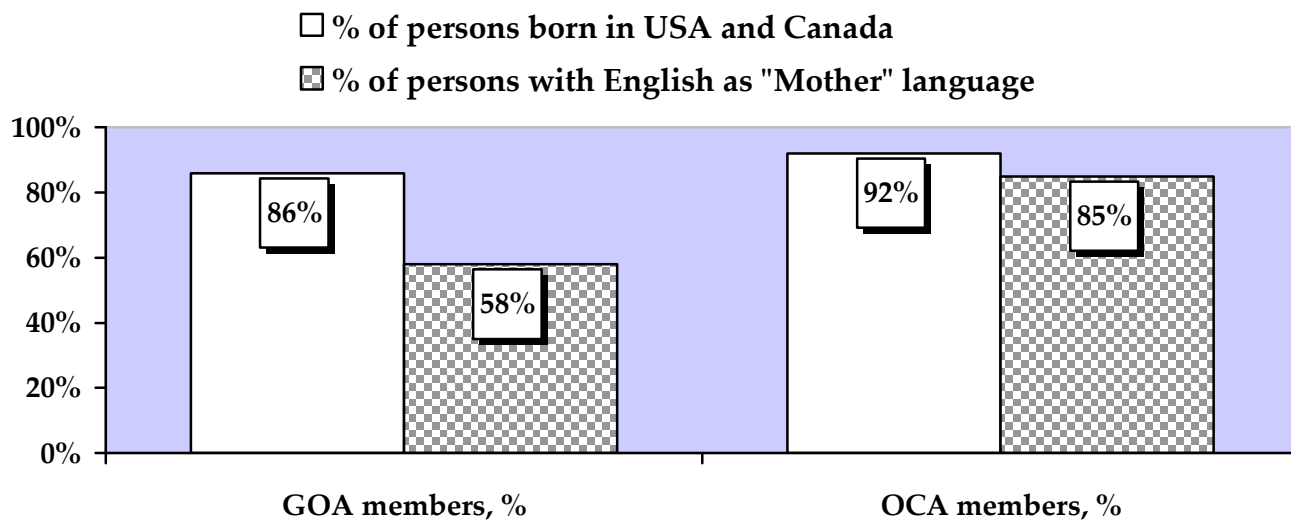
At the same time, one remarkable pattern needs to be mentioned. The share of the American-born persons is nearly the same among the younger (under 45), middle-aged (45-64 years old) and senior (65+) parishioners: 89%, 92% and 85% respectively. Yet, despite the fact that they are almost equally likely being born in US, these three generations of American Orthodox laity differ significantly in the *strength of their ethnic heritage* as measured by proportion of persons who consider other-than-English language to be their first, “Mother,” tongue. Fig. 1 shows that in all three age groups the proportion of persons saying that English was their first language is smaller than the share of the respondents born in North America. Yet this gap is especially wide in the case of the most senior parishioners. Indeed, 85% of persons aged 65+ were born in America, but only 48% of them feel that English is their first “Mother” language.

**Fig.1 Place of Birth and Mother Language: Differences between Various Age Groups.**



Similarly, the survey tells us that the GOA laity maintain much stronger ties to an ethnic identity and heritage than the OCA members. 86% of respondents from GOA parishes are American-born, but only 58% of them said that English is their first language. This gap is much smaller among survey participants from OCA churches: 92% of them were born in North America and 85% said that English is their “mother” tongue. See Fig. 2. Given that 51% of OCA members are converts to Orthodoxy (see Fig. 3), that is, with an “American” cultural background and ancestry, this difference between the two communities is understandable. Also, the OCA, with its Russian roots, during the height of the Cold War in the 1940s and 1950s, may have felt more pressure to downplay its Slavic identity in America.

**Fig.2 Place of Birth and Mother Language: GOA and OCA members.**

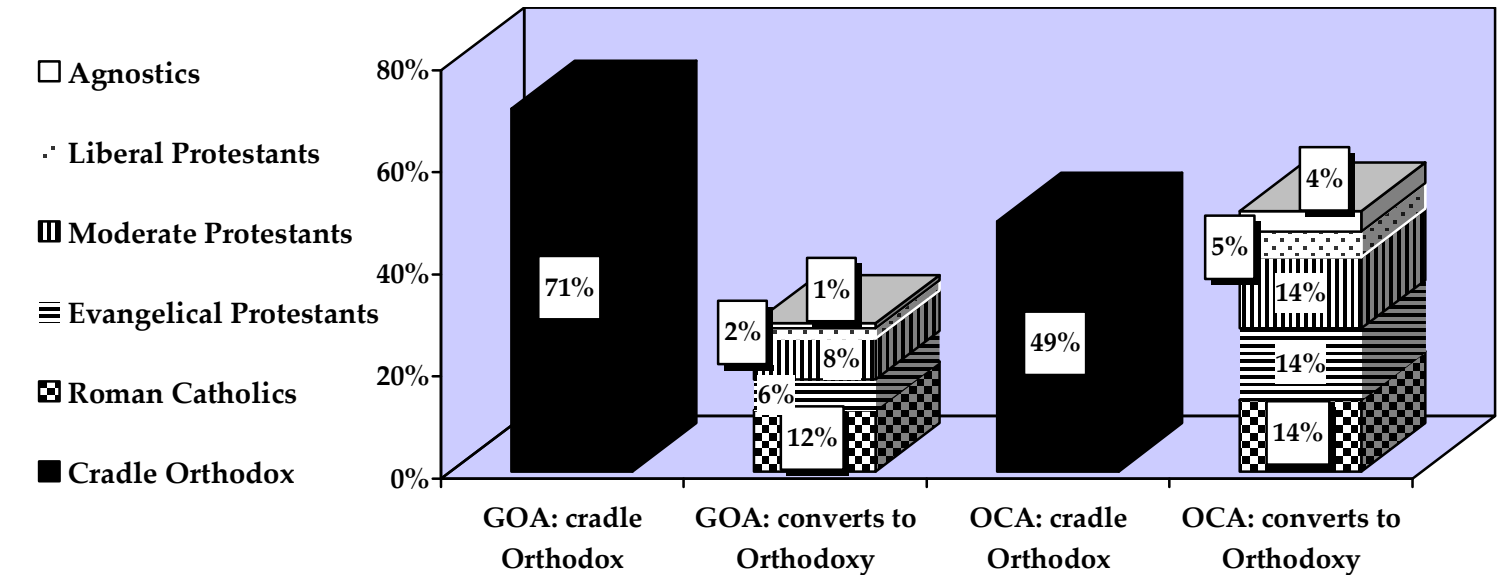


A remarkable distinction between OCA and GOA laity is much stronger presence of the converts to Orthodoxy – the persons raised in the other (non-Orthodox) religious traditions - among OCA members. While this is generally well known fact, the “Orthodox Church Today” survey provided us with accurate and nationally representative statistic data on original religious background of the GOA and OCA parishioners.

Fig. 3. shows that today dominant majority (51%) of OCA parishioners are converts to Orthodoxy in comparison with only 29% of GOA members raised in the other (non-Orthodox) religious traditions.

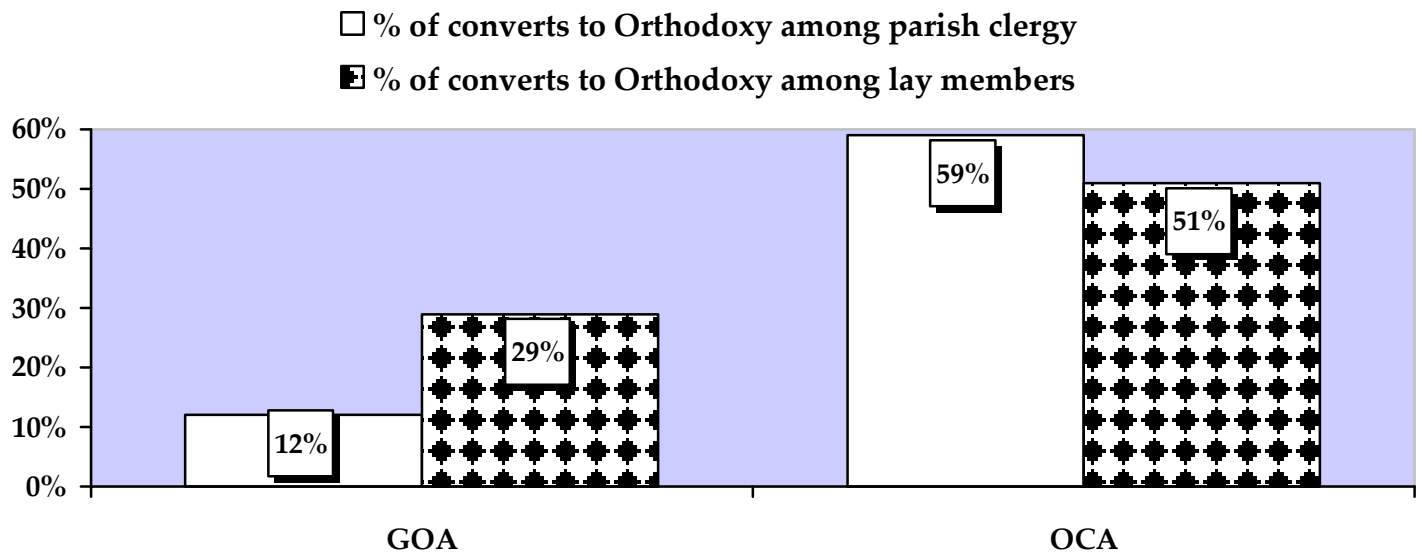
**Fig. 3 Original Church affiliation of the GOA and OCA parishioners**

**“What was your church affiliation before you became an Orthodox Christian?”**



One more fact indicates that the Orthodox converts have significantly stronger impact on the “denominational culture” of the OCA than the GOA. There is little doubt that in the Orthodox Christianity the clergy have much more influence on the Church polity than the lay members do. The actual patterns of church life – especially on the national and regional (diocesan) levels – are largely shaped by the clergy, while lay members are assigned relatively passive roles. Fig. 4 shows that in terms of the share of converts among clergy the gap between OCA and GOA is even larger than among their laity. Indeed, nearly 6 out of 10 OCA priests were brought up in the other (non-Orthodox) religious in comparison with only 12% among GOA clergy. In other words, in the OCA, the presence of converts to Orthodoxy among those in leadership roles is stronger than among church’s “rank and file” members, while the GOA presents opposite situation.

**Fig.4 Converts to Orthodoxy among American Orthodox Laity and Parish Clergy:  
Differences between GOA and OCA.**



A strong adherence to established traditions along with an emphasis on continuity, stability and uniformity in Church life can be seen as foundational for Orthodox Christianity. At the same time, we know that in today's America the actual approach to various aspects of Church life as well as to different social issues vary greatly from parish to parish. As noted earlier, based on their personal understandings and interpretation of Church doctrine and traditions, Orthodox clergy and laity organize the social and religious lives of their parishes, and interact with the outside non-Orthodox community in very different ways. One of the ways to examine this diversity in the patterns of the local church life is to look at them through the prism of the conservative-liberal theological divides within American Orthodox community. We used the hypothesis proposed by Anton C. Vrame (Vrame 2008) suggesting four types of "orthopraxy" - the way Orthodox individuals and communities live out their religious values and behave socially being influenced by their religious attitudes. In general, these four types of religiously motivated behavior are based on the degree of willingness to accept or, to the contrary, reject changes and innovations.

The survey asked question "When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand?" The respondents were given four choices to identify themselves as:

- I am **Conservative**. Orthodox Church should avoid changes in its life and theology.
- I am **Traditional**. Any changes in the Church should be evolutionary.
- I am **Moderate**. I accept new developments and changes in Church depending on local circumstances.
- I am **Liberal**. I am willing to initiate and promote new developments in Church.

Several notable findings deserve attention. First, we saw that OCA and GOA laity differ significantly in the strength of their ethnic heritage and in their original religious upbringing (e.g. proportion of cradle Orthodox versus converts to Orthodoxy), but they are remarkably similar by the presence of persons who hold either more conservative or more liberal theological outlooks and who demonstrate either more conservative or more liberal approaches to the patterns of Church life. See Fig. 5

**Fig. 5. When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand? (%)**

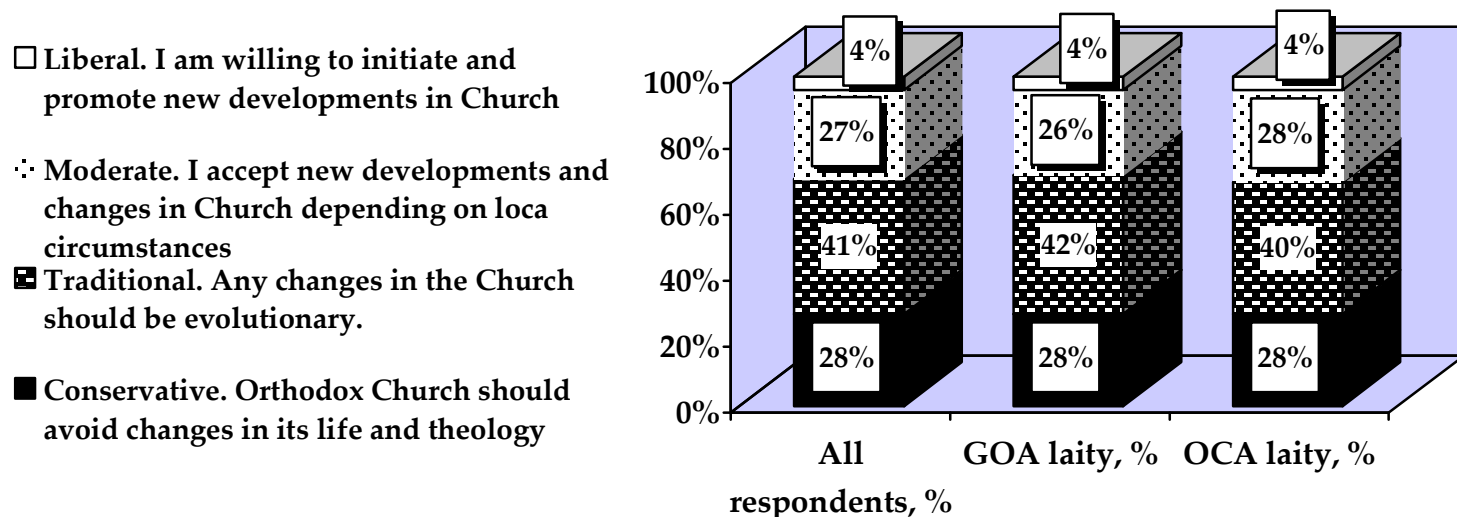


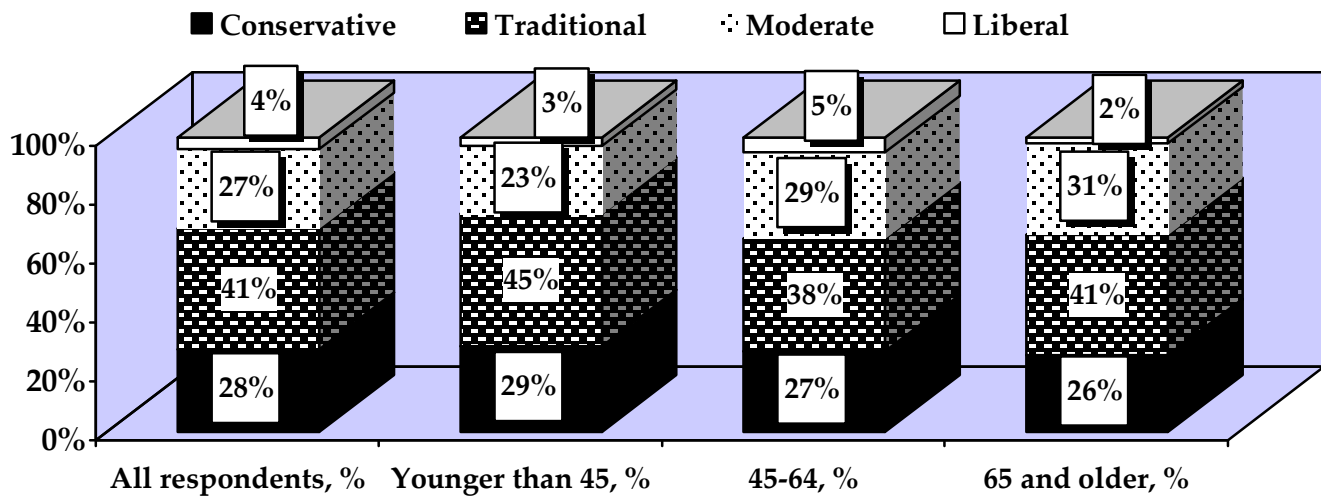
Fig. 5 tells us that a “reform oriented” camp among American Orthodox laity is relatively small in comparison with much stronger group of those who are keen to “keep the things the way they are.” Indeed, less than one-third of the respondents identified themselves as either liberal (4%) or moderate (27%) in comparison with the vast majority of the survey participants who said they are traditional (51%) or conservative (28%).

From practical experience we know that in church politics, the most radical groups are usually the most vocal. In this context, the survey also indicates that today radical “conservative” wing in American Orthodox community (28%) is also much larger than the group of radical “liberals” (4%).

Second, there is **NO** significant difference in “liberal-conservative” orientations among various generations of American Orthodox laity. Fig. 6 shows that the middle-aged (45-64) parishioners are slightly more likely to describe their theological stance as “liberal-moderate” than the younger or older church members, but generally speaking all age groups (under 45, 45-64 and 65+) are similar by proportions of persons who identify themselves with either “conservative – traditional” or “moderate – liberal” wings in the Church. Put differently, age is not a significant factor in how one chooses his or her “micro-theology.”

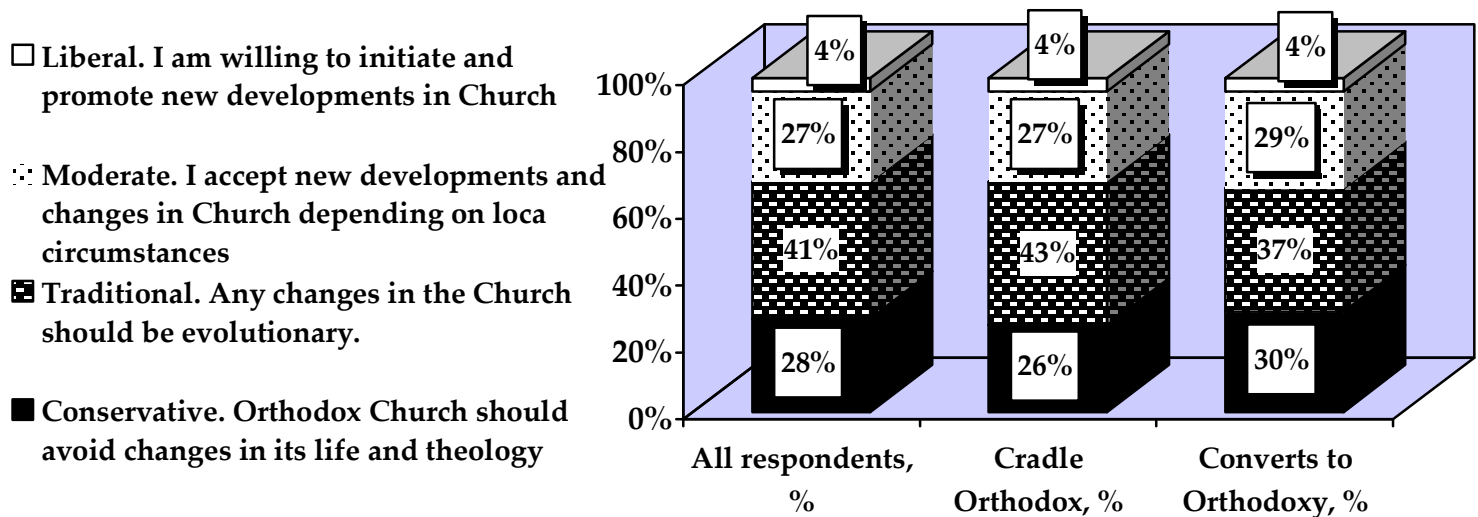


**Fig. 6.** When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand? (%)



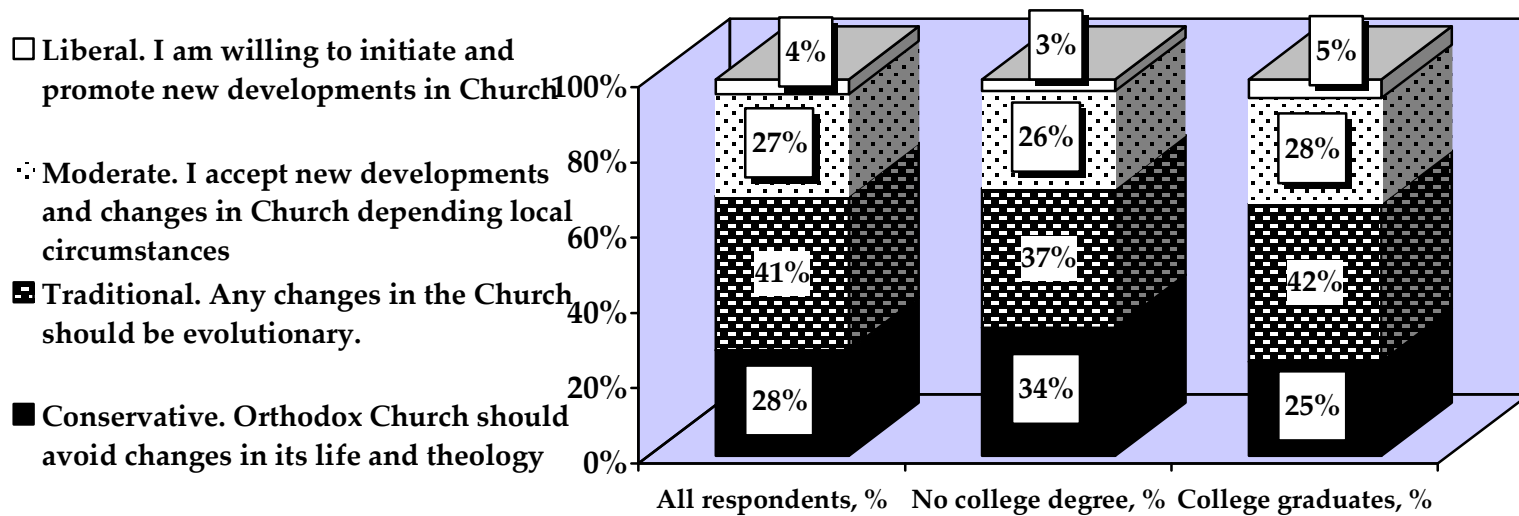
Three, there is also **NO** significant difference in “traditional-conservative” or “liberal-moderate” orientations among cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy. See Fig. 7. This finding is especially important, because it challenges a commonly shared stereotype – the hypothesis that American converts to Orthodoxy tend to be more conservative and “Orthodox” than the cradle Orthodox Christians. The results of the survey do **NOT** support this stereotype: cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy are equally likely to be present in either “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal” camps.

**Fig. 7.** When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand? (%)



Four, education is also **NOT** a significant factor for being theologically either more conservative or more liberal. Fig. 8 shows that persons with college degrees are slightly more likely to be “moderate-liberal” in their theological stance and attitudes towards church life, while those without college education have somewhat higher proportion of “conservative-traditional” persons. Yet, this difference is rather subtle.

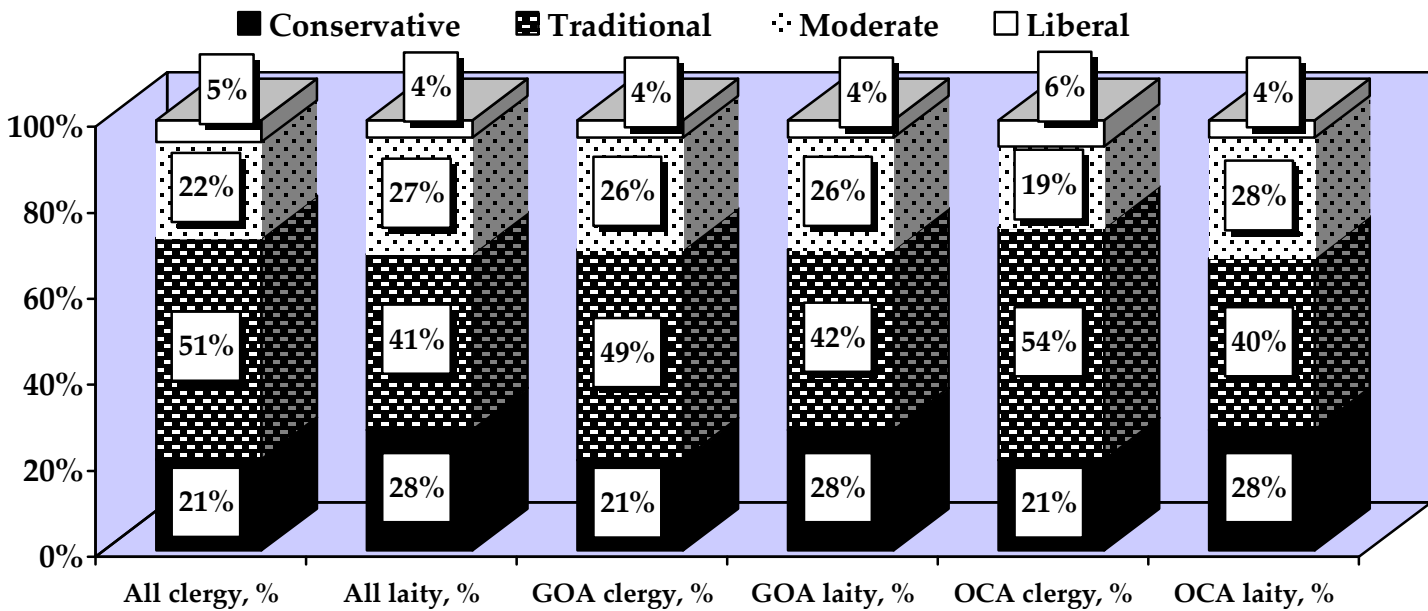
**Fig. 8. When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand? (%)**



To conclude, the question “Who is in ‘Conservative-Traditional’ and who is in ‘Liberal-Moderate’ camps in American Orthodox community?” cannot be easily and unambiguously answered. Indeed, the fact that some church members identify themselves as “liberal” or “moderate” while the others say that they are “traditional” or “conservative” is not related to their education, or age, or religious upbringing or “denominational culture.” The persons with and without college degrees, the younger and older parishioners, the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and the OCA and GOA members are equally likely to be found in either “conservative-traditional” or in “liberal-moderate” camps.

Finally, as noted earlier, the “Orthodox Church Today” was designed to answer crucial question: “To what extent are the social and religious attitudes of American Orthodox clergy reflective of their parishioners - the church lay members?” We found that conservative-liberal “profiles” of American Orthodox laity and parish clergy are similar – especially, in the case of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. In other words, the “shepherds” and the “flock” have similar proportion of persons who think of themselves as theologically either “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal.” See Fig. 9.

**Fig. 9 When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand? (% of respondents)**



**Note:** the data for American Orthodox clergy are from the “Evolving Visions of American Orthodox Priesthood” study completed by PAOI in 2006 (Krindatch 2006).

#### IV. What Parishioners Think About their Parishes.

##### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- 102 persons (children and adults together) are praying every Sunday in a “typical” OCA parish as compared to 236 persons present in an “average” GOA church;
- Dominant majority (59%) of respondents in both GOA and OCA parishes are convinced that their churches will grow in the foreseeable future. Only 12% of survey participants predicted decline of their parishes within the next 5 years;
- Quality of liturgical and sacramental life combined with the ability of a parish priest to be a spiritual role model and counselor are two by far most important factors attracting American Orthodox Christians to their parishes;
- “Practical care of parishioners for one another in time of need” is seen as one of the most valuable aspects of a parish life by significantly greater proportion of OCA members as compared to GOA laity, while “programs for children and youth” play greater role in attracting people to their parishes among GOA laity than among OCA members;
- The members of the smaller parishes have much greater appreciation for “spiritual guidance and care provided by priest” and “practical care of parishioners for one another in times of needs,” while those

attending in larger parishes value more “Sunday school for children and teenagers” and “programs for children and youth other than Sunday school;”

- For most American Orthodox Christians - the ordinary church members - “church” means first and foremost their local parish community. Therefore to a large degree the personal theological stance of “people in pews,” their religious attitudes and practices, their opinions about various church related matters, and their vision for the Church’s future are shaped by the particular “style” and patterns of everyday life in their home parishes.
- “Evangelism” and “Programs for children and youth” are two areas of church life in which American Orthodox Churches lag behind other Christian denominations;
- 22% of respondents described their parishes as being more “modern” as compared to the “typical” GOA/OCA parish, while 21% of survey participants defined their churches as more “traditional” and stricter in applying Orthodox principles to the everyday parish life than the “average” GOA/OCA parish;
- The major weaknesses of American Orthodox parishes are:
  - most parishes exist in the situation of the “self-isolation” without much communication and interaction with their local “non-Orthodox” neighborhood communities,
  - most parishes struggle to find enough volunteers for various chores in a parish,
  - most parishes seem to be bound by the established routines of church life.
- Three out of five GOA parishioners said that their churches have “strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve” in comparisons with only 1 out of 5 in the case of OCA respondents;
- Overall, the “conservative-traditional” church members are more enthusiastic and optimistic about their churches than the persons who defined their theological stance and approach to Church life as “moderate” or “liberal;”
- The needs for “more money,” “more volunteers and enthusiastic people,” “clearer vision of the parish future” and “more youth involvement” are seen as the most urgent ones by both GOA and OCA laity;
- In GOA, smaller parishes report various needs as “especially urgent” more frequently than the larger churches. In OCA the pattern is opposite: parishioners from the larger churches estimated various parish needs as “very urgent” more frequently than the persons attending in the smaller parishes;
- The respondents from OCA parishes are significantly more satisfied with the willingness of their fellow parishioners to donate money to Church than the survey participants from the GOA churches.

We know from practical experience that various Orthodox parishes in the US organize their religious and social lives in very different ways. Some parishes limit themselves to worship and providing sacraments, while the others develop a wide range of social and educational activities. Some parishes welcome innovations and changes in church life, while the others emphasize their adherence to established traditions and rules.

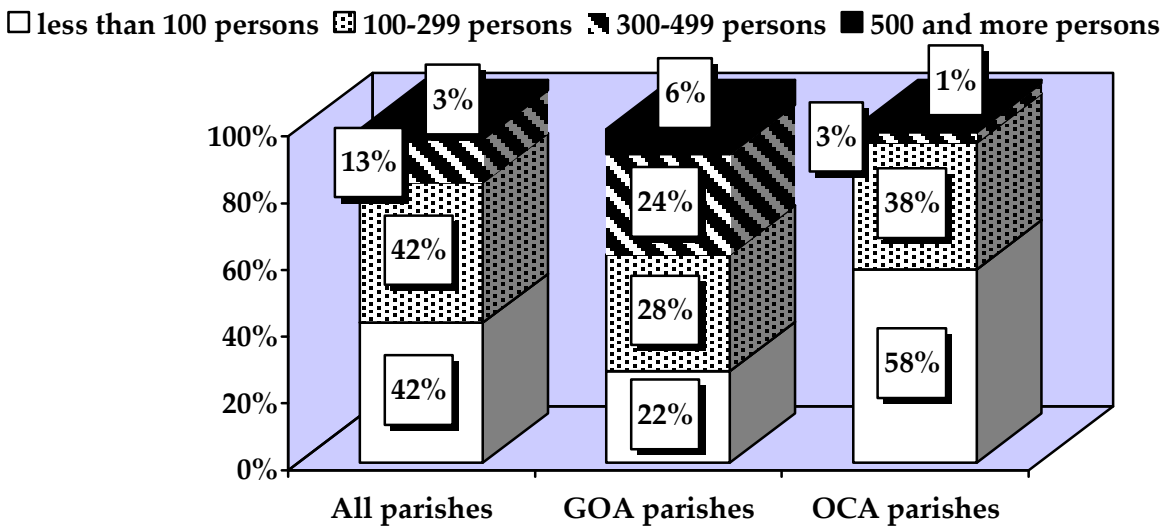
Some cherish their ethnic cultural identity and heritage, while the others can be described as “All-American” parishes. Some parishes consider outreach into the local communities among top priorities, while the others are more reluctant to accept new members and converts to Orthodoxy from non-Orthodox Churches.

Further, the factor of “congregationalism,” the significant autonomy of the 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 how many parishes have been and continue to be founded. Generally, most parishes in the US were not and are not created by the hierarchy of the Church. Rather it is typically a group of lay people who organize a community and church, then petition for reception into a particular jurisdiction. In many parts of the US, the “congregationalism” of the American Orthodox parishes is further augmented by significant geographic distances and by the scant communications between them and their diocesan centers. In brief, in US, the individual parishes have relative flexibility and freedom in making decisions about patterns of their social and religious lives and about either embracing certain innovations or avoiding any changes in the Church. Put differently, to a large degree, Orthodox parishes in the US exists as voluntary organizations with their day-to-day life administered by the members of the congregation.

Hence, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, the format and nuances of worship services, the personal “micro-theology” and style of leadership of the clergy, the availability of and emphases on certain church based programs and activities, the ways social relations are build and decisions are made vary greatly from parish to parish, thus, influencing differently laity’s perception of the Church at large. Because of this, our study paid particular attention to what parishioners think about their parishes. Several questions examined the diversity in the local patterns of the parish life from the perspective and through the eyes of the parish members.

The size of the congregation is a decisive factor in church life. It determines the financial and human resources available to the parish and it has a strong impact on the range and scope of parish-based programs and activities. The major problem in estimating the size of the American Orthodox parishes is the absence of the clear criteria for measuring membership. On the one hand, in many cases the total number of persons associated with and participating – at least occasionally - in church life is greater than the number of those who are formally listed in parish records as “full members” (or “regularly contributing families,” or “stewards”). On the other hand, the core group of parishioners involved regularly and frequently in various religious and social activities is typically smaller than the whole formal membership of a parish. The average *attendance on a typical Sunday* is one of the ways to judge number of persons regularly participating in church life. Our survey asked: “Approximately how many persons total – adults and children together – do you have in church on a typical Sunday?” See Fig. 10.

**Fig. 10** Approximately how many persons *TOTAL* – children and adults together – do you have in church on a typical Sunday? (% of parishes in each size category)



One can see that the average number of persons regularly participating in parish life (estimated as the number of those who are present in church on Sunday) is 141 per “typical” American parish. At the same time, there is a huge difference in this regard between OCA and GOA churches: 102 persons are praying every Sunday in an “average” OCA parish as compared to 236 persons present in an “average” GOA church. An absolute majority (58%) of OCA parishes can be qualified as “small churches” with less than 100 persons in attendance on a typical Sunday compared to only 22% GOA parishes in this size category. Conversely, about one third (30%) of GOA churches have more than 300 children and adults praying together every Sunday, but there are only very few (4%) OCA churches with such the Sunday attendance of 300+ persons.

The trend in number of parishioners – either growth or decline of parish membership – is an indicator of dynamics in parish life and a good predictor of the parish future. We asked parishioners about their opinions on changes in membership in the next 5 years. A dominant majority (59%) of our respondents in both GOA and OCA parishes are convinced that their churches will grow in the foreseeable future. Only 12% of survey participants (8% in GOA and 16% in OCA) predicted decline of their parishes within the next 5 years. See Tab. 9.

**Tab. 9 Parish growth:** Compared to the present, what do you think will happen to your parish in the next 5 years? (%)

	GOA, %	OCA, %	Total, %
It will grow	60	58	59
It will stay the same	32	26	29
It will decline	8	16	12

There were no differences in the answers to the question about future changes in membership provided by parishioners in various age categories and by the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy. That is the younger and older Orthodox laity, those who grew up in the Orthodox Church and those who converted to Orthodoxy in the later stages of their lives are equally optimistic about the future of their home parishes. At the same time, we found that parishioners who defined their theological stance and approaches to Church life as “conservative” are firmer believers in the future growth of their parishes, while persons saying that they are theologically “moderate” or “liberal” were somewhat more inclined to predict decline in members of their parishes. See Tab. 10.

**Tab. 10 Parish growth:** Compared to the present, what do you think will happen to your parish in the next 5 years? (%)

	“Conservative” respondents, %	“Traditional” respondents, %	“Moderate” and “Liberal” respondents, %	All respondents, %
It will grow	60	64	51	59
It will stay the same	32	24	32	29
It will decline	8	12	17	12

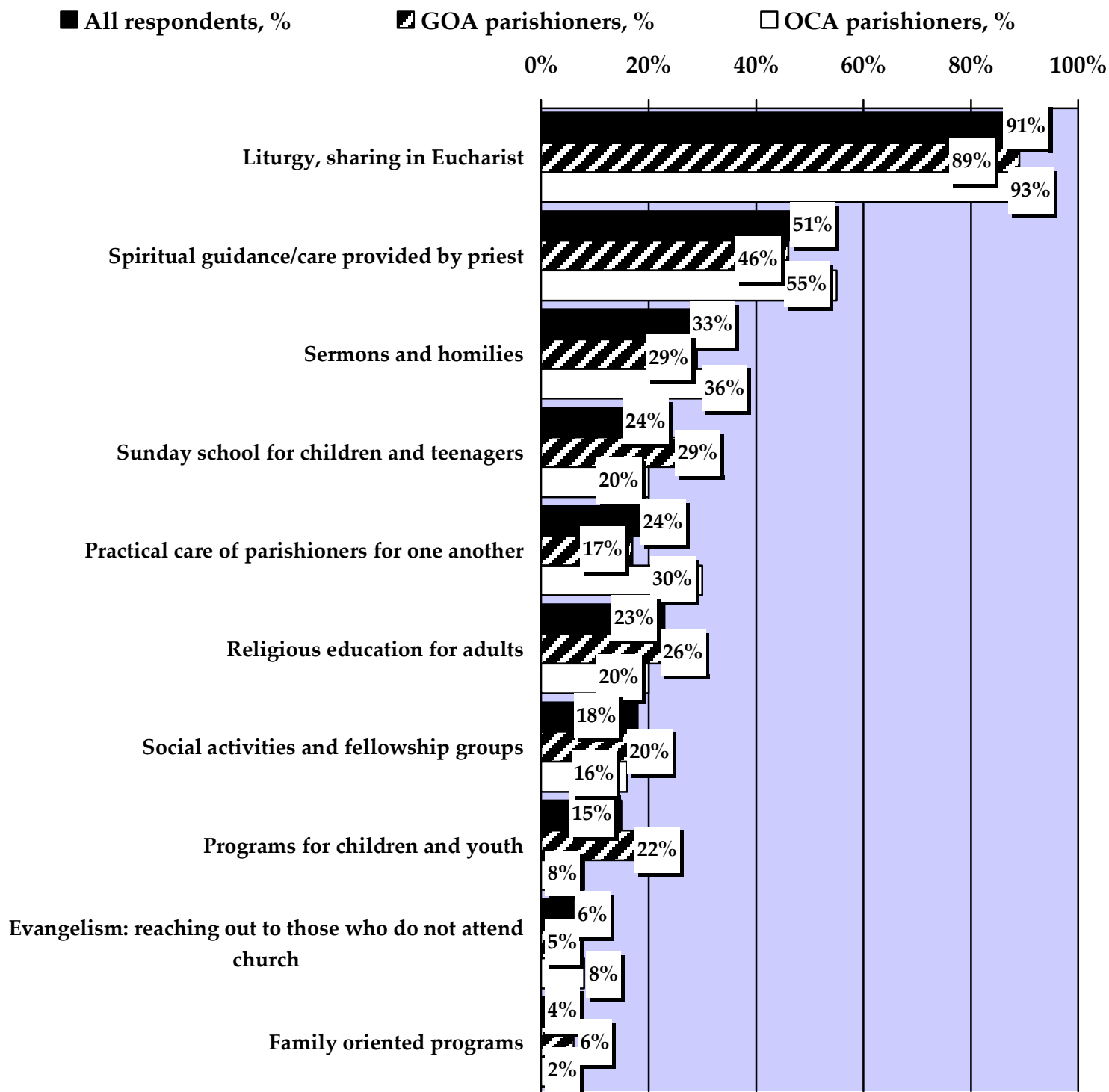
One of the most important subjects examined in our study was the rather broad question about what Orthodox laity like about their home parishes and what make their local churches attractive to them? Ultimately, this question translates into the complex subject of “why people go to church?” Given importance of this question for the Church future, this was also one of the key-issues discussed during personal in-depth interviews in the local parishes and during focus groups with selected groups of parishioners. The findings from these focus groups and people’s “personal stories” about “why I attend here” and “what I like about this parish” will be discussed later in this study report.

In our mail survey, we gave respondents a list of ten items reflecting different areas of church life and asked them: “Out of the following, please, choose THREE aspects of your parish life that you personally most value.” Fig. 11 shows which aspects of parish life have been most frequently mentioned among three choices made by parishioners as the most valuable to them.

Several conclusions should be made. First, clearly and predictably, “liturgy and sharing in Eucharist” is by far most important aspect of parish life which attracts members to their parishes. It was chosen by virtually all parishioners (91%) as one of the three most valuable aspects of their parish life. Only one more item on the list also scored more than 50% of responses as one of the most valuable features of a parish – “Spiritual guidance and care provided by your priest.” Hence, quality of liturgical and sacramental life combined with the ability of a parish priest to be a spiritual role model and counselor are two most important factors attracting members to their parishes.

**Fig.11 Attractiveness of a parish: “Out of the following, please, choose *THREE* aspects of your parish life that you personally *MOST* value?”**

**% of the respondents who selected the following items among their *THREE* choices**





At the same time, less than one quarter of the respondents choose “Sunday school for children” and “religious education for adults” as one of the most valuable aspects of their church life. Further, less than one in five persons indicated “social activities and fellowship groups” and “programs for children and youth” as something that they really value about their parishes. This finding is difficult to interpret unambiguously. Does it mean that parishioners *are not really interested* in these areas of parish life? Or does it indicate that most parishes simply *don’t do a good job* in providing religious education, organizing social activities and fellowships and developing attractive programs for children and youth? Further research is needed to respond to these questions. We also will get more insights into this subject later, in chapter discussing “personal stories” and findings from the focus-groups.

Three, Fig. 11 tells us that the OCA and GOA laity are somewhat different in what they most value about their parishes. “Practical care of parishioners for one another in time of needs” is seen as one of the most valuable aspects of a parish life by significantly greater proportion of OCA members (30%) as compared to GOA laity (17%). To the contrary, “programs for children and youth” play greater role in attracting members to their parishes among GOA laity than among OCA members.

Four, we looked separately at responses provided by parishioners with various education levels. We found that there is virtually no difference between college graduates and parishioners without a college degree in what they most value about their parishes.

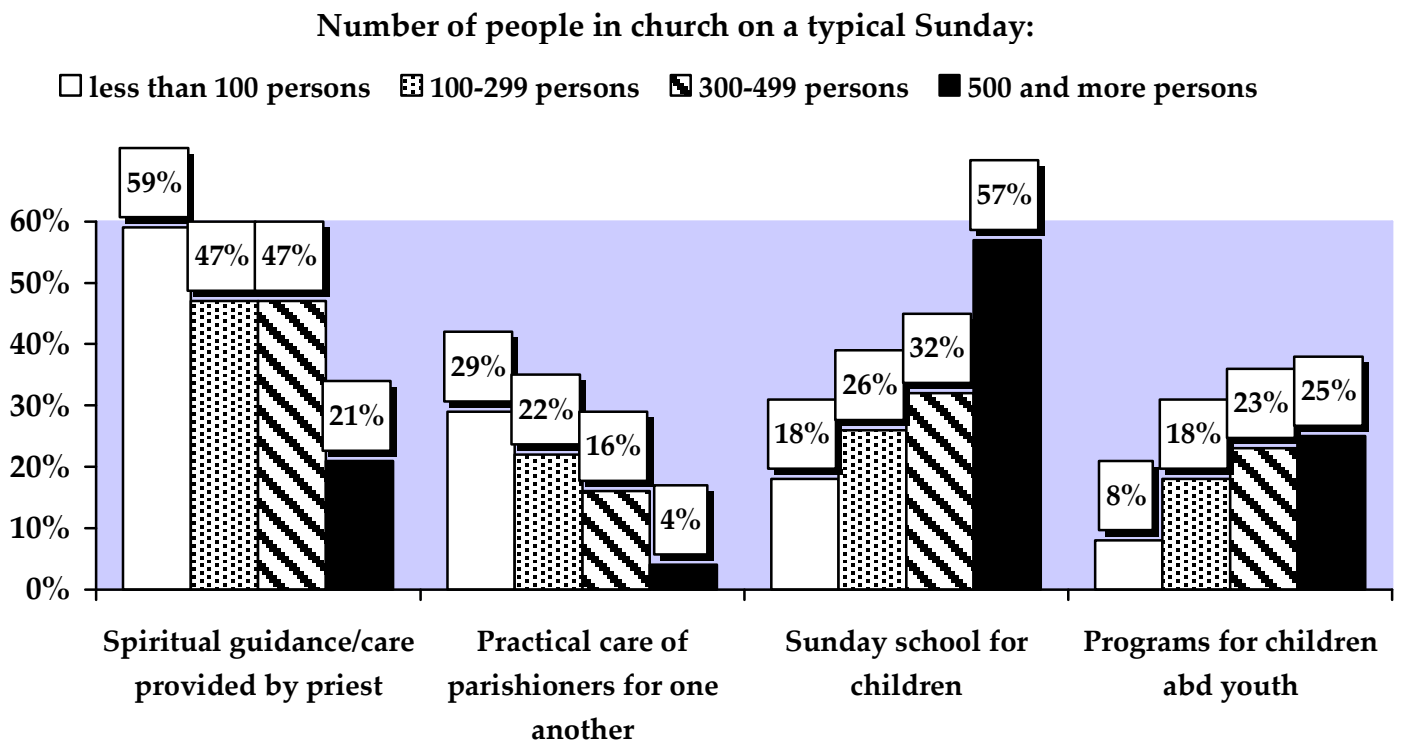
Five, we looked also at the answers given by the members in various age categories, cradle Orthodox and converts, and persons with “conservative-traditional” theological stance and those who identified their personal theological position and approach to church life as “moderate” or “liberal.” We found that there are certain differences in what these various groups most value about their parishes:

- “Liturgy, sharing in Eucharist” and “religious education for adults” play greater role for persons with “conservative” and “traditional” theological stance as compared to theologically “moderate” and “liberal” members;
- “Parish’s social activities and fellowship groups” are more valued by parishioners with “moderate” and “liberal” theological stance as compared to those who identified their personal theological position and approach to church life as “conservative” or “traditional;”
- “Religious education for adults” is significantly more valued by the older (65+) parishioners than by the middle-aged (45-64) and younger (under 45) members;

- “Spiritual guidance and care provided by parish priest” is more important as one of the most valuable aspects of parish life to the younger (under 45) and middle-aged (45-64) parishioners than to the senior (65+) parish members;
- “Sunday school for children and teenagers” and “Programs for children and youth other than Sunday school” play greater importance for the cradle Orthodox than for the converts to Orthodoxy.

Six, we found that the size of the parish is an important factor for what “really matters” to parishioners in their church life. See Fig. 12.

**Fig. 12 Attractiveness of a Parish and the Size of Parish Membership: “Out of the following, please, choose *THREE* aspects of your parish life that you personally MOST value”**  
 (% of the respondents in the parishes of various sizes who selected the following items among their **THREE** choices)



One can see that the members of the smaller parishes have much greater appreciation for such aspects of parish life as “spiritual guidance and care provided by priest” and “practical care of parishioners for one another in times of needs,” while those attending in larger parishes value more “Sunday school for children and teenagers” and “programs for children and youth other than Sunday school.”

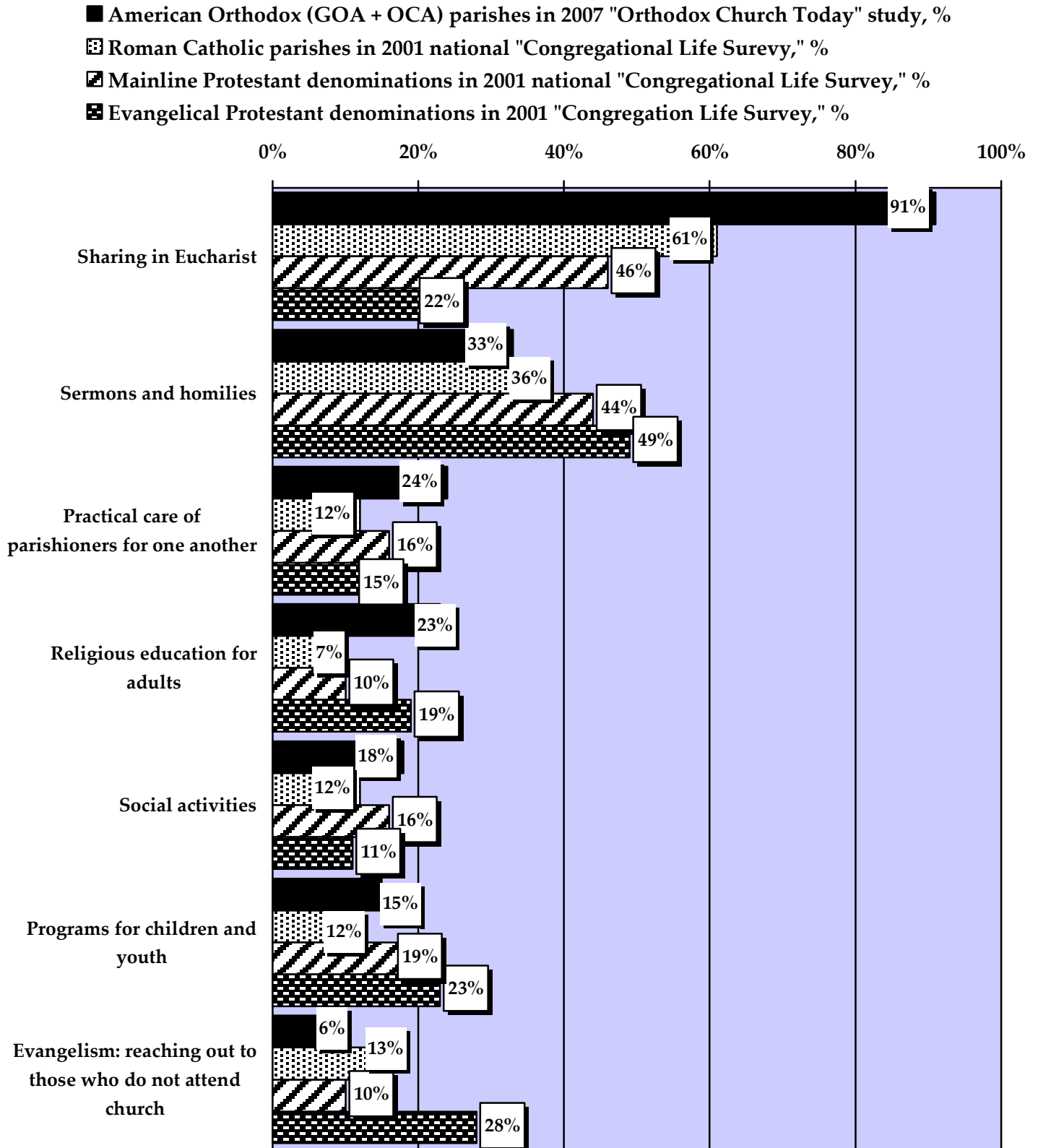
This pattern is relatively easy to explain. On the one hand, in the smaller parishes, the social networks are stronger and social relations are more intimate, thus providing members with the greater feeling of mutual support than this is the case in the bigger churches. Also, in the smaller parishes, priest is more accessible and closer to members, thus being able to pay more attention to individuals and provide better spiritual guidance and support.

On the other hand, larger parishes have bigger demographic potential, more children, more people and more finances available to run various programs, thus, having greater opportunity to develop quality religious education and other programs for children and youth.

How do American Orthodox Christians, the members of GOA and OCA parishes, compare to other American Christian denominations with regards to the question “What do people most value about their churches?” The data from the national 2001 “US Congregational Life Survey” provided us, at least partial, respond to this question. More than 300,000 members in over 2,000 Protestant congregations and Roman Catholic parishes across America participated in “US Congregational Life Survey” making it the largest survey of worshippers in America ever conducted. One of the questions in this survey asked “Which of the following aspects of this parish/congregation do you personally most value?” Similarly, to our questionnaire, the respondents were given a list of various aspects of church life and they could select up to three choices indicating what they most value. Several items on this list were either identical or very similar to those included in our questionnaire. Fig. 13 on the next page shows how GOA and OCA laity compare to American Roman Catholics and to the members of the Mainline and Evangelical Protestant denominations with regard to the question “What do people most value about their churches?”

Clearly, the sacramental aspect of the church life plays a much greater importance for American Orthodox Christians as compared to American Roman Catholics or, especially, mainline Protestants. Nine in ten Orthodox respondents indicated “Sharing in Eucharist” as something that they most value about their churches, but only 6 in 10 Catholics and only 4 in 10 Protestants did so. At the same time, many more Protestants (44-49%) selected “Preaching, sermons and homilies” among three most valuable aspects of their church life than in the case of both Orthodox (33%) and Catholics (36%). This is easy to explain, because preaching has always been significantly more emphasized in the Protestant than in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. What came as somewhat of a pleasant surprise was that “Practical care of members for one another in times of needs” and “Religious education for adults” were selected among most valuable aspects of the church life by the bigger proportion of American Orthodox Christians than in the case of the Roman Catholics, Mainline and Evangelical Protestants.

**Fig. 13 Attractiveness of a parish/congregation:** “Out of the following, please, choose up to *THREE* aspects of your parish/congregation life that you personally *MOST* value.”  
 (% of the respondents who selected the following items among their *THREE* choices)

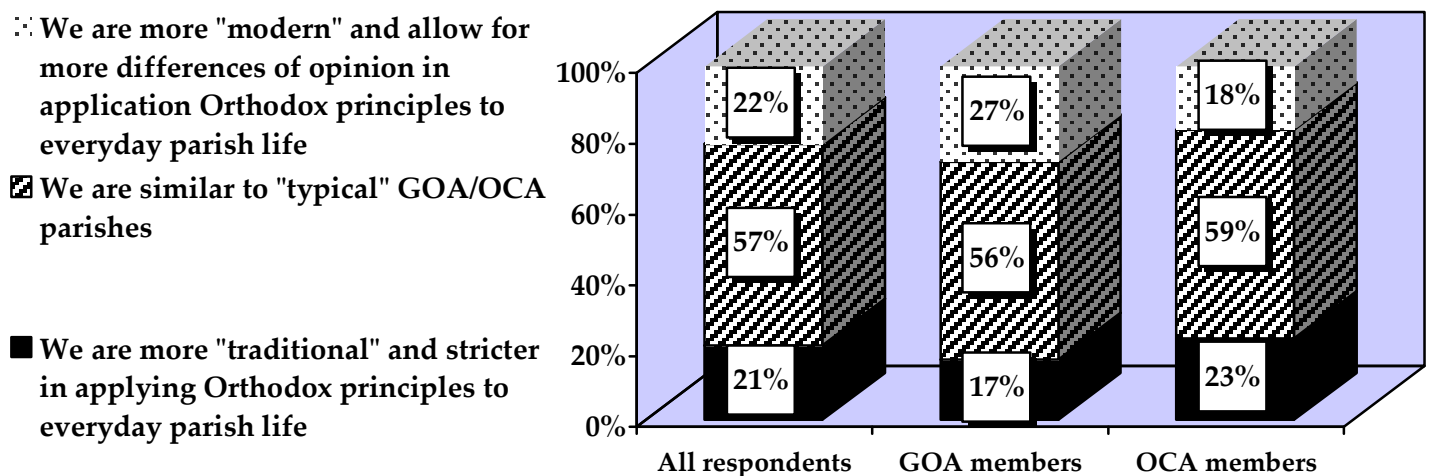


**Note:** The data for the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations are from 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey. The data available at <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/USCLSRA.asp>

The commonly shared perception is that Protestant, especially Conservative-Evangelical, denominations place great emphasis on creating strong social networks in their congregation and on religious education for both children and adults. The data from our survey, however, tell us that American Orthodox Churches are as good in these two areas of church life as Protestant denominations or, at least, that the members of OCA and GOA are more happy with adult religious education and with mutual support among parishioners than the Roman Catholics and Protestants. Fig. 13 shows also two areas of church life in which American Orthodox lag behind other Christian groups. Indeed, compared to the Orthodox respondents, “Evangelism” as one of the most valuable aspects of church life, was indicated by the greater proportion of the Roman Catholics and Protestants. Similarly, compared to Orthodox Christians, more Protestants (especially Evangelical Protestants) indicated “Programs for children and youth” as one of the most valuable aspects of their congregations.

In previous chapter we looked at the personal “micro-theologies” of GOA and OCA lay members asking them to describe their theological attitudes and approach to Church life as either “liberal,” or “moderate” or “traditional” or “conservative.” The next question is how do they view the communal “micro-theologies” of their parishes? We asked survey participants to describe their parishes as either more “modern” (e.g. – allowing for more differences of opinion in application of Orthodox principles to everyday parish life) or more “traditional” (e.g. – tending to be stricter in applying Orthodox principles to everyday parish life) in comparison with the “typical” GOA and OCA parishes. See Fig. 14.

**Fig. 14** In general, how you would describe your parish’s approaches to church life in comparison with “typical” GOA/OCA parishes? (%)

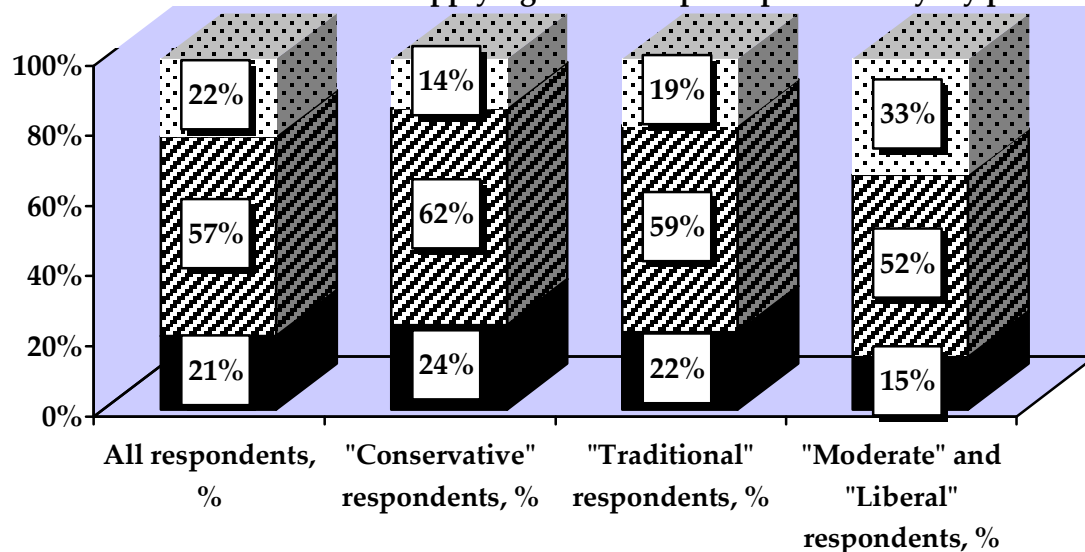


About one fifth of respondents described their parishes as being either more “modern” (22%) in comparison with the “typical” GOA/OCA parish or, to the contrary, as more “traditional” and stricter in applying Orthodox principles to the everyday parish life. An absolute majority of respondents (57%) preferred to avoid these extremes and identified their parishes as – what they believe are – “typical Orthodox parishes.” Although in comparison with OCA somewhat more GOA members described their parishes as more “modern” (18% and 27% respectively), generally the answers of OCA and GOA parishioners to this question are similar. Put differently, two largest American Orthodox jurisdictions (denominations) have roughly the same proportion of parishes which are either more “experimental” or, to the contrary, are solidly bound to once and forever established traditions.

Third and most importantly, we found a *statistically significant* correlation between personal theological outlooks and approaches to church life of parishioners, on the one hand, and their opinions about their parishes as being either “more modern” or “more traditional,” on the other hand. Fig. 15 shows that survey participants who said that their personal theological outlook and approach to the church life is “conservative” were more likely to say that their parishes are also “more traditional.” On the contrary, the respondents who declared their theological position and approach to church life as either “moderate” or “liberal” were more likely to define their parishes as “more modern.”

**Fig. 15** In general, how you would describe your parish’s approaches to church life in comparison with “typical” GOA/OCA parishes? (%)

- ∴ We are more "modern" and allow for more differences of opinion in application Orthodox principles to everyday parish life
- ▤ We are similar to typical GOA/OCA parishes
- We are more "traditional" and stricter in applying Orthodox principles to everyday parish life



It should be noted that we found the same pattern in our earlier small-scale (diocesan level) studies of American Orthodox clergy and laity. Generally this fact suggests that like-minded members (on both sides of “theological spectrum”) tend to gather in like-minded parishes, thus making parish-to-parish differences in church life even stronger through their adherence to the different Orthodox “micro-theologies.”

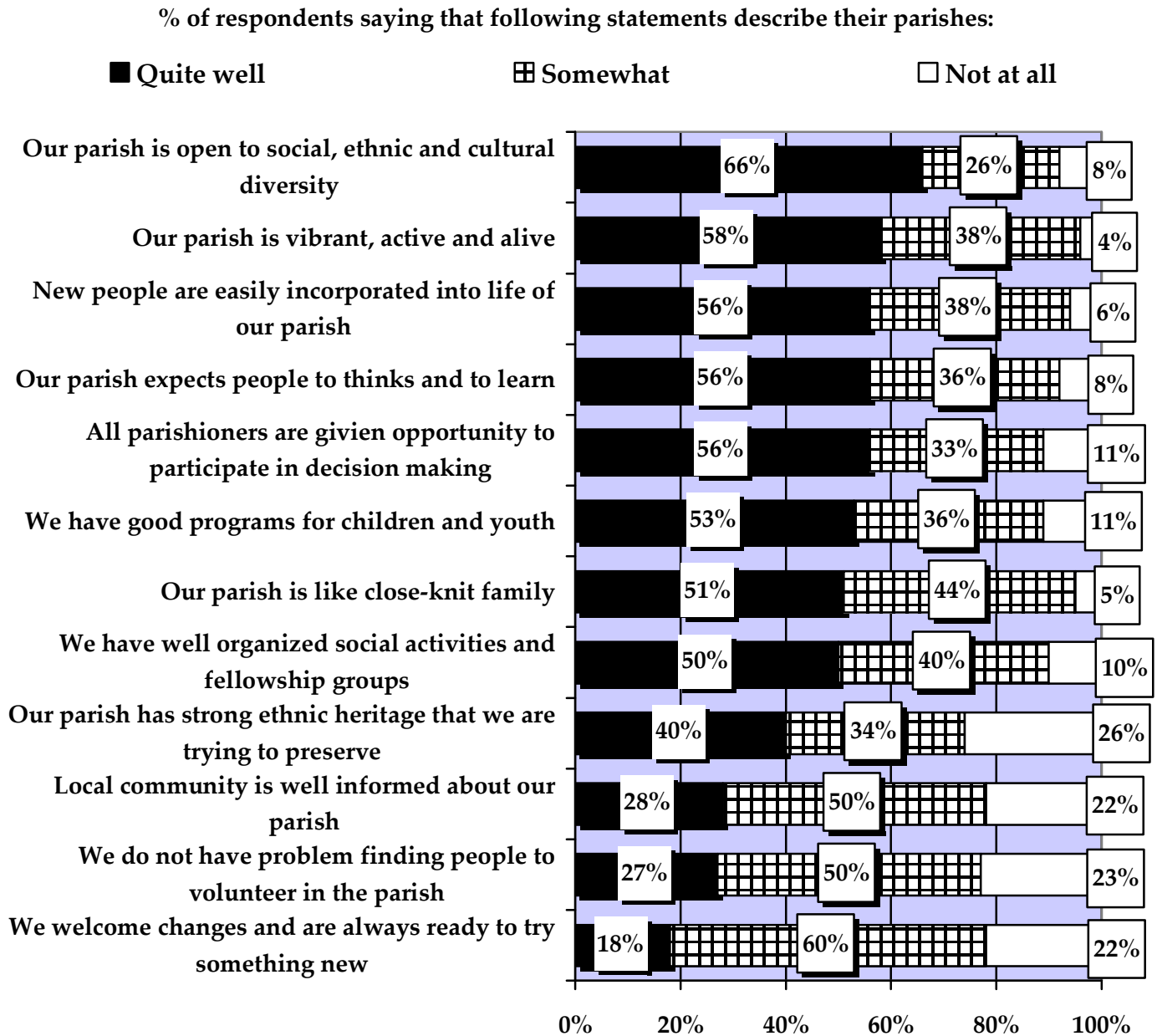
The survey further asked “How well does each of the following statements describe your parish?” The parishioners participating in our survey were given 12 statements describing the “style” and various characteristics of the parish life. The respondents can choose between three answers saying that each statement describes his/her parish “Quite well,” or “Somewhat” or “Not at all.” The particular combination of these characteristics – unique for each parish – can be seen as something that we can call “the identity of a parish.”

Fig. 16 on the next page provides us with comprehensive picture of how parishioners perceive their home churches.

First, one can see that in general more than half of survey participants describe their parishes in very positive manner. Dominant majority of parishioners feel that their parishes are welcoming people with various ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds (66% fully agreed with the statement “Our parish is open to social, ethnic and cultural diversity”), and that it is easy for a newcomer to integrate into parish life (56% said that the statement “New people are easily incorporated into our parish life” described their parish “quite well”). Absolute majority of survey participants feel also good about dynamics of their parish lives (58% agreed with the statement “Our parish is vibrant, active and alive”) and believe that their parishes cater not only to the needs of adult members but also of the children and youth (53% said that the statement “We have good programs for children and youth” describes their parishes “quite well”). More than half of the respondents described their churches as the place where “all parishioners are given opportunity to participate in decision making” (56%) and where members are “expected to think and to learn” (56%).

Second, Fig. 16 gives a good insight into the issue which continues to be debated among American Orthodox clergy and laity – the question to what extent American Orthodoxy remains an “ethnically based” religious community. Our survey tells us that 2 out of 5 respondents (40%) described their parishes as having “strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve.”

**Fig. 16 Parish identity: “How well does each of the following statements describe your parish?”**



Finally, Fig. 16 shows us not only the strengths of American Orthodox parishes but it tells also about their major weaknesses. Indeed, three statements were identified by *only less than 30%* of parishioners as truly describing their parishes. These statements are: “The local community is well informed about our parish,” “We do not have problem finding people to volunteer to work in the parish,” and “We welcome changes and are always ready to try something new.” In other words:

- most of parishes exist in the situation of the “self-isolation” without much communication and interaction with their local communities,
- most of parishes struggle with the problem of finding volunteers for various chores in a parish,
- most of parishes seem to be bound by the established routines of church life.



The fact that only one in four (27%) respondents feels that “We do not have problem finding people to volunteer to work in the parish” is, perhaps, most disturbing and alarming. It questions also the objectivity of the overall optimistic assessment that “Our parish is active, vibrant and alive.” Indeed, it is the desire of the ordinary parishioners to donate their time and talent to the local church community that is one of the major indicators of the actual – not claimed – vitality of a parish. Because of importance of this issue, the desire to volunteer in the parish, we looked at characteristics and distinct features of the parishes of those 27% respondents reporting that “We do not have problem finding people to volunteer to work in the parish.” We will concentrate on this subject later.

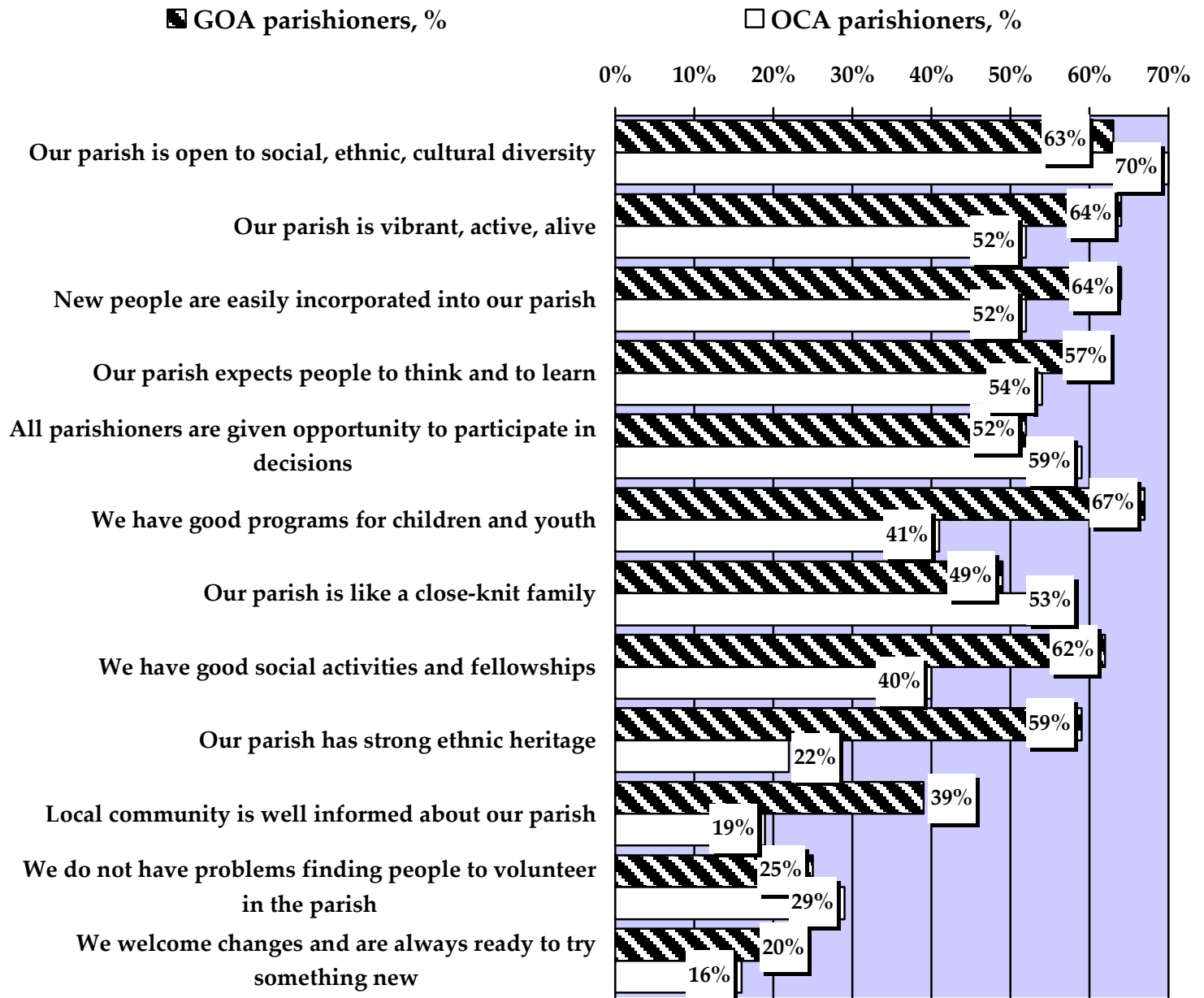
Are there any *significant* differences between GOA and OCA laity in how they describe their home parishes? Fig. 17 on the next page indicates that the most notable distinction is the different strength of the ethnic heritage of the GOA and OCA churches. Three out of five GOA parishioners said that their churches have “strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve” in comparisons with only 1 out of 5 in the case of OCA respondents.

This finding is consistent with the facts presented in the first chapter - much stronger presence of the converts to Orthodoxy in the OCA, on the one hand, and significantly bigger proportion of persons with other-than-English Mother language among GOA members.

**Fig. 17 Parish identity: OCA and GOA churches.**

**“How well does each of the following statements describe your parish?”**

**% of respondents saying the following statements describe my parish "quite well"**



Interestingly enough, although GOA parishes have a much stronger “ethnic heritage” compared to OCA parishes, a larger proportion of GOA respondents believe that “New people are easily incorporated into the life of our parish” (64%) than among OCA parishioners (52%). One possible explanation for this is that responding to this statement the GOA parishioners might have thought of “new people” in terms of persons sharing their ethnic heritage.

Fig. 17 also shows that significantly more GOA than OCA parishioners agree with the statements about their parishes as having various social programs and activities (“We have good social activities and fellowships,” “We have good programs for children and youth”) and as being well incorporated into their local communities (“The local community is well informed about our parish”). Hence from the perspective of the survey participants, in comparison with the OCA churches, the social lives of GOA parishes are more abundant and they are better connected to their local neighborhoods.

Are there any *significant* differences between various categories of parishioners (college graduates and persons without college degree, persons in various age, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, theologically “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal”) in how they describe their home parishes? Three patterns are relatively strong and present among both GOA and OCA parishioners.

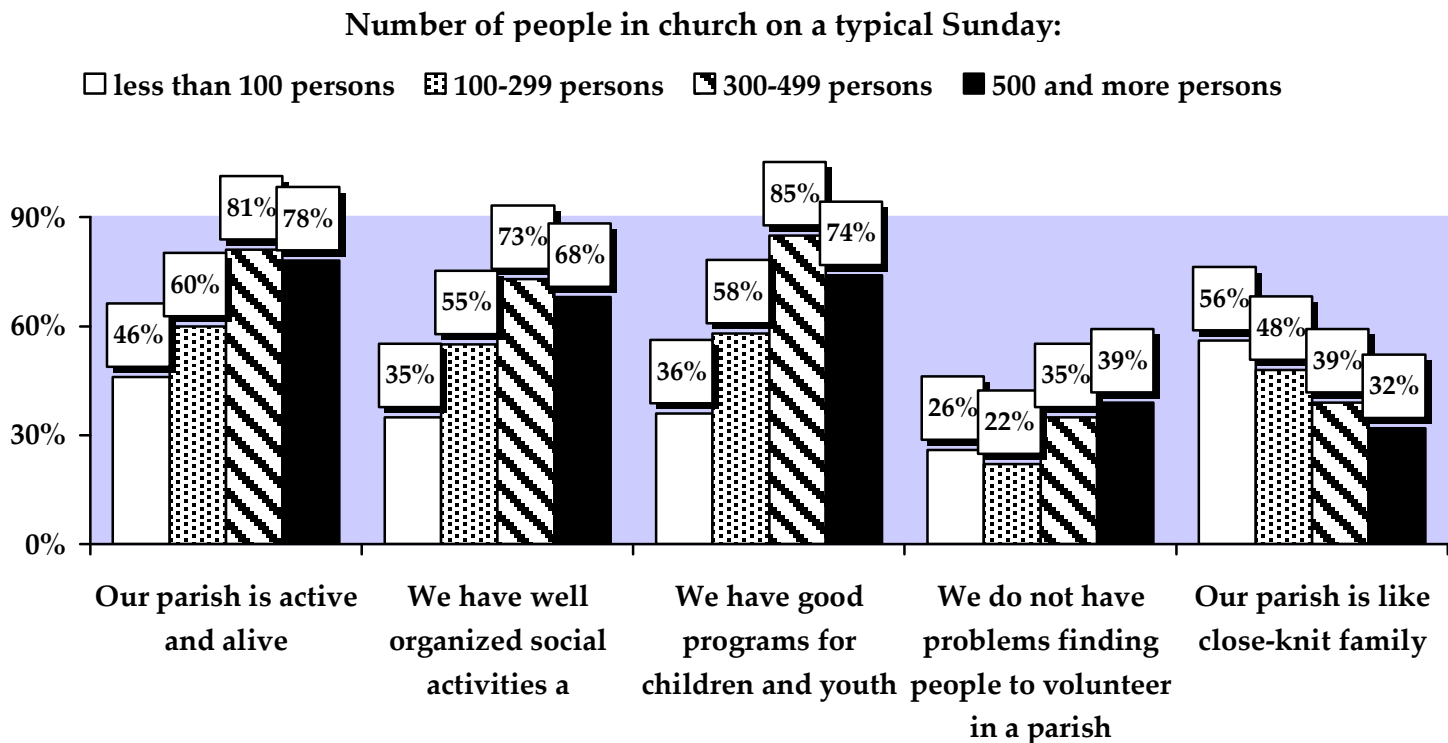
First, there was virtually no difference between persons with various levels of education in how they describe their parishes. Second, the parishioners who described their theological stance and attitudes to church life as “conservative” or “traditional” are more likely to describe their home parishes as being “vibrant, active and alive” than the respondents who defined themselves as either “moderate” or “liberal.” This fact is consistent with our earlier finding that “conservative-traditional” parishioners are stronger believers in the future growth of their parishes than their “moderate-liberal” fellow-parishioners. Hence, overall the “conservative-traditional” church members seem to be more enthusiastic and optimistic about their churches than the persons who defined their theological stance and approach to Church life as “moderate” or “liberal.” Third, in comparison with the converts to Orthodoxy, the cradle Orthodox are more likely to describe their churches as having “strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve.” Fourth, the older (65+) parishioners are more likely to say about their parishes that “we have good programs for children and youth” and that “the local community is well informed about our parish” than the younger (under 45) and middle-aged (45-64) parish members. This pattern is difficult to explain.

Finally, it should be noted that the size of parish is an important factor influencing patterns of church life and identity of a parish. Fig. 18 shows that parishioners attending in larger parishes are more likely to say that their parishes are “vibrant, active and alive,” that they have “well organized social activities and fellowship groups” and “good programs for children and youth,” and that they “do not have problems finding people to volunteer to work in a parish.” At the same time, there is a certain advantage of being parishioner in a smaller church: their members are more likely to feel that “Our parish is like a close-knit family.”

**Fig. 18 Identity of a Parish and the Size of Parish Membership.**

**“How well does each of the following statements describe your parish?”**

**% of respondents saying that the following statements describe their parishes “QUITE WELL.”**

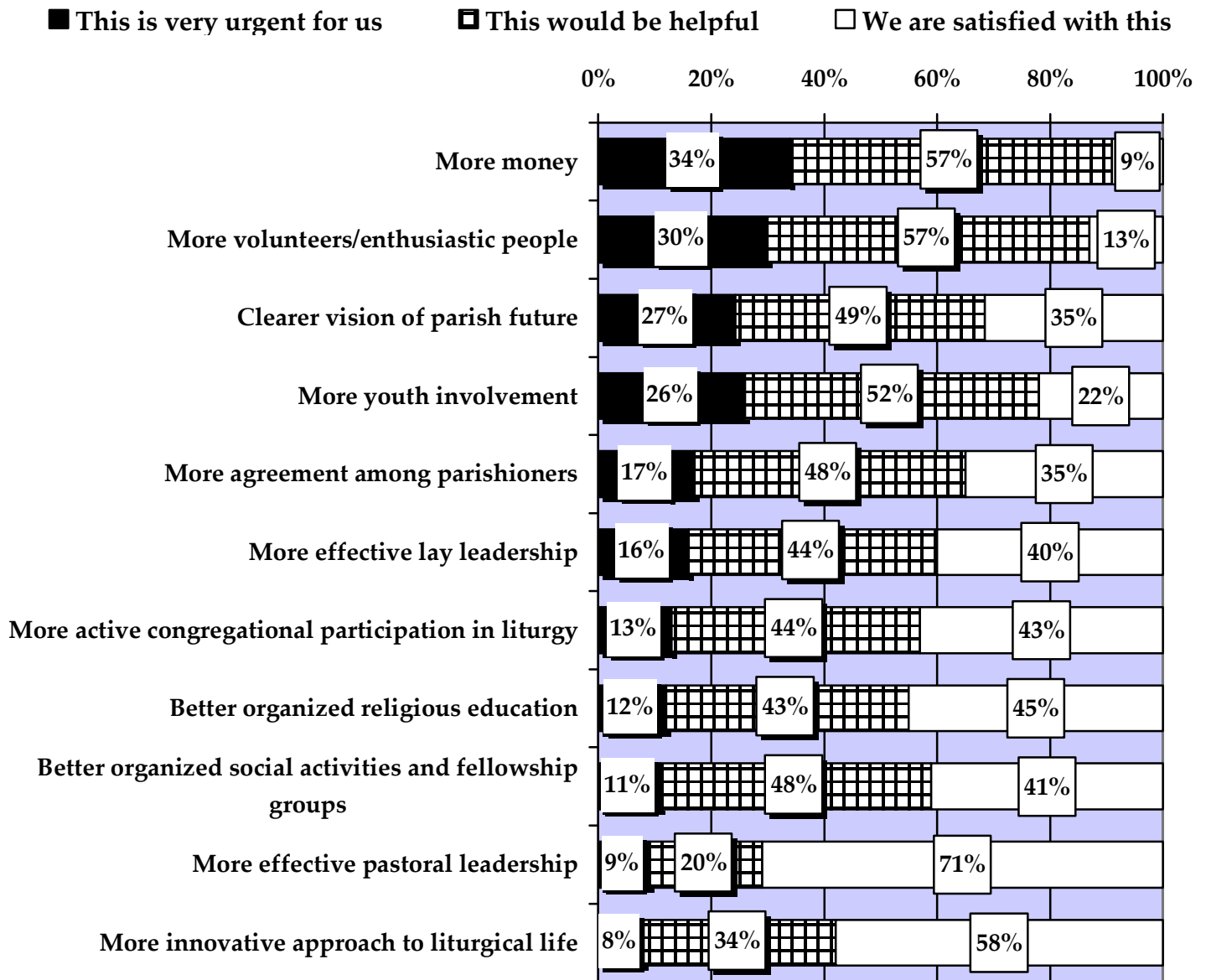


The next question is: what are major challenges for the growth and general well-being of American Orthodox parishes from the perspective of their members? Answering the question “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” the respondents have most frequently chosen two items as most urgently needed to assure a bright future for their parishes: “more money” (34% reported that this is “very urgent” for us) and “more volunteers and enthusiastic people” (30%). No more than 13% of parishioners participating in our survey said that they are “basically satisfied” with these two aspects of their parish life. In other words, the vast majority of American Orthodox parishes are to a lesser or greater degree struggling with their finances and with availability of people willing to volunteer in a parish.

Two further challenges have been mentioned by more than one quarter of the respondents as “very urgent for us:” the needs to have “clearer vision of parish future” (27%) and “more youth involvement” (26%). Only one in five survey participants is “basically satisfied” with the youth involvement in his/her church and only one out of three respondents feel that his/her parish has clear vision for the parish future. See Fig. 19.

**Fig. 19 Needs of a parish: “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?”**

% of respondents saying that:

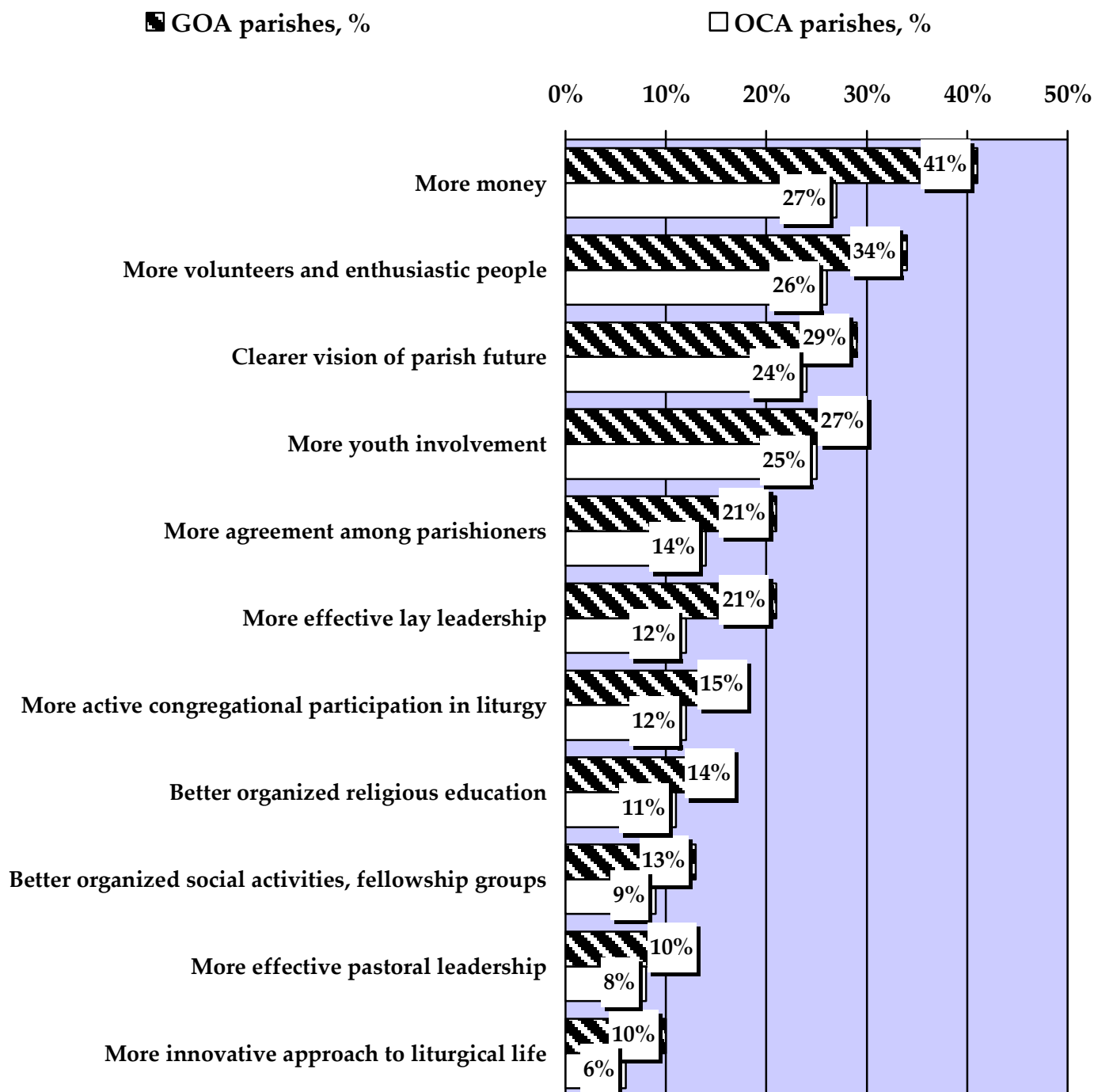


On the opposite “positive” side, it seems that dominant majority of GOA and OCA parishioners (71%) are quite satisfied with the quality of pastoral leadership in their parishes and only one in eleven respondents feels that “more effective pastoral leadership” is “very urgent” for their churches in order to strengthen and to grow.

Do GOA and OCA members *equally perceive* the need for “more money,” “more volunteers and enthusiastic people,” “clearer vision of parish future,” and “more youth involvement,” as the most urgent problems of their parishes?

Yes and no. “Yes,” because in both GOA and OCA parishes the respondents ranked these four challenges above all other needs. In other words, among both GOA and OCA laity, the feeling of urgent need for “more money,” “more volunteers and enthusiastic people,” “clearer vision of parish future,” and “more youth involvement” dominates all other concerns. See Fig. 20.

**Fig. 20 What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?**  
**% of GOA and OCA parishioners saying that the following is “VERY URGENT” for us.**

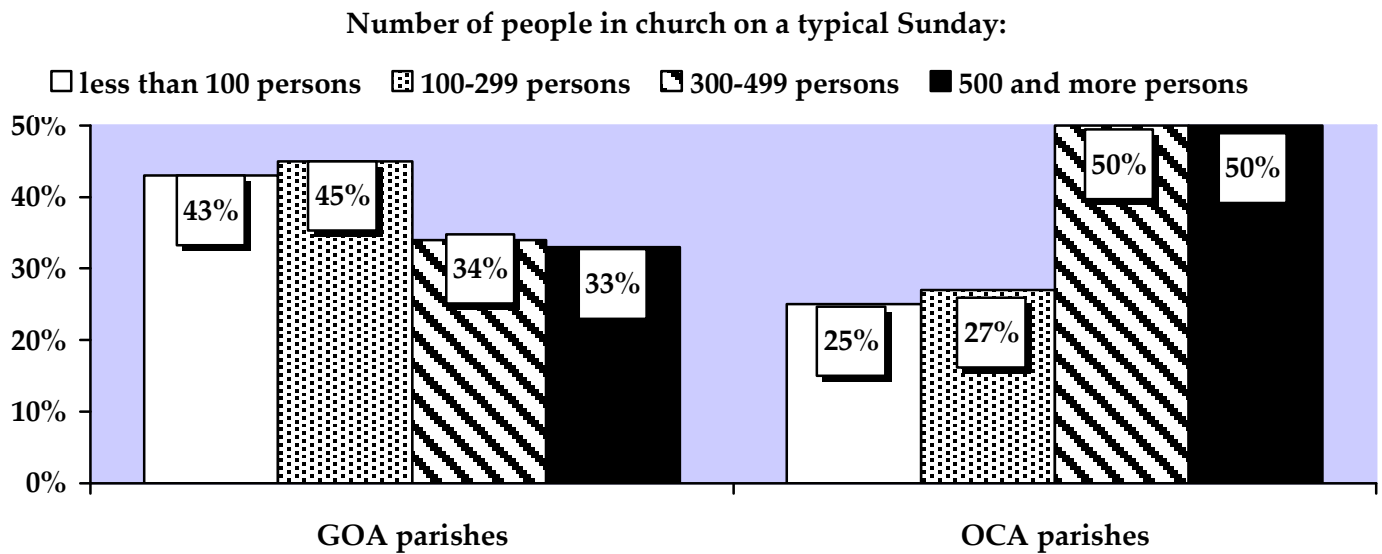


“No, because there is clear difference between GOA and OCA in degree of urgency of these top-four and all other needs. Fig. 20 indicates that in comparison with OCA members, a higher (sometimes much higher) proportion of GOA parishioners estimated virtually all possible needs on our list “as especially urgent” for their churches. This finding is somewhat unexpected. In general, American Greek Orthodox parishes are better organized and have wider range of programs and activities than the parishes of other American Orthodox churches (OCA including). Further, GOA parishes are also generally perceived as prosperous churches. Yet, the gap between GOA and OCA parishioners in how urgent they feel the need for “more money” is especially wide: 41% of GOA respondents said that having “more money” is very urgent for their parishes in comparison with only 27% among OCA laity. How to explain this? While there may be many reasons, one possible explanation is that GOA members have higher expectations for their churches and are more sensitive to all possible needs, therefore, saying that having “more” of this and that is very urgent for them.

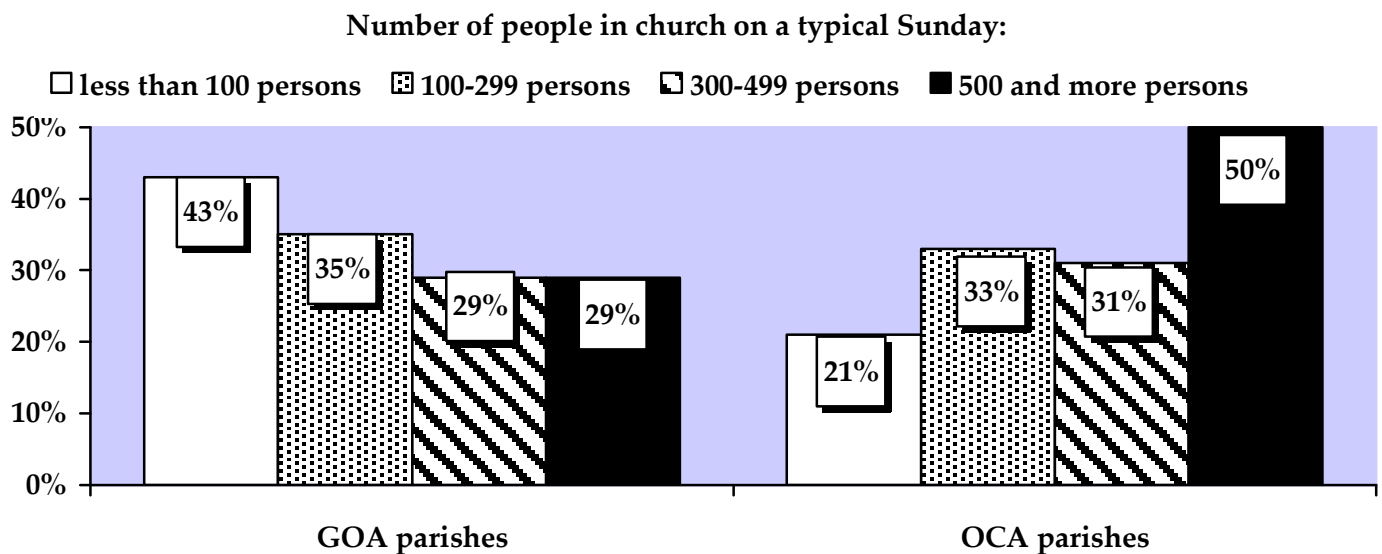
Another possible explanation for the greater feel of urgency with regard to all possible parish needs among GOA laity than among OCA members could be different size of the “typical” GOA and “typical” OCA parish. As noted earlier in this chapter, the GOA churches tend to be much larger than the OCA parishes. The question is: “Does the size of a parish matter for how parishioners estimate the urgency of various needs?” In order to eliminate the influence of “denominational” factor, we compared small, medium and large parishes for each jurisdiction (GOA and OCA) separately. The result was unexpected. In the case of GOA, the smaller parishes tend to report various needs as “especially urgent” more frequently than the larger churches. In the OCA, however, the pattern is opposite: the parishioners from the larger churches estimated various parish needs as “very urgent” more frequently than the persons attending in the smaller parishes.

With regard to having “more money” and “more volunteers and enthusiastic people” as top-needs for both GOA and OCA these opposite patterns are especially visible. In the GOA, 43% of members attending in the small churches with less than 100 persons present on Sunday said that the need for “more money” is “very urgent” for us in comparison with only 33% of respondents going to churches with more than 500 persons present on a typical Sunday. In the OCA, the respective figures were 25% and 50%. In the GOA, the need for “more volunteers and enthusiastic people” is perceived as “very urgent” by 43% of parishioners in smaller (less than 100 persons on Sunday) churches in comparison with only 29% among those who belong to the churches with more than 500 on a typical Sunday. The respective figures for OCA are 21% and 50%. See Fig. 21A and Fig. 21B.

**Fig. 21A** % of parishioners saying that the need for “MORE MONEY” is “VERY URGENT” for us



**Fig. 21B** % of parishioners saying that the need for “MORE VOLUNTEERS AND ENTHUSIASTIC PEOPLE” is “VERY URGENT” for us



To conclude, the data tell us that, for one or another reason, the smaller GOA parishes are much more exposed to the need to have “more money” and “more volunteers” than the larger churches, while in OCA the smaller church communities are dealing with the issue of having “more money” and “more volunteers” better than larger churches.



Finally, it should be noted that there was remarkable agreement among various categories of parishioners in how they estimate the urgency of the various parish needs. In other words, the answers to the question “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” provided by the persons with various levels of education, by the cradle Orthodox and converts, and by theologically “conservative-traditional” and “moderate-liberal” respondents were very similar with the whole sample of the respondents. The only exception from this general rule is the fact that the older (65+) parishioners tend to evaluate different parish needs as “very urgent” somewhat more frequently than the middle-aged (45-64) and younger (under 45) church members (especially, the needs for having “clearer vision for parish future” and “more youth involvement”). But, again, the overall differences in answers given by various generations of parishioners were rather small.

The last subject in this chapter deals with the issue which is probably equally important for all American Christian denominations – the strength of the financial commitment of their church members. The 1996 national study “Money Matters: Personal Giving in American Churches” identified four major motivations for giving to one’s church:

- Thankfulness and, especially, gratitude for the many gifts God provides and altruism;
- Reciprocity with God – giving gifts in the hopes of getting something in return;
- Reciprocity with the congregation (parish) often with the “payoff” being recognition by other members in the case of special gifts and donation of a large sum;
- Giving to the extensions of the self, because it produces feelings of joy.

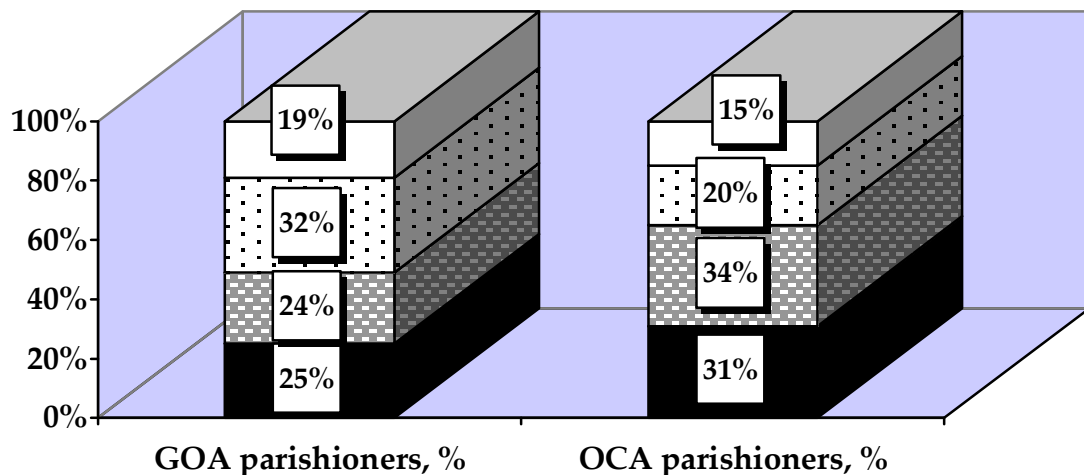
Obviously, similarly to Roman Catholic parishes and Protestant congregations, these four types of motivations for church giving are also present in American Orthodox churches.

We should note that the theme of the actual financial situation of American Orthodox parishes is beyond the limits of this study. What we were interested in is the perceived *willingness* of the GOA and OCA members to donate money to their home parishes. Clearly, the strength of the financial commitment demonstrated by Orthodox parishioners has direct and immediate implications for the economic well-being of a parish. What is also important, however, is that *desire* to contribute financially to one’s home parish constitutes one of the three major elements of stewardship understood as giving to the Church one’s time, talent and treasure. The notion of stewardship as a theological understanding of a total way of life and as returning to God a portion of gifts that God has given us (by donating time, talent and treasure) is relatively new in American Orthodox Churches. In fact, the deliberate and consistent emphasis on a stewardship model of church life is still relatively rare in American Orthodox parishes.

Hence, how do OCA and GOA lay members participating in our survey view and estimate generosity of their fellow parishioners? The questionnaire asked “How would you describe the strength of the financial commitment demonstrated by your fellow parishioners?” See Fig. 22. Clearly, the respondents from OCA parishes are significantly more satisfied with the willingness of their parish members to donate money than the survey participants from the GOA churches. Indeed, two-thirds of the OCA members participating in the study (65%) feel that either “most of our parishioners willingly contribute generously to the parish” (31%) or that “many of our parishioners have limited finances, but nevertheless they contribute what they can to the parish” (34%), while only less than half (49%) of the GOA respondents selected one of these answers. Perhaps, this difference in desire to contribute financially to the church explains, at least partially, why GOA members are also much more concerned with the need to have “more money” than the OCA respondents – the fact which was indicated previously.

**Fig. 22 Strength of financial commitment demonstrated by parishioners.**

**How would you describe the strength of the financial commitment demonstrated by your fellow parishioners? (% of respondents):**



- ☐ There is a small group of parishioners who donate most of parish contributions while most give very little
- ☐ Some of parishioners demonstrate strong financial commitment to parish, while others don't care at all
- ☒ Many parishioners have limited finances, but nevertheless they contribute what they can to parish
- ☒ Most of parishioners contribute generously to parish

We looked at the answers to the question “How would you describe the strength of the financial commitment demonstrated by your fellow parishioners?” provided by various categories of parishioners and did not find any significant difference. In other words, parishioners with various education level, older and younger respondents, cradle Orthodox and converts, theologically “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal” were basically uniform in evaluating strength of financial commitment demonstrated by the other members in their home parishes.

The crucial question which needs to be answered is: “Is there anything special about and what are the characteristics of the parishes which succeed in encouraging their members to give money and where parishioners either ‘willingly contribute generously to the parish’ or they ‘have limited finances, but nevertheless they contribute what they can to the parish’?” We will return to this important subject later.

## **V. What Parishioners Think about their Clergy: The Laity’s Vision for Orthodox Priesthood in the US**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- “Leading worship and administering sacraments” is seen by Orthodox laity as the area of priestly work which is by far more important than anything else. Three other areas of pastoral work have been also indicated frequently by parishioners among the major duties of parish clergy: “teaching parishioners about Orthodox doctrine and traditions,” “offering guidance and being spiritual role model,” and “visiting, helping and counseling parishioners;”
- The areas of pastoral work which are seen by American Orthodox laity as secondary and less important are: “providing vision and goals for the parish future,” “administering the work of a parish,” “reaching out to non-Orthodox people,” and “training parishioners for various Church ministries;”
- “Conducting worship, administering sacraments” and “offering prayer/guidance, being spiritual role model” have ***much*** greater significance for American Orthodox Christians than for the members of Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches.
- From the point of view of parishioners, “social outreach into local community” and “fundraising and financial skills” are the areas, where significant number of American Orthodox parish clergy can increase their skills: only about 50% of our respondents qualified their priests as “confident and experienced” with regard to these areas;
- Both in GOA and in OCA, in 9 out of 10 parishes, the laity feel that there is a good match between parish community and their priest;

- In a majority of parishes (53%) there is a balance between priest's and laity input on decision making so that "priests inspires parishioners to act by themselves, but acts alone if he believes it is needed." In almost one-third (32%) of parishes, the lay members are largely in charge of decision-making. In 15% of parishes the situation is opposite and "priest makes most of decisions, parishioners generally follow him;"
- Compared to other American Christian denominations, the GOA and OCA have fewer pastors who take full charge over life of a congregation and more clergy who let parishioners to be the "rulers" in the affairs of a congregation;
- Vast majority of both Orthodox laity (77%) and clergy (90%) would encourage the next generation of young men to enter the priesthood;
- Majority of GOA (60%) and OCA (65%) lay members are of opinion that the Orthodox clergy should be firm bearers of established traditions and stability rather than the messengers of changes and innovations in Church life;
- Senior parishioners (65 and older) are more in favor of clergy as promoters of changes and adaptations in Church life than the middle-aged (45-64 years old) and, especially, the younger (under 45) church members;
- More than three quarters of respondents view their parish clergy as "men set apart" and believe that ordination to the priesthood means an entirely new status which makes them different from the laity. No more than one-fourth of the GOA and OCA members feel that this special distinct status is a hindrance in creating true Christian community;
- About half (47%) of Orthodox parishioners agreed that "It is urgent that priests achieve greater social status as competent professionals in the eyes of Orthodox community;"
- Dominant majority of GOA (58%) and OCA (67%) laity are willing to obey and to recognize the ultimate authority of their priests in a parish;
- Compared to GOA parishioners, the OCA members lean more upon "cultic" model of priesthood;
- In terms of notion of priesthood, more similarity exists between clergy and laity within each jurisdiction (i.e. GOA and OCA) rather than between the priests of the two jurisdictions and the laity of the two jurisdictions;
- Of all age groups, parishioners older than 65 are stronger supporters of the "servant-leadership" model of priesthood which blurs the line of separation between the clergy and the laity and challenges ultimate authority of priest in a parish. On the contrary, the younger respondents (under 45) expressed greater preference for the "cultic" model of priesthood;

- Compared to converts to Orthodoxy, the cradle Orthodox parishioners are much stronger proponents of servant-leadership model of Orthodox priesthood: they are more vocal in supporting broader social involvement of the priests and express stronger desire for the greater social prestige of priestly vocation and challenge more frequently the unquestionable final authority of clergy in the parish life. The parishioners who are converts to Orthodoxy adhere more to cultic model of priesthood.

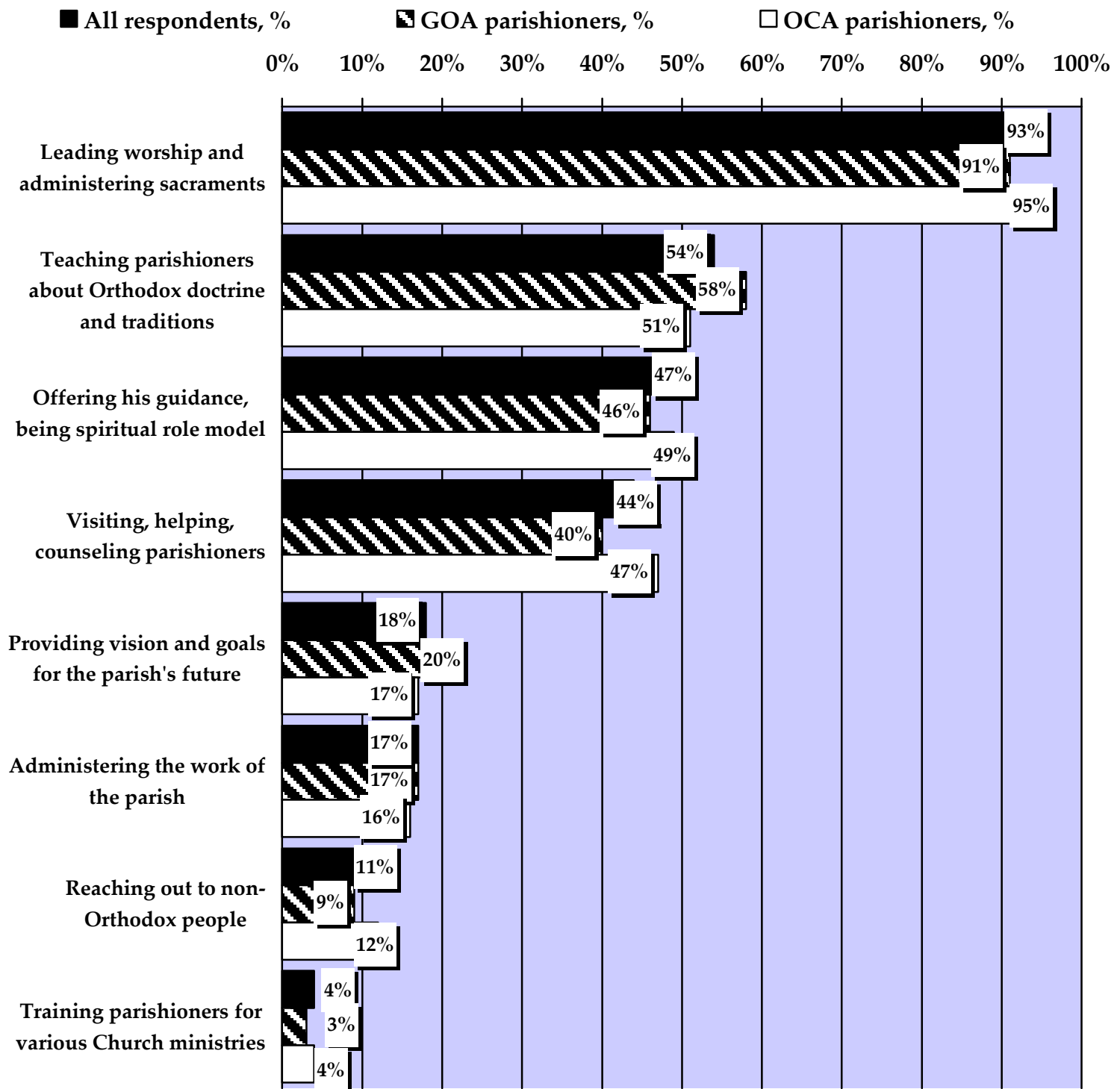
The work of a pastor is a multi-task job. While this applies to all Christian denominations, it is especially true for American Orthodox parish priests. Many of them preside over sizeable (especially in the case of GOA) parishes with little or no additional staff support. Besides leading worship and administering the sacraments, the daily work of Orthodox clergy cover many other areas: visiting and counseling members, providing religious education, reaching out into local communities and engaging into ecumenical activities with other Christian denominations, fundraising and administering the daily life of a parish - to name just a few. Clearly, the range of pastoral duties and emphasis on particular areas of pastoral leadership may vary significantly from parish to parish depending on both internal characteristics of a parish and on the local circumstances in which Orthodox community functions.

The question is: what are the *primary duties* of an Orthodox parish priest in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, from the perspective of the laity? We gave respondents a list of eight items describing different areas of pastoral work and asked them: “Out of the following, what do you think are THREE main roles that your priest actually plays in your parish.” Fig. 23 on the next page allows for three major conclusions.

First, “leading worship and administering sacraments” is seen by laity as the area which is by far more important than anything else in the work of an Orthodox parish priest. More than 90% of both GOA and OCA members selected “leading worship and administering sacraments” among their three choices. Second, three other areas of the pastoral work have been indicated relatively frequently by parishioners as the major duties of their parish clergy: “teaching parishioners about Orthodox doctrine and traditions,” “offering guidance and being a spiritual role model,” and “visiting, helping and counseling parishioners:” 44%-54% of our respondents listed these items among three main roles that the priests play in their parishes.

**Fig.23 Role of a Priest in a Parish: “What do you think are THREE MAIN roles that your priest actually plays in your parish?”**

**% of the respondents who selected the following items among their THREE choices**



Third, Fig. 23 also tells us which areas of pastoral work are seen by American Orthodox laity as secondary and less important: “providing vision and goals for the parish future,” “administering the work of a parish,” “reaching out to non-Orthodox people,” and “training parishioners for various Church ministries.” The questions which at this point remain unanswered are: “Are these later areas perceived by laity as something which is really not part of the job description of an Orthodox clergyman?” or “Are Orthodox parish priests simply not as good at ‘providing vision and goals for the parish future,’ ‘administering the work of a parish,’ ‘reaching out to non-Orthodox people,’ and ‘training parishioners for various Church ministries’ in comparison with their much better performance in ‘leading worship and administering sacraments,’ ‘teaching parishioners about Orthodox doctrine and traditions,’ ‘offering guidance and being spiritual role model,’ and ‘visiting, helping and counseling parishioners.’ Further research is needed to clarify these questions.

Fig. 23 also shows that the GOA and OCA laity responded very similarly to the question about three main roles of their parish clergy. In other words, there is no difference between GOA and OCA members in how they perceive the major and the secondary duties of their pastors. Further, various categories of parishioners (persons with various education levels, parishioners in different age, and the cradle Orthodox and the converts to Orthodoxy) also ranked the relative importance of the various duties of their parish priests in the same way.

There were some differences in opinions about three main roles of the parish clergy between persons with various theological attitudes and between parishioners attending in the smaller and in the larger parishes. In comparison with parishioners describing their approach to Church life as “moderate” or “liberal,” more persons defining themselves as theologically “conservative” or “traditional” selected “teaching parishioners about Orthodox faith and traditions” as one of the three main roles of their parish priests. To the contrary, more theologically “liberal” and “moderate” than “conservative” and “traditional” parishioners said that “visiting, counseling, helping parishioners” is one of the three major functions of the Orthodox parish clergy. Finally, comparing to the whole sample of the respondents, many more parishioners attending the largest parishes (more than 500 persons present in the church on a typical Sunday) selected “administering the work of the parish” among three main roles of their pastors: 17% and 29%.

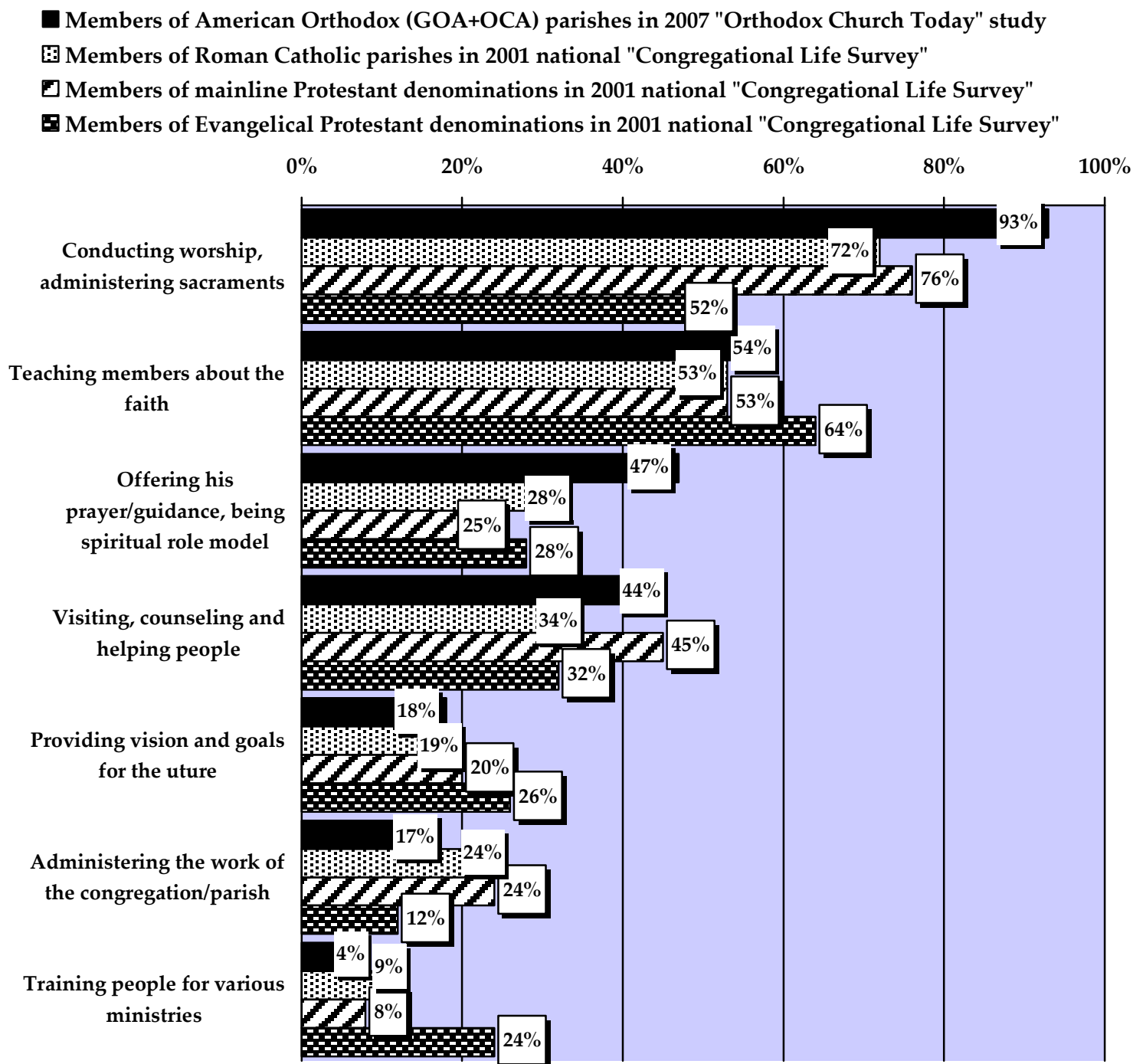
In spite of these slight variations, however, an important conclusion can be made: the American Orthodox laity are essentially homogenous in how they perceive and estimate the relative significance of the various areas of the work of their parish clergy.

How do American Orthodox Christians, the GOA and OCA laity, compare to the members of other American Christian denominations with regards to the question about main roles and functions of their pastors?

The national 2001 “US Congregational Life Survey” provided us with the largely comparable data and with good insight into this issue. See Fig. 24.

**Fig. 24 Role of a Minister/Pastor/Priest in a Congregation: “What do you think are THREE MAIN roles that your minister/pastor/priest actually carries out here?”**

**% of the respondents who selected the following items among their THREE choices**



**Note:** the data for the Roman Catholic Church and for Protestant denominations are from 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey. The data available at <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/USCLSRA.asp>



One can see that two areas of pastoral work have *much* greater significance for American Orthodox Christians than for the members of all other Christian denominations. First, “conducting worship, administering sacraments” has been selected as one of the three main roles of a pastor by 93% of Orthodox respondents in comparison with only 52%-76% in the case of Roman Catholics and Protestants. This is easy to explain. Indeed, compared to the Roman Catholic Church and, especially, Protestant denominations, in the Orthodox Church, leading worship and performing sacraments are the functions which are reserved exclusively for clergy. In other words, the worship and sacramental life of an Orthodox parish would be non-existent without presence of an ordained clergyman. Second, significantly more Orthodox parishioners (47%) selected “Offering prayer/guidance, being spiritual role model” as one of the three main roles of a pastor than this was the case among the Roman Catholics and Protestants (25%-28%). We interpret this finding as a confirmation of the commonly shared (in the Orthodox world) notion of the clergyman as a special person who is “set apart” by way of his ordination and of the spiritual authority implicitly invested into the priestly office. Later in this chapter, more data from the “Orthodox Church Today” survey will discuss this thesis.

How well are American Orthodox clergy prepared for their multiple pastoral duties and tasks from the perspective of their parishioners? We asked our respondents “There are various areas of pastoral work and practical skills required from clergy. In your opinion, how experienced and confident is your parish priest with regard to each of the items listed below?” The respondents were given a list of 17 items. For each item, they could describe their clergy as “our priest is confident and experienced in this area,” or “our priest can increase his skills in this area, but this is not a major concern for us,” or “I think that for our priest this is one of the major challenges in his work.” Tab. 11 shows proportion (%) of all respondents who selected one of the answers evaluating the skills of their priests in the seventeen areas of pastoral work.

Several observations can be made. First, in general, Orthodox laity positively view the skills and qualifications of their parish priests. With regard to 10 out of 17 areas of pastoral work, more than two thirds of the respondents said about their parish clergy that they are “confident and experienced in this area.”

Second, at the same time, there are two areas of work, where significant number of American Orthodox parish clergy can definitely increase their skills: “social outreach into local community” and “fundraising and financial skills.” Only about 50% of our respondents qualified their priests as “confident and experienced” with regard to these areas.

Third, despite the fact that about half of the respondents ***don't feel*** that their clergy are “confident and experienced” in the areas of fundraising and social outreach, very few (12-15%) expressed serious concerns about this fact by saying “I think that for our priest this is one of the major challenges in his work.” Instead, a significant number of parishioners (33%-40%) opted for the “sedative” answers that “our priest can increase his skills in this area, but this is not a major concern for us.” This finding is somewhat puzzling. We know from practical experience that most American Orthodox parishes are not as good at social outreach programs and activities as the congregations of the Roman Catholic Church and of the various Protestant denominations. We saw also in the previous chapter that only 28% of the respondents said that the statement “the local community is well informed about our parish” describes their parish “quite well.” Similarly, we saw in the previous chapter that the need for “more money” is seen as the most urgent one by both GOA and OCA parishioners. And yet only relatively small number of parishioners are seriously worried about necessity for their clergy to increase their skills in the areas of fundraising and social outreach.

**Tab. 11 Qualifications of the parish clergy:** “There are various areas of pastoral work and practical skills required from clergy. In your opinion, how experienced and confident is your parish priest with regard to each of the items listed below?” (all respondents, % on each row add to 100%)

	Our priest is confident and experienced in this area.	Our priest can increase his skills in this area, but this is not a major concern for us.	I think that for our priest this is one of the major challenges in his work.
Ability to refer to and to interpret Scripture easily	87	11	2
Ability to provide religious education for parishioners	82	14	4
Ability to relate social issues to Orthodox doctrine	81	16	3
Ability to give spiritual direction for parishioners	81	15	4
Ability to preach well	80	15	5
Ability to counsel and help parishioners with everyday life issues.	78	17	5
Knowledge of other religious traditions	75	22	3
Evangelism and working with converts	73	20	7
Working with youth	71	21	8
Family counseling	70	24	6
Ability to be a good parish administrator	69	24	7
Ability to celebrate liturgy in languages other than English	63	32	5
Ability to deal with a conflict in a parish	63	26	11
Promoting a clear vision and goals for parish's future	62	29	9
Ability to communicate in languages other than English	56	38	6
Social outreach into local community	52	33	15
Fundraising and financial skills	48	40	12

Tab. 12 shows that GOA and OCA laity are similar in terms of the small proportion of persons who evaluate negatively the various skills of their parish priests by saying “I think that for our priest this or that is one of the major challenges in his work.” We did not find any significant variations in evaluating clergy’ skills with regard to 17 areas of pastoral work by the persons in various age categories, by parishioners with the various education level (although college graduates were somewhat more critical), by the cradle Orthodox and by the converts to Orthodoxy, and by the theologically “conservative-traditional” and “moderate-liberal” parish members.

**Tab. 12 Qualifications of the parish clergy:** “There are various areas of pastoral work and practical skills required from clergy. In your opinion, how experienced and confident is your parish priest with regard to each of the items listed below?”

% of respondents reporting that “I think that for our priest this is one of the major challenges in his work.”			
	All respondents, %	GOA, %	OCA, %
Social outreach into local community	15	15	14
Fundraising and financial skills	12	12	12
Ability to deal with a conflict in a parish	11	12	10
Promoting a clear vision and goals for parish’s future	9	8	9
Working with youth	8	8	8
Ability to be a good parish administrator	7	7	6
Evangelism and working with converts	7	7	7
Family counseling	6	6	5
Ability to communicate in languages other than English	6	3	8
Ability to preach well	5	6	4
Ability to counsel and help parishioners with everyday life issues.	5	6	4
Ability to celebrate liturgy in languages other than English	5	2	7
Ability to provide religious education for parishioners	4	4	3
Ability to give spiritual direction for parishioners	4	5	3
Ability to relate social issues to Orthodox doctrine	3	4	2
Knowledge of other religious traditions	3	4	2
Ability to refer to and to interpret Scripture easily	2	2	1

As noted earlier, in the USA, various Orthodox parishes organize their internal lives and interact with the outside (non-Orthodox) community in very different ways. Accordingly, the nuances and circumstances of the work of an Orthodox priest also vary significantly from parish to parish. Put differently, there is no one uniform “job description” for an Orthodox priest in the US. The combination of particular professional skills and personal characteristics which are needed to be a “good shepherd” is unique for each parish. Therefore, for any given parish the crucial question is: “Is there a good match between the personality of an Orthodox clergyman and characteristics and needs of this particular parish?” We asked the respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement “In general there is a good match between our parish and our priest.” The good message is that in 9 out of 10 parishes, both in GOA and OCA, the laity feel that there is a good match between parish community and their priest. See Tab. 13 on the next page.

**Tab. 13** “In general there is a good match between our parish and our priest.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
GOA, %	89	5	6
OCA, %	92	3	5
Total, %	91	4	5

Nobody would challenge the thesis that each Orthodox priest is expected to be a leader of the local community of the Orthodox faithful. The question is, however, *what type and style* of pastoral leadership is characteristic for the American Orthodox parish clergy at the new century’s beginning?

In his influential book “Evolving Visions of the Priesthood,” Dean Hoge distinguished between two models of priesthood and pastoral leadership among American Roman Catholic clergy: the “cultic” and the “servant-leader” models. The first “cultic” model placed central importance on worship and it saw the priest as mainly provider of sacraments. It implied also that clergy would keep certain distance from everyday social life. Solely by virtue of their ordination, priests were accorded high status and influence. In the “cultic” model parishioners put their pastor on a pedestal, as a mediator between themselves and God. (Hoge 2003: 10). Quite differently, the “servant-leader” model views priests as sharing the human condition with all the baptized (Schwartz 1989). It “de-emphasized the priest’s separateness and special status, placing himself in the twin roles of servant and leader within the community of believers” (Hoge 2003: 11). That is, in the servant-leader model, the clergy-laity distinction is much less important than in cultic model. Accordingly, the servant-leader model of priesthood means also the leadership of the faithful in the parish life requiring from clergy a great deal of collaboration with laity.

Where do American Orthodox clergy stand with regard to these two different models of priesthood, from the point of view of their parishioners? To what extent does their leadership style include collaboration with parish lay members? How “much space” is accorded to American Orthodox laity for the decision making in their home parishes? Several questions in our survey explored this subject.

First we asked parishioners whether they agree or disagree with the statement about Orthodox priests in general: “Most priests don’t expect the laity to be leaders, just followers.” Only 17% of parishioners (15% in OCA and 19% in GOA) feel that American Orthodox clergy don’t expect lay members to take leadership roles in parish life, while almost two thirds (62%) of the respondents expressed their disagreement with this statement. See Tab. 14 on the next page.

**Tab. 14** “Most priests don’t expect the laity to be leaders, just followers.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
<b>GOA, %</b>	19	62	19
<b>OCA, %</b>	15	62	23
<b>Total, %</b>	17	62	21

Further, there was virtually no difference in responses to this statement from persons in various age categories and with various education levels, from the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and from persons who described their approach to Church life as “conservative-traditional” or “moderate-liberal.” Hence, the dominant majority of American Orthodox laity *don’t feel* that clergy deny lay members the possibility to hold leadership positions.

We then asked more specific questions about the particular parish priest of the respondents: “Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your priest?” See Tab. 15. Several observations can be made. First, in a dominant majority of parishes (53%) there appears to be a good balance between priest’s and laity’s input on decision making when “priests inspires parishioners to act by themselves, but acts alone if he believes it is needed.” Second, the remaining parishes are divided unequally in two very distinct groups. In almost one-third (32%) of parishes, the lay members are largely in charge of decision-making when the clergy either “act mainly on goals that parishioners have settled” or “parishioners come up with most of initiatives and make most of decisions about parish’s directions and programs.” In 15% of parishes the situation is opposite and “priests makes of decisions, parishioners generally follow him.” Put differently, it seems that in the vast majority of American Orthodox parishes the laity have either significant or even decisive impact on the every-day life of a parish. Third, there is no significant difference between GOA and OCA in proportion of parishes with the various styles of the leadership of their clergy.

**Tab. 15.** Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your priest?

	GOA, %	OCA, %	Total, %
Our priest makes most of decisions, parishioners generally follow him	17	12	15
Our priest inspires parishioners to act by themselves, but acts alone if he believes that it is needed	51	55	53
Our priest acts mainly on goals that parishioners have settled, although he tries to influence their decisions	25	22	23
Parishioners come up with most of initiatives and make most of the decisions about parish’s directions and programs	7	11	9

How do American Orthodox Churches compare to other Christian denominations in the style of the pastoral leadership of their clergy? The data from already quoted 2001 national “US Congregational Life Survey” help us to respond to this question. See Tab. 16 on the next page.

**Tab. 16** “Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your pastor, minister or priest (%)?”

	Roman Catholics, %	Mainline Protestants, %	Evangelical Protestants, %
Leadership that tends to take charge	25	19	23
Leadership that inspires people to take action	51	57	61
Leadership that acts on the goals that people here have been involved in setting	18	20	14
Leadership where the people start most things	6	4	2

**Source:** 2001 the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. The data available at <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/USCLSRA.asp>

One can see that, there is no significant difference between GOA and OCA, on the one hand, and the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations, on the other hand, in the proportion of pastors who manage to balance and share harmoniously authority with the laity. At the same time, compared to other American Christian denominations, Orthodox Churches have fewer pastors who take full charge over life of a congregation and more clergy who let parishioners to be the “rulers” in the congregation’s affairs.

The next question is “How much wisdom and advice do American Orthodox clergy borrow from their parish members?” We asked the respondents “To what extent does your parish priest take into account the ideas of parishioners?” The vast majority of both GOA (54%) and OCA (63%) responded: “to a great extent.” Very few of GOA (6%) and OCA (4%) members feel that their parish clergy pay little or no attention to the ideas of parishioners. See Tab. 17.

**Tab. 17** To what extent does your parish priest take into account the ideas of parishioners? (%)

	GOA, %	OCA, %	Total, %
To a great extent	54	63	59
To some extent	40	33	36
To a small extent or not at all	6	4	5

The comparable data from the 2001 “US Congregational Life Survey” show that proportion of Orthodox parishes where clergy take into account the ideas of parishioners either “to a great extent,” or “to some extent,” or “to a small extent or not at all” is very similar with the mainstream American Christianity – the Roman Catholic and various Protestant Churches. See Tab. 18.

**Tab. 18** To what extent does the minister, pastor or priest here take into account the ideas of those who worship here? (%)

	Roman Catholics, %	Mainline Protestants, %	Evangelical Protestants, %
To a great extent	54	58	59
To some extent	37	38	34
To a small extent or not at all	9	4	7

**Source:** 2001 the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. The data available at <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/USCLSRA.asp>

We conclude that there is no significant difference between American Orthodox Churches and other Christian denominations in the degree of sharing authority and co-operation between their clergy and laity.

So far we have looked mainly at opinions of laity about their particular home parish priests. What do laity think about Orthodox clergy in the USA in general? The remainder of this chapter will provide insight into laity's vision for the Orthodox priesthood in America.

We learned from the survey that the vast majority of parishioners feel that in general parish clergy manage their pastoral duties quite well. Indeed, 87% of both GOA and OCA members agreed with the statement "On the whole parish priests do a good job." See Tab. 19.

**Tab. 19** "On the whole, parish priests do a good job."

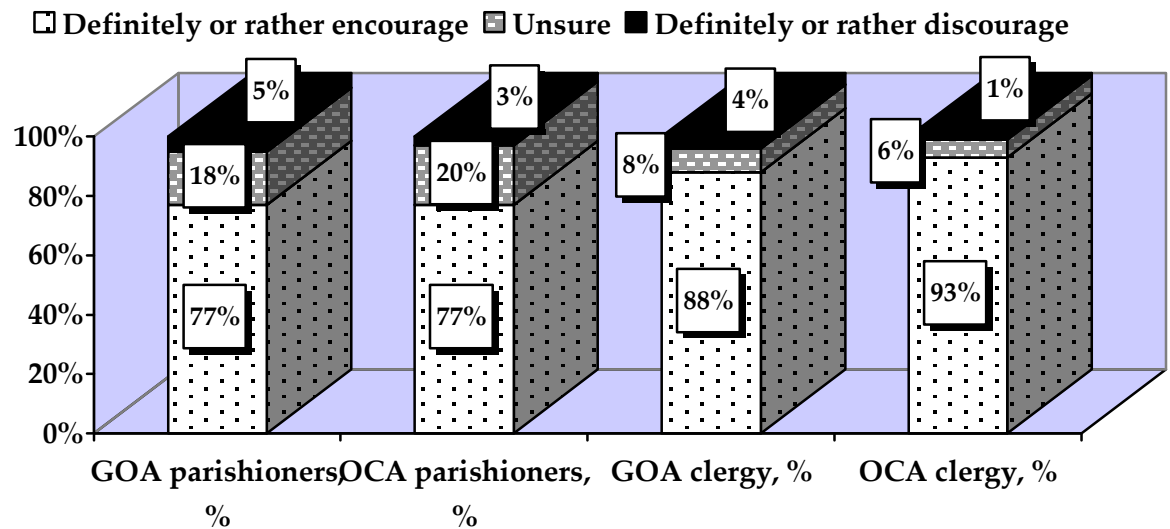
	"Agree"	"Disagree"	"Neutral or unsure"
<b>GOA, %</b>	87	4	9
<b>OCA, %</b>	87	2	11
<b>Total, %</b>	87	3	10

Being professional clergy in 21<sup>st</sup> century America is, probably, not seen as a "dream choice" of occupation by most people. Neither is this something which is associated with a prestigious social position in society. The salaries of a dominant majority of pastors in most Christian churches are very modest (in comparison to the qualified college educated professionals in other sectors of the economy), while the emotional pressure put on them is high and the work hours are long. Given all these considerations, would Orthodox Church members rather encourage or rather discourage their sons if they would decide to enter priesthood?

Our survey asked "If you had a son and he considered becoming a priest, would you encourage or rather discourage him?" More than three quarters (77%) of the respondents answered "Definitely or rather encourage." In our earlier 2006 national study of American Orthodox clergy (Krindatch 2006) we asked parish priests similar question: "Would you rather encourage or rather discourage young men who are considering priesthood as their vocation?" Fig. 25 shows that only tiny proportion of both GOA and OCA clergy (1%-4%) and GOA and OCA laity (3%-5%) would "definitely or rather discourage" young men from becoming an Orthodox priest.

**Fig. 25 Question for clergy: “Would you rather encourage or rather discourage young men who are considering priesthood as their vocation?”**

**Question for laity: “If you had a son and he considered becoming a priest, would you encourage or rather discourage him?”**



Responding to the question about encouraging or discouraging their sons to become priests, the laity were somewhat more likely than clergy to choose the answer “Unsure.” Yet, the message is clear: by far dominant majority of both Orthodox laity (77%) and clergy (88%-93%) would encourage the next generation of young men to enter priesthood.

We should note, however, that idea of their sons becoming Orthodox priests received different degree of support among parishioners in various age categories and by the persons with different theological stance. In general:

- The younger parishioners in the age under 45 are more likely to “definitely or rather encourage” their sons to become Orthodox clergy than the middle-aged (45-64) or senior church members in the age of 65 and older (81%, 79% and 68% respectively);
- The persons who described their theological position as “conservative” or “traditional” are also more likely to “definitely or rather encourage” their sons to become Orthodox clergy than the persons who defined their approach to Church life as “moderate-liberal” (83%, 79%, 68%).



A careful examination of the two thousand years long history of Orthodox Christianity reveals remarkable flexibility and adaptability in the Church life (Taft 2006). At the same time, the commonly shared and “agreed upon” perception is that Orthodox Christianity praises adherence to tradition and emphasizes continuity and stability. Indeed, generally speaking, changes and innovations in the institutional Church are accepted rather grudgingly and only if proven absolutely necessary and approved properly by Church hierarchy.

This distinct feature of Orthodox Church, a strong emphasis on keeping the things “the way they are,” can be seen both as its strength and, at the same time, as its major challenge. Indeed, two difficult questions facing the Church are:

- how to keep a proper balance between supposedly once-and-forever established traditions and changing social realities?
- how to adapt the assumingly universal Church traditions and rules to the various local contexts in which Orthodox Christianity functions?

For several reasons, here, in America, these questions are especially urgent. First, Orthodox Christianity in the US is a minority religious group. Being a minority and in order to avoid social marginalization, the Orthodox community has in many ways adapted to mainstream American culture. In Church life, hierarchs, clergy and lay leaders alike cannot pretend that, for instance, the issues of ordination of women or of same-sex marriage among Church members are simply not present. The strong ethnic identity and the sense of close-knit community which is culturally and religiously distinct from the wider society were fundamental for the earlier generations of Orthodox believers in the US. In the past, this helped American Orthodox Churches to keep established patterns of church life, to avoid changes and to expect taken-for-granted obedience of their faithful. Today, when the strength of the ethnic values and sentiments has declined significantly, the Orthodox Churches cannot rely any longer on the unconditional loyalty of their members based simply on sharing common ethnic ancestry.

Second, the strong notion of religious pluralism has been historically one of the foundational principles upon which American society was built. As prominent sociologist Peter Berger pointed out, the conditions of an ever-expanding market of religious options force American churches to compete in retaining or gaining the adherence of the free-to-choose population. And this task proved to be especially difficult for churches with a claim to exclusive authority and a history of relying on the state to enforce a religious monopoly (which to a large degree was the case of Orthodoxy). On the level of individual religious consciousness, religious pluralism means a shift from religion as a taken-for-granted or inherited reality to religion as a matter of personal voluntary and deliberate choice (Berger 2003: 34).

Put differently, in America, it would be seen as perfectly acceptable for an Orthodox Christian to leave the Church which is unwilling to meet changing expectations and aspirations of the new generations of her faithful and to join another Church. However, within American Orthodox community, this is still seen negatively.

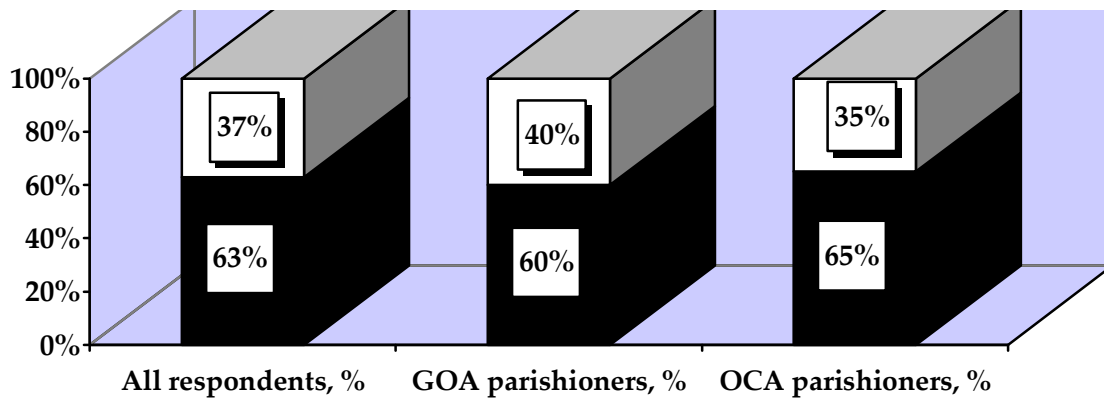
Third, the notion of unquestionable hierarchical authority and highly centralized church administration are fundamental for the Orthodox Church. For a number of historic reasons, however, the factor of “congregationalism” has always been present in the Orthodox parishes in the USA to a much greater extent than in the Old World. According to Fr. Tomas Hopko, “Orthodox parishes and dioceses in North America today are *voluntary associations* of like-minded Orthodox Christians organized for purposes *determined by their members*.” The reality is that “a parish belongs to the diocese of its choice, most often *on its own terms*” (Hopko 2003: 1-2). The “congregationalism” of American Orthodox parishes has its roots in the ways how many of them have been founded. Generally, most parishes in the US were not and are not created by the hierarchy of the Church. Rather it is typically a group of lay people who organize a community and church, then petition for reception into a particular jurisdiction. In many parts of the US, the “congregationalism” and significant local autonomy of the American Orthodox parishes are further augmented by the geographic distances among them and by the scant communications between them and their diocesan centers. Overall, in the US, the individual parishes have relative flexibility and freedom in making decisions locally about either embracing certain innovations or avoiding any changes in Church life.

Under these circumstances, the personal approach of a parish priest as the spiritual leader of the local Orthodox community, his willingness to initiate innovations or, to the contrary, his firm rejection of any changes have a very strong impact on the patterns of Orthodox parish life in America. Therefore, it was important to examine the opinions of the Orthodox laity on the role of a parish priest as being either promoter of the changes in the Church or, to the contrary, the bearer of once-and-forever established traditions.

Our survey asked respondents to choose one of the two statements describing opposite attitudes of clergy towards possible changes in the Church: “In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests should be open to changes and adaptations of established Church traditions to contemporary realities” or “In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests follow the inherited traditions and practices of the Church.” Fig. 26 shows that majority of both GOA (60%) and OCA (65%) lay members are of opinion that the Orthodox clergy should be firm bearers of established traditions and stability rather than the messengers of changes and innovations in the Church life.

**Fig. 26 Please, choose ONE of the following two statements**

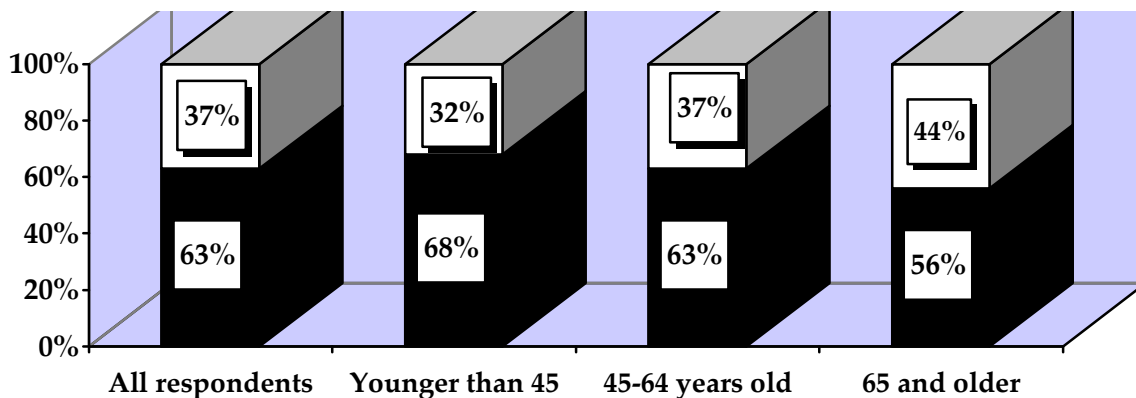
- ☐ In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests should be open to changes and adaptations of established Church traditions to contemporary realities
- ☒ In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests follow the inherited traditions and practices of the Church



Various categories of respondents, however, expressed different opinions on the preferable attitudes of clergy towards innovations in the Church. First and somewhat surprising, we found that the senior parishioners (age 65 and older) are significantly more in favor of the clergy as promoters of the changes and adaptations in the Church life than the middle-aged (45-64 years old) and, especially, the younger (under 45) church members. See Fig. 27. How to explain this finding? Does it reflect the overall conservative shift among the younger generation of the faithful? Or does it simply mean that the experiences of the older laity taught them that the innovations and changes are “unavoidable” part of the Church life in the US? More research is needed to respond these questions.

**Fig. 27 Please, choose ONE of the following two statements**

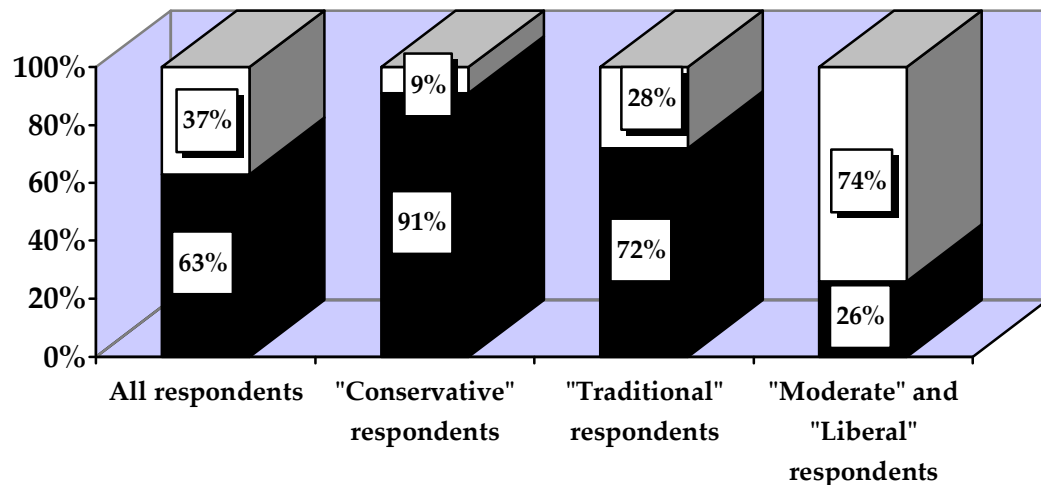
- ☐ In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests should be open to changes and adaptations of established Church traditions to contemporary realities
- ☒ In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests follow the inherited traditions and practices of the Church



Second and predictably, the laity who defined their theological outlook and approach to Church life as either “conservative,” or “traditional” or “moderate-liberal” are deeply divided among themselves over issue of the desirable attitude of a priest towards changes in the Church. See Fig. 28. Not surprisingly, 91% of “conservative” and 72% of “traditional” lay members believe that “in a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests follow the inherited traditions and practices of the Church.” Conversely, 74% of “moderate-liberal” parishioners feel that “in a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests should be open to changes and adaptations of established Church traditions to contemporary realities.”

**Fig. 28 Please, choose ONE of the following two statements**

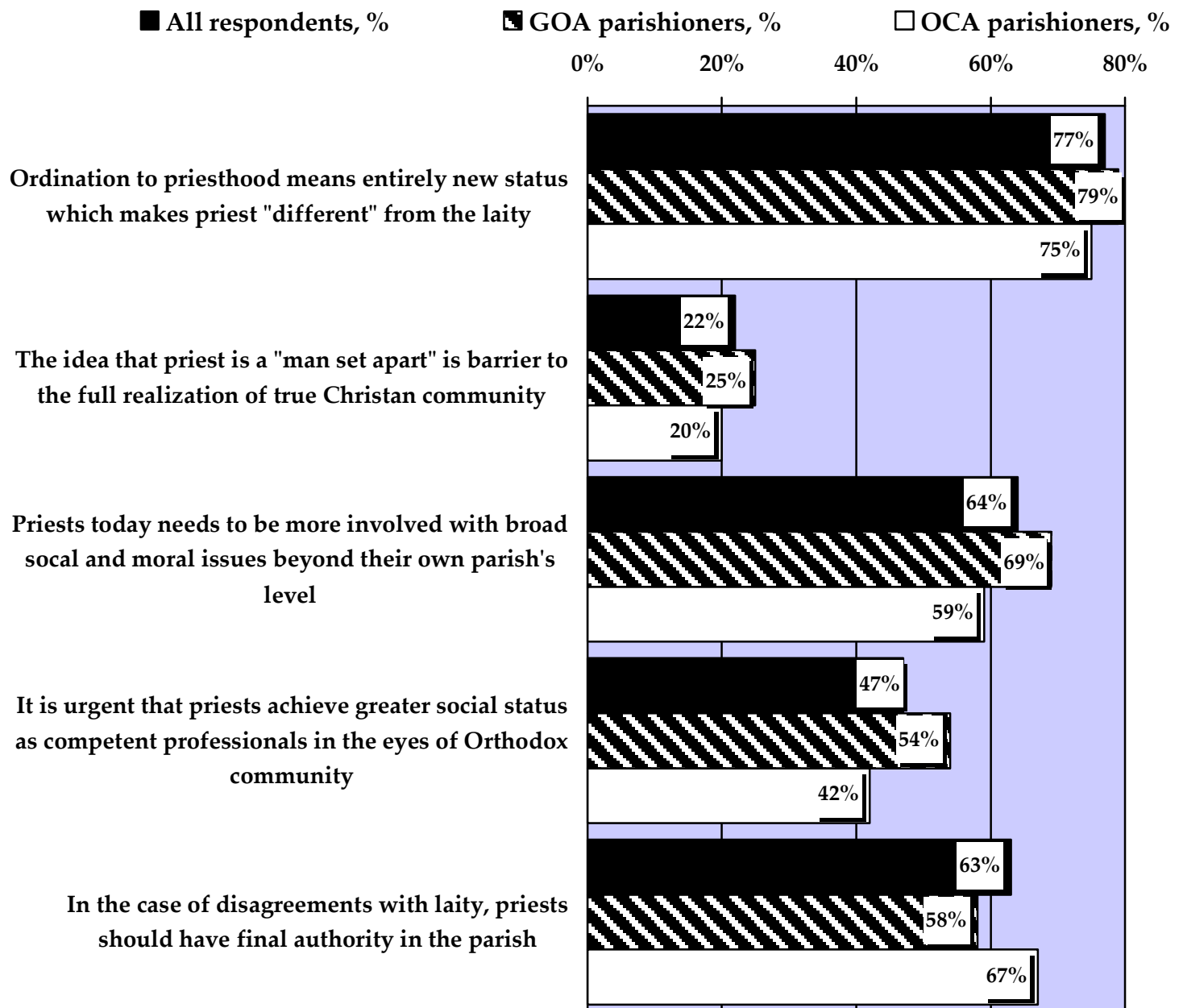
- ☐ In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests should be open to changes and adaptations of established Church traditions to contemporary realities
- ☒ In a rapidly changing world, it is essential that priests follow the inherited traditions and practices of the Church



Five statements examined opinions of the Orthodox laity about status of a priest within and beyond parish community. Fig. 29. shows proportion of GOA and OCA parishioners who agreed (either “strongly agreed” or “rather agreed”) with each of these statements.

**Fig.29 Attitudes of GOA and OCA Laity to the Status of Priesthood:**

**% of GOA and OCA parishioners who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



The first and the second statements - “Ordination to the priesthood means an entirely new status which makes priests ‘different’ from laity” and “The idea that priest is a man ‘set apart’ is a barrier to the full realization of true Christian community” - deal with the same issue: how distinct is the status of a priest from the laity and how clear should be the borders between clergy and people in the pews. The responses to these statements tell us which model of priesthood the laity favor more: the “cultic” model or the “servant-leadership” model. The survey indicate that more than three quarters of respondents view their parish clergy as “men set apart.” 79% of GOA and 75% of OCA parishioners believe that ordination to the priesthood means an entirely new status which makes them different from the laity. No more than one-fourth of the GOA (25%) and OCA (20%) members feel that this special distinct status is a hindrance in creating true Christian community.

The third statement - “Priests today need to be more involved with broad social and moral issues beyond their own parish’s level” - examines the opinions of laity on the significance of social ministry as a part of pastoral duties. It should be noted that this statement does not undermine the importance of the sacramental liturgical functions of the priesthood, but suggests that clergy should also be socially involved beyond the level of their own parishes. Almost two-thirds of all respondents (69% of GOA and 59% of OCA) agreed with this statement. The fact that a vast majority of Orthodox laity recognize the significance of social ministry as part of pastoral duties is an important finding. The idea of social ministry as an integral part of priestly vocation is relatively new for American Orthodox Churches. According to the national “Ministry in America” study published in 1980, the Orthodox clergy identified most completely with the “sacramental–liturgical model” of priesthood. In this model, clergy were called to have a *singular focus* on the transcendent and holy: on leading sacramental worship, providing communion, and teaching. At that time, counseling, social outreach and the development of community services were subtly disregarded or even discouraged in many American Orthodox parishes (Harakas 1980).

The fourth statement - “It is urgent that priests achieve greater social status as competent professionals in the eyes of Orthodox community” - is related to the image of priestly vocation as an occupation which requires particular training, skills, and experience. It voices a concern that priests should become more like other professionals, more competent in their defined areas, and, as a result, higher in their social status in general. About half (47%) of all respondents agreed that “It is urgent that priests achieve greater social status as competent professionals in the eyes of Orthodox community,” but there was certain difference in responses to this statement between GOA and OCA members. Dominant majority (54%) of GOA parishioners agreed with this statement in comparison with only 42% among OCA laity. In other words, the GOA members are more concerned with the professional status and image of Orthodox priesthood than OCA laity.

The fifth statement, “In the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish,” involves a subject which was already discussed in this chapter: the leadership style of American Orthodox parish priests. We saw earlier that most laity feel that they are given significant part in decision making in a parish and that their ideas are properly taken into account and utilized by the clergy. However, the fact that laity are *given* substantial possibility to partake in decision making and in the shaping the life of a parish does not mean that parishioners explicitly *possess* the final authority in a parish.

The statement “In the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish” investigates an important question: who, clergy or laity, should have final say in a parish, if the “shepherds” and their “flock” would have different visions for their parishes. The data in Fig. 29 show that a strong majority of both GOA (58%) and OCA (67%) members are willing to obey and to recognize the ultimate authority of their priests.

One more observation should be made with regard to data in Fig. 29. Comparing to GOA parishioners, the OCA members lean more upon “cultic” model of priesthood. Indeed, fewer OCA than GOA respondents feel that the status of the priests as “men set apart” is barrier to the full realization of Christian community, that clergy should become more socially involved, and that it is urgent for the priests to achieve greater social status and to become competent professionals in the eyes of the Orthodox community. On the contrary, more OCA than GOA members are willing to subordinate themselves to the unquestionable final authority of the parish clergy.

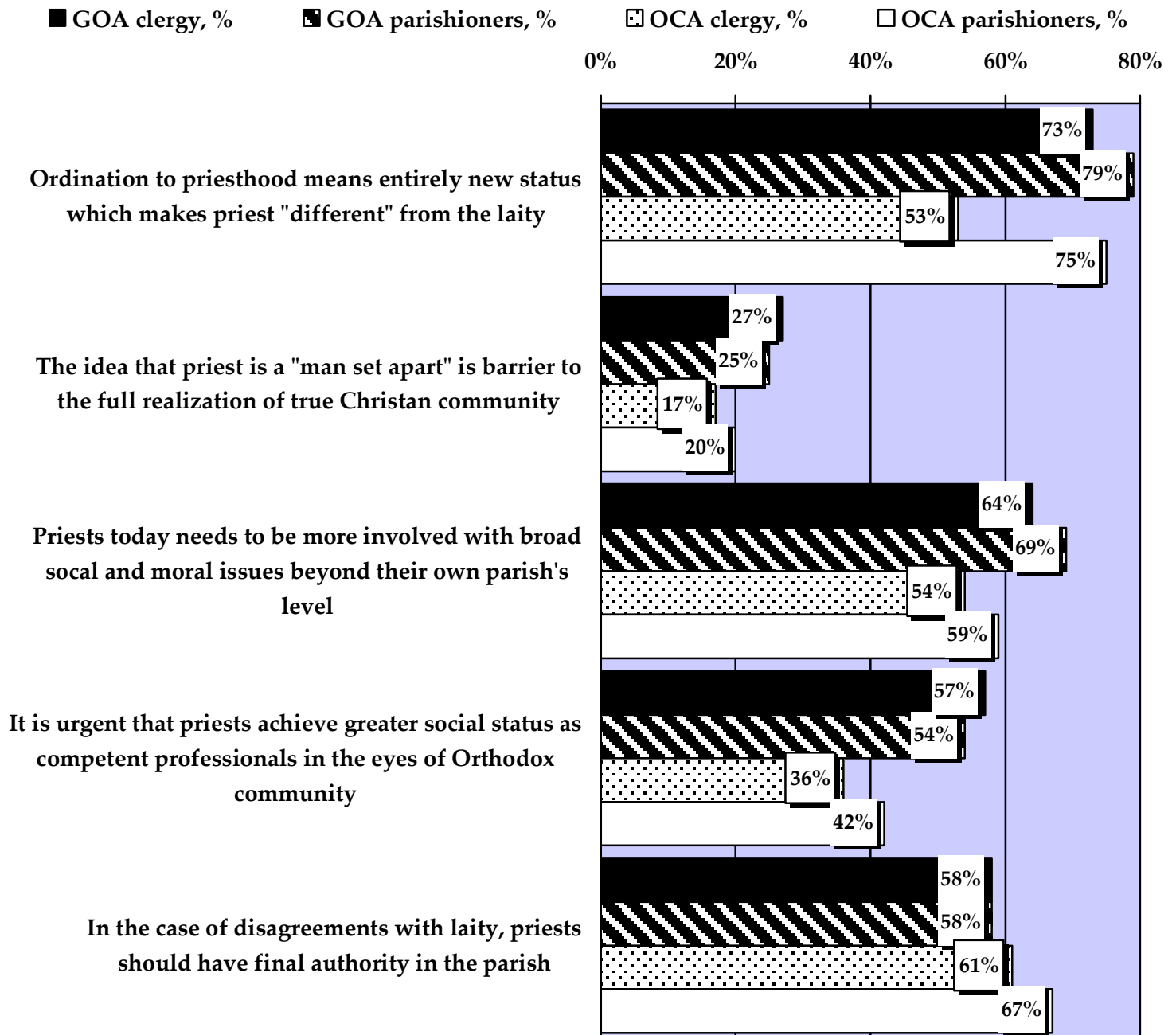
How do the opinions of Orthodox laity about the status of Orthodox priesthood in the US compare to those by the clergy? The data from our 2006 national study “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America” (Krindatch 2006) allow to respond this question. See Fig. 30. Two important conclusions should be made.

First, there is no significant difference in approaches of clergy and laity towards the status of an Orthodox priest. With only one exception, roughly the same proportion of GOA and OCA clergy and laity agreed with five statements on the status of priesthood. The single exception is much stronger agreement with the statement “Ordination to priesthood means an entirely new status which makes priest different from the laity” expressed by the OCA laity (75%) than by OCA clergy (53%). Second and most importantly, in terms of notion of priesthood, more similarity exists between clergy and laity within each jurisdiction (i.e. GOA and OCA) rather than between the priests of the two jurisdictions and the laity of the two jurisdictions. That is, in both jurisdictions (denominations) clergy and lay members have more similarities with one another in their approach to the status of the priesthood than the GOA and OCA clergy as one group, and the GOA and OCA laity as another group.

Put differently, in American Orthodoxy, the denominational polity and culture seem to have a stronger impact on personal attitudes towards the status of priesthood than belonging to either clergy or laity.

**Fig.30 Laity and Clergy Attitudes to the Status of Priesthood:**

**% of GOA and OCA parishioners and clergy who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**

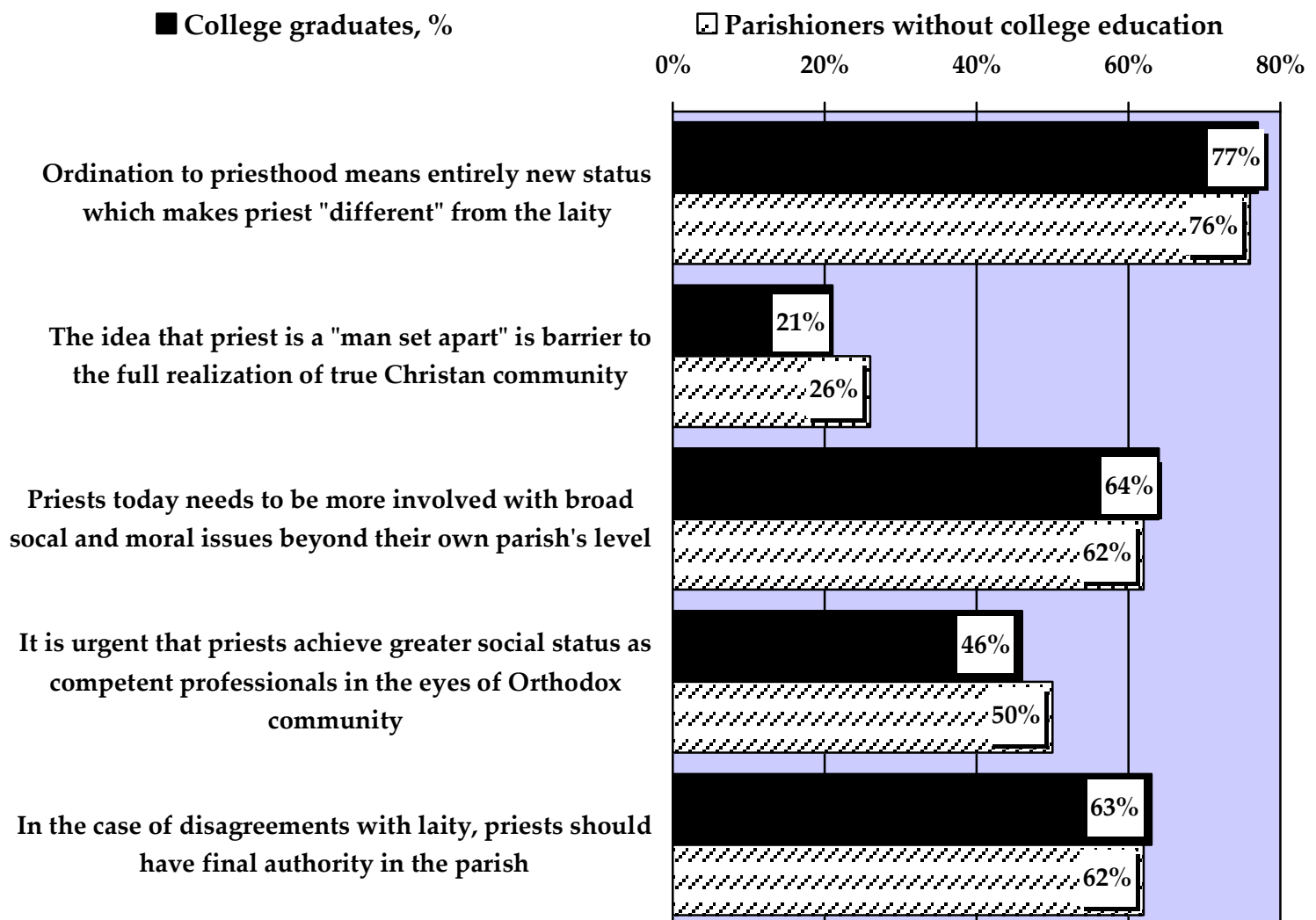




How big is the difference in opinions about the status of an Orthodox priest between persons with the various education levels, between younger and older parishioners, between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy and between those who identified their approaches to Church life as either “conservative,” or “traditional,” or “moderate-liberal?”

Fig. 31. shows that education level of parishioners has NO influence on their attitudes towards the status of a parish priests. College graduates and persons without a college degree expressed virtually the same level of agreement with all five statements about status of priesthood.

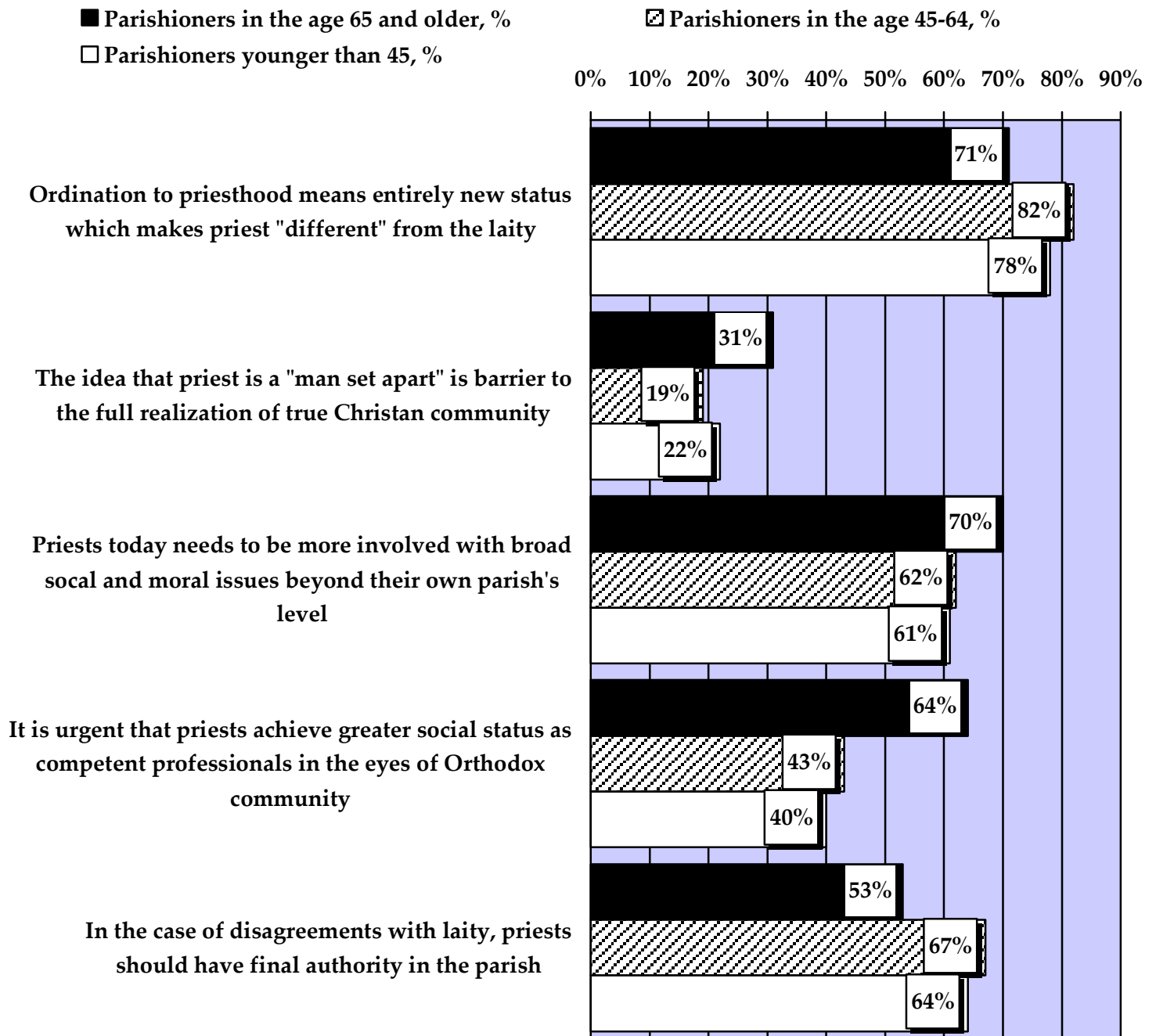
**Fig.31 Education of GOA and OCA Laity and their Attitudes to the Status of Priesthood:**  
**% of GOA and OCA parishioners with various education levels who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



Quite differently, the age of the respondents has certain impact on the attitudes of parishioners to the status of a parish priest. See Fig. 33. Several findings should be mentioned.

**Fig.33 Age of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to the Status of Priesthood:**

**% of GOA and OCA parishioners in various age categories who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**

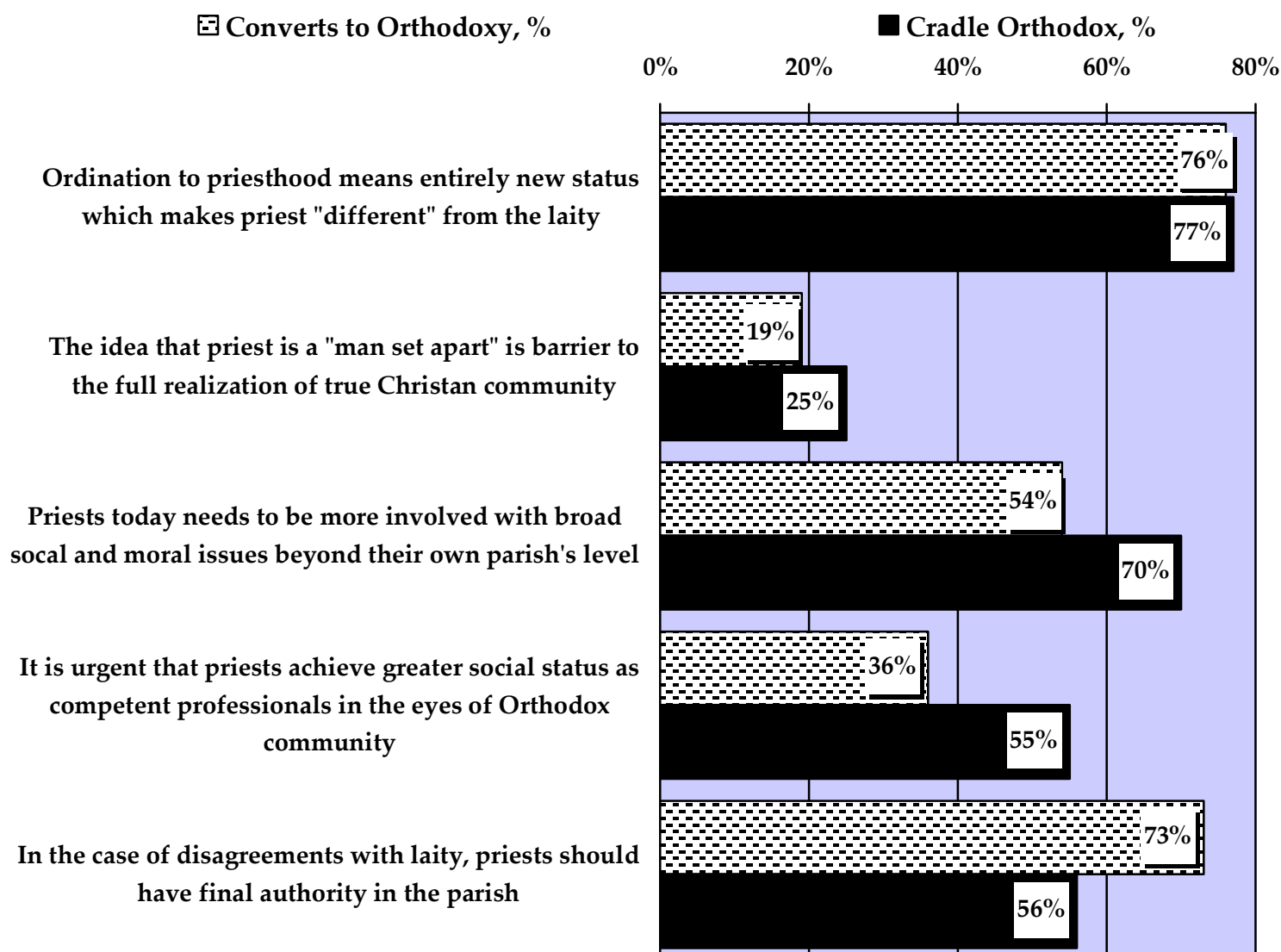


First, the position of the senior (65 and older) and middle-aged (45-64) parishioners on the line of separation between clergy and laity is different from the persons younger than 45. The senior and middle-aged respondents are more likely to agree with the statement about the special, distinct from the laity, status of a priest which is achieved through ordination. At the same time, compared to both younger and middle-aged respondents, the senior parishioners feel more strongly that “The idea that the priest is a ‘man set apart’ is a barrier to the full realization of true Christian community.” Our guess is that this apparently contradictory position of the older church members can be explained by the fact that they base their responses not only on the formal theology of priesthood but also on their personal experiences. Put differently, the senior parishioners are aware of the special status of the priest accorded to him by way of ordination. At the same time, their life experiences tell them that the strong borders separating laity and clergy within the Church could also be a hindrance in process of building a healthy and vibrant parish.

Second, the older parishioners are significantly more concerned than the middle-aged and younger respondents with the idea of greater social involvement of the Orthodox clergy and, especially with the needs for a greater social prestige of priestly vocation. Third, the senior parishioners are less likely to accept the ultimate authority of the parish clergy over laity than the middle-aged and younger church members: only 53% of the respondents in the age older than 65 agreed with the statement “In the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish,” in comparison with 64% among respondents younger than 45 and 67% among respondents in the age 45-64. Overall, it appears that of all age groups, the senior parishioners older than 65 are stronger supporters of the “servant-leadership” model of priesthood blurring the line of separation between the clergy and the laity and challenging ultimate authority of priest in a parish. To the contrary, compared with the middle-aged and, especially, senior church members, the younger respondents (under 45) expressed greater preference for the “cultic” model of priesthood.

There were some remarkable distinctions in the attitudes to the status of priesthood between cradle Orthodox parishioners and the church members who are converts to Orthodoxy. See Fig. 34.

**Fig.34 Religious Upbringing of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to the Status of Priesthood:**  
**% of cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



More cradle Orthodox (25%) than convert laity (19%) feel that the special status of a priest as “man set apart” is barrier to the full realization of Christian community. Similarly many more cradle Orthodox (70%) than convert respondents (54%) agreed that “Priests today need to be more involved with broad social and moral issues beyond their own parish’s level” and that “It is urgent that priests achieve greater social status as competent professionals in the eyes of Orthodox community” (55% and 36% respectively). Finally, cradle Orthodox are significantly less inclined to accept the ultimate authority of the priest in a parish. Indeed, only 56% of cradle Orthodox agreed with the statement “In the case of disagreement with laity, priests should have final authority in a parish,” while 73% of converts to Orthodoxy did so.

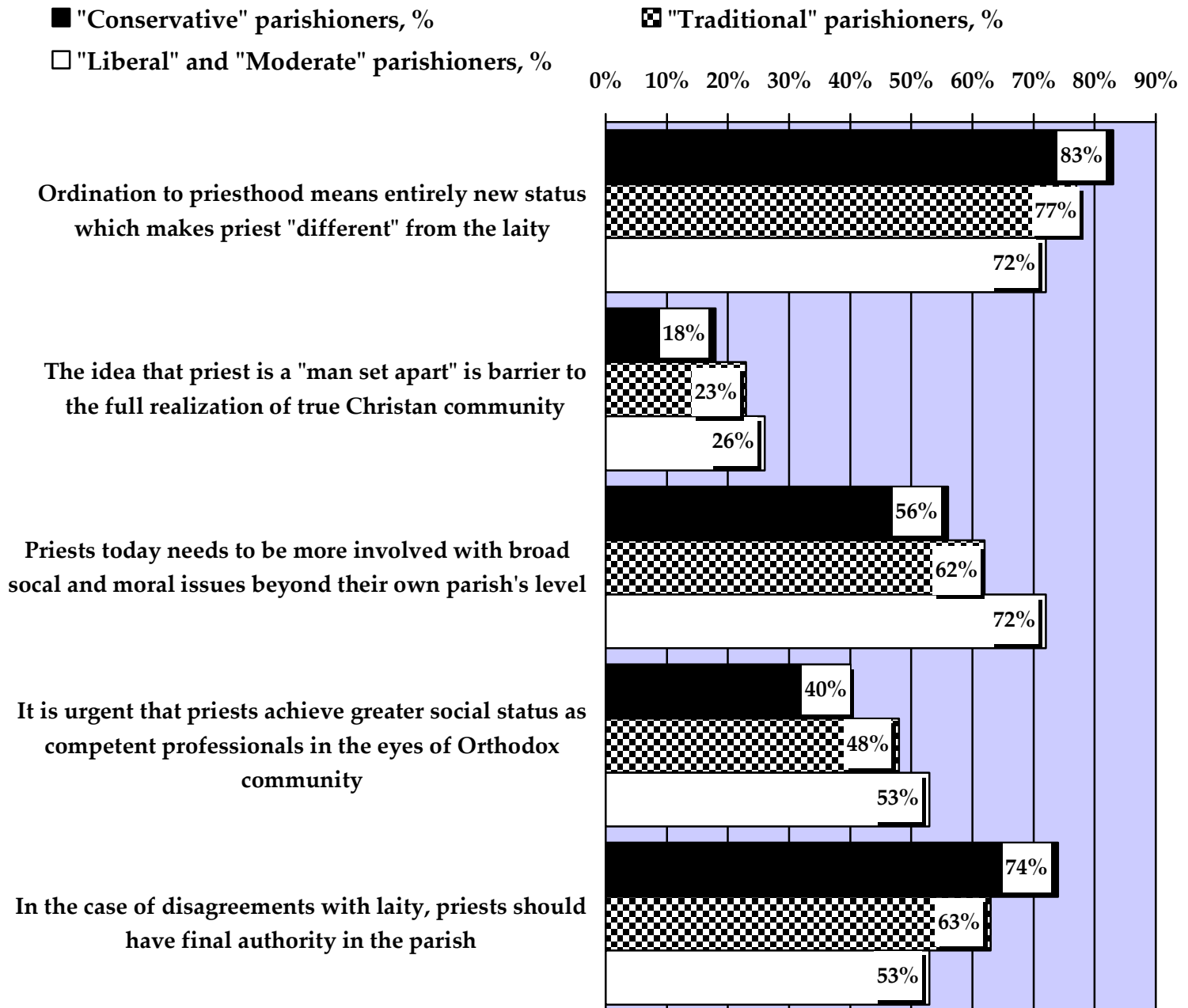
We conclude that, compared to converts to Orthodoxy, cradle Orthodox parishioners are much stronger proponents of the servant-leadership model of Orthodox priesthood. They are more vocal in supporting broader social involvement of the priests and express stronger desire for the greater social prestige of priestly vocation. They are also more willing to challenge the unquestionable final authority of clergy in the parish life. Conversely, the parishioners who are converts to Orthodoxy adhere more to cultic model of priesthood. Why is it so? We saw in the first chapter that converts to Orthodoxy and the cradle Orthodox are very similar in proportion of persons who identify their theological stance and approach to Church life as either “conservative” or “traditional” or “moderate-liberal.” Hence, the personal micro-theology is not an explanation for the stronger adherence of converts to Orthodoxy to the cultic model of priesthood. Our best guess is that the converts to Orthodoxy create their vision of the priesthood based on what they have *learned* about Orthodox Church and tradition from the theological and historical sources. Also, converts to Orthodoxy may reflect a rejection of Christian churches which are strongly influenced by the Social Gospel movement of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century and a preference for the liturgical-sacramental life experienced in Orthodoxy.

Differently, the cradle Orthodox parishioners are probably more likely to express their opinions on the desired status of priesthood based on what they saw and experienced while growing up in the Orthodox Church.

In comparison with the differences between GOA and OCA members, between various generations of parishioners and between the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, the personal theological position is the most influential factor for the laity attitudes to the status of priests. Fig. 35 shows the degree of agreement with five statements about priesthood by the respondents who identified their theological stance and approaches to the Church life either as “liberal” or “moderate” or as “traditional” or as “conservative.”

Clearly, the traditional and, especially, conservative parishioners are stronger proponents of the cultic model of priesthood and of a clear separation between clergy and laity in the Church, while liberal and moderate church members are closer to the servant-leadership model. In comparison with 72% among liberal and moderate, 77% of traditional and 83% of conservative church members feel that “Ordination to priesthood means an entirely new status which makes priest ‘different’ from laity.”

**Fig.35 Theological Stance of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to the Status of Priesthood:**  
**% of parishioners with various theological stance who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



The liberal and moderate parishioners are much more in favor of greater social involvement of clergy than traditional and conservative parish members. 72% of liberal and moderate respondents agreed that “Priests today need to be more involved with broad social and moral issues beyond their own parishes,” but only 62% of traditional and only 56% conservative laity did so.

53% of liberal and moderate respondents feel an urgent need for professionalization and higher social image of priesthood within Orthodox community, while only 48% of traditional and 40% of conservative church members agreed with the statement “It is urgent that priests achieve greater social status in the eyes of Orthodox community.”

Finally and predictably, in comparison with “moderate-liberal” laity, the parish members who defined their theological position and approaches to the Church life as “traditional” or “conservative” were much more in favor of the statement “In case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish:” 74%, 63%, 53% respectively.

## **VI. Laity’s Vision for the Orthodox Church in the US**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Two broad patterns in wider American society are seen by both GOA and OCA parishioners as having the strongest influence on the future of the Orthodox Church in the US: “More people living in non-traditional families” and “Rise in consumerism and materialism;”
- GOA and OCA clergy and laity are unanimous in their opinions that the question of “Youth and young adults leaving the Church” is by far the MOST URGENT issue for an open discussion in the Church;
- There is remarkable agreement between GOA and OCA lay members, between various generations of parishioners, between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and between persons with various theological position about the SECOND MOST URGENT issue for an open discussion in the Church: “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church.” The GOA and OCA clergy, however, do not see this subject as important as the laity do;
- Three further subjects have been identified by significant proportion (more than 40%) of Orthodox laity as being “very important” for an open Church discussion: “Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level,” “The issue of ‘ethnic’ versus ‘American’ parishes,” and “Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages;”
- In both GOA and OCA, many more priests than laity are concerned with the subject “Process of selecting bishops” as being very important to be openly discussed;
- Compared to OCA members, the GOA parishioners are much more eager to bring to the public forum two issues which related to the subject of intermarried families: “Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages” and “Issue of mixed (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages;”
- Compared to OCA priests and parishioners, significantly more GOA clergy and laity feel that the time has come to discuss the matter of “Sharing ministry with laity;”

- GOA and OCA parishioners are very similar in their opinions about four major problems facing the Orthodox Church in the US: “That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should,” “That youths and young adults are not as involved in the Church as much as they should be,” “That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith,” and “That there is poor religious education in the local parishes;”
- More parishioners older than 65 believe “That lay people have little say in decision making in the Church” is a “serious problem” in the Church than this is the case among the middle-aged (45-64) and younger (under 45) respondents;
- The members of both the GOA and the OCA are almost equally divided among themselves in their vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the US. Half of parishioners approve changes in the Church by saying “The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this (29%)” or “I feel that we are too strongly ‘tied’ to our past. We need rethink where we are now and decide about new directions (21%).” Another half of respondents favor tradition and stability in the Church life and feel that “We need to get back to the way we did things in the past (6%)” or “We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so (44%);”
- Senior parishioners older than 65 are more likely to embrace changes in Church life, while the younger Church members tend to reject changes in the Church;
- Both in GOA and in OCA, and both among clergy and laity the question of “Orthodox Unity in America” is a very divisive issue. Neither supporters of faster movement towards united American Orthodox Church nor those who are comfortable with current arrangements can claim an absolute majority among Church members;
- More than half of the laity (57%) feel that American Orthodox bishops do their best to be competent and wise Church leaders. About one in five respondents (18%) disagreed with this. A quarter of parishioners (25%) are unsure how to evaluate the leadership of the bishops.

For many generations, Orthodox faithful in the US saw themselves as a community which, in many ways, existed apart from mainstream American society. The ethnic heritage of American Orthodox parishes founded by Greek, Russian, Serbian, Romanian and other Orthodox immigrants has been permanently reinforced by new waves of immigration from the Old World and also by internal Church policies aimed at preservation of language and culture brought from overseas. The word “diaspora” was commonly accepted as a way to describe the borders of separation between American Orthodox Christians and society at large, on the one hand, and strong relationship of these immigrant communities to the Old World. Life in a “cultural ghetto” had many drawbacks for the American Orthodox Churches, but it also had the advantage of being relatively uninfluenced by the broad social and cultural trends in the wider society. This is not the case anymore.



Today, the vast majority of Orthodox Christians are second, third, or fourth generation Americans of various ethnic and racial backgrounds (we saw in the third chapter that only 14% of GOA and only 8% of OCA current members were born outside the US). Indeed, most of them are descendants of the Orthodox immigrants who recognize and appreciate their ethnic ancestry. At the same time, many identify themselves as “simply American” and – outside Church - pursue life styles which are indistinguishable from their Protestant or Catholic neighbors and fellow citizens.

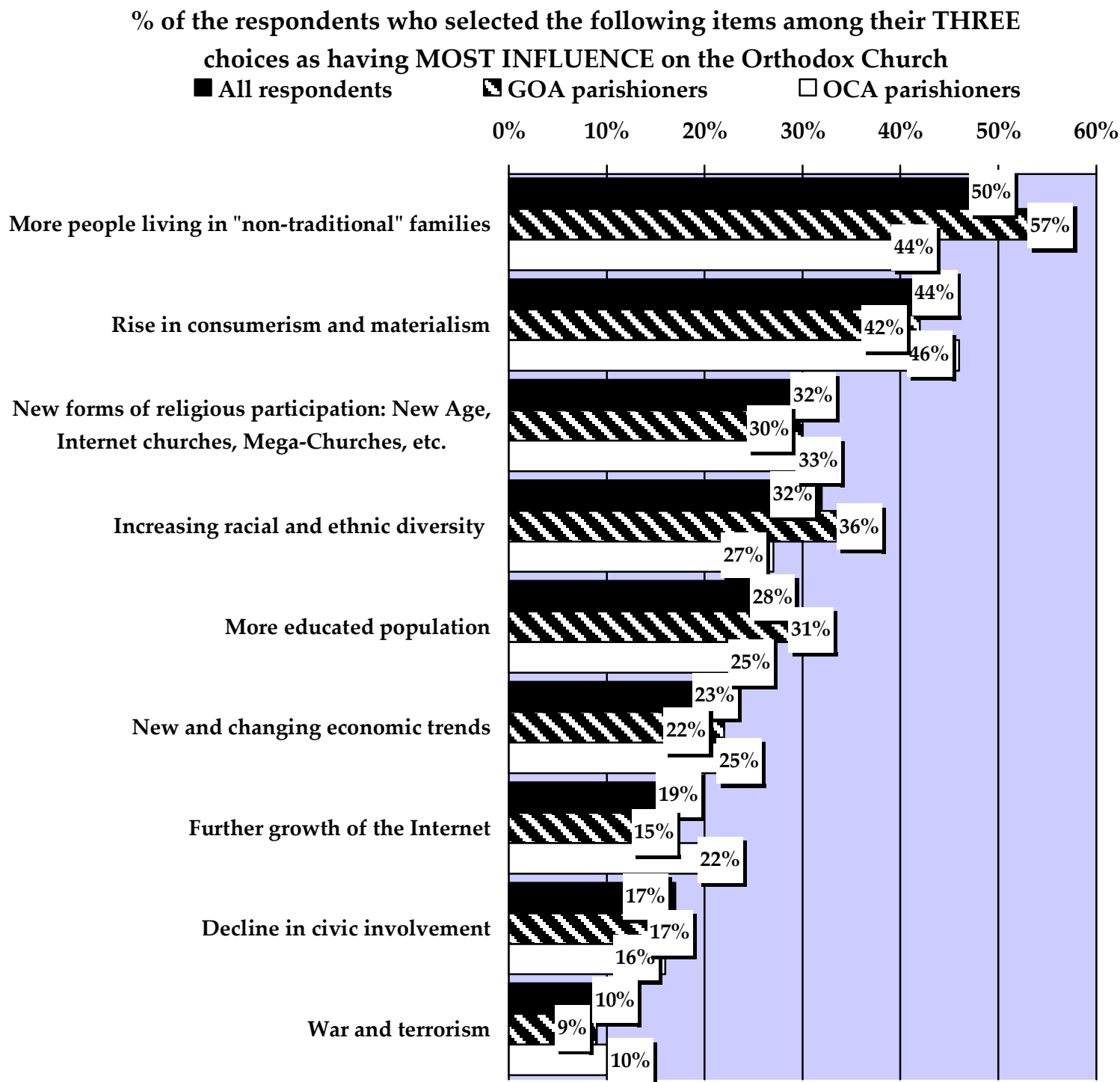
Further, in many parishes, converts to Orthodoxy who were raised in different (non-Orthodox) religious traditions and who do not have Orthodox “ethnic roots” comprise significant or even a dominant proportion of members.

These fundamental shifts in the demography of membership changed dramatically the way how most Orthodox faithful relate themselves to American society at large. As Fr. Thomas FitzGerald pointed out, “In sharp contrast to the lack of interest in societal issues during the early periods of Orthodox Church development in America, the Orthodox in recent decades have demonstrated far greater interest in the challenges facing America today” (FitzGerald 1998: 128). Accordingly, any new social patterns and cultural developments in society at large have today a much stronger influence on American Orthodox Churches than in the past. What are the opinions of Orthodox laity about the impact of mainstream America on the life of Orthodox Church?

The questionnaire asked: “What broad patterns in American society do you think will have the **MOST INFLUENCE** on the Orthodox Churches in the US in the foreseeable future?” The respondents were given a list of nine items and asked to choose up to three of them. Fig. 36 on the next page shows which social developments are perceived by the American Orthodox laity as having most significant impact on the Church.

Several findings deserve attention. First, out of nine items, only one was selected by half of the respondents as having a strong impact on Orthodox Church life in America: “More people living in non-traditional families.” The phrase “More people living in non-traditional families” could be interpreted by respondents in several ways: more single-parent households, more “civic unions” and couples living together without being “properly” married, more same-sex couples, etc. In any case, however, it conveys the same message: decline in what is commonly understood as “traditional family values and practices” which are strongly endorsed by the Orthodox Church. Clearly, the fact that these traditional family values and practices are challenged by the changing realities of life in modern society is seen by the Orthodox laity as having very serious implications for the future of the Church.

**Fig. 36** “What broad patterns in American society do you think will have the **MOST INFLUENCE** on the Orthodox Churches in the US in the foreseeable future? Out of following, please, choose up to **THREE.**”



Second, Fig. 36 shows that “Rise in consumerism and materialism” in American society is perceived by both GOA and OCA parishioners as the second strongest in its influence on the future of the Church. Why? Do parishioners feel an ever-growing gap and sharpening contradictions between their personal spirituality and teachings of the Orthodox Church, on the one hand, and their everyday live in an increasingly materialistic and pragmatic 21<sup>st</sup> century America? More research is needed to properly examine this question.

Third, two more social tendencies were selected by a significant proportion (32%) of the respondents as having strong influence on the Orthodox Church in the USA: “New forms of religious participation” and “Increasing racial and ethnic diversity.” Do GOA and OCA laity think that the growing variety of choices in the American religious market (“New forms of religious participation”) is penetrating gradually into the American Orthodox community, thus, challenging the traditional notion “once Orthodox – forever Orthodox?” Do respondents feel that “Increasing racial and ethnic diversity” in America in general has strong impact on their parishes? Again, further research and more specific data are needed to accurately respond these questions.

Are there any differences between various categories of the respondents in how they estimate the impact of one or the other social trend on the future of the Orthodox Church in this country?

First, as noted, the item “More people living in non-traditional families” has been selected by significant number of both GOA and OCA respondents. At the same time, it raised greater concerns among GOA than among OCA members. 57% of GOA parishioners feel that “More people living in non-traditional families” has a great impact on Orthodox Church in comparison with only 44% among OCA laity. We attribute this difference to the importance of traditional family values and family ties which have been always cultivated in American Greek community in a particularly strong way.

Second, compared to the middle-aged (45-64) and especially older (over 65 years) parishioners, significantly more younger (under 45 years) respondents feel that “Rise in consumerism and materialism” has serious impact on American Orthodoxy: 45%, 33% and 51% respectively. On the contrary, of all age-groups, the senior parishioners are most strong believers that increasing education standards have a strong influence on American Orthodox Churches. 43% of the respondents older than 65 selected “More educated population” as one of the three trends that have strong influence on the Church in comparison with only 23% among younger (under 45 years) and middle-aged (45-64) parishioners.

Third and somewhat predictably, compared to the cradle Orthodox, more converts to Orthodoxy – the persons raised in the mainstream American social and religious culture – feel that “Rise in consumerism and materialism” will influence seriously the future of Orthodoxy in America: 40% and 50% respectively.

In spite of these variations, however, generally speaking the GOA and OCA members, the younger and the older parishioners, the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and the persons with various education levels expressed very similar opinions on the broad trends in American society which influence American Orthodox Churches. Further, the respondents with various theological stances, those who described their approach to Church life as either “conservative,” or “traditional,” or “liberal-moderate” were also remarkably uniform in their opinions on social and cultural changes in American society which may have the most impact on the future of the Orthodox Churches in the US.

In every Christian denomination there are always certain topics which are on the Church’s agenda and which are debated - sometimes openly and sometimes “behind closed doors” - among both members and clergy. The American Orthodox Churches are no exception. Depending on the particular Orthodox jurisdiction and on the specific local context, the list of these “hot” subjects can range widely from the various aspects of internal parish life to different sensitive issues in national Church policies. Our study examined opinions of the GOA and OCA parishioners about what would be most important to bring to a public forum and to discuss openly in the Church. The survey asked “Numerous issues relating to the Church life are being discussed today and may also have impact on your parish. How important would an ***OPEN DISCUSSION*** be in the Church in the following areas?” The respondents were given the list of 13 possible subjects for discussion and they can respond “very important to be discussed,” “somewhat important to be discussed,” “not important to be discussed or do not want it to be discussed.” See Tab. 20.

**Tab. 20 What Needs to Be Openly Discussed in the Church:** “Numerous issues relating to the Church life are being discussed today and may also have impact on your parish. How important would an open discussion be in the Church in the following areas? (% of all respondents, each row add to 100%)

	<b>Very important to be discussed</b>	Somewhat important to be discussed	Not important or don't want it to be discussed
Issue of youth and young adults leaving the Church	<b>80</b>	18	2
Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church	<b>58</b>	36	6
Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level	<b>45</b>	46	9
The issue of “ethnic” versus “American” parishes	<b>42</b>	46	12
Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages	<b>41</b>	43	16
Issue of mixed (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages	<b>37</b>	49	14
The relationship between American Orthodox Churches and the Mother Churches in the Old World	<b>35</b>	47	18
The process of selecting bishops	<b>29</b>	44	27
Recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy	<b>28</b>	51	21
Sharing ministry with laity	<b>27</b>	52	21
The lack of clear professional standards for priests	<b>25</b>	45	30
Family problems of Orthodox priests	<b>19</b>	47	34
Ordination of women	<b>10</b>	21	69

There is only one subject which is seen by the vast majority of laity (80%) as “very important to be openly discussed:” the “Issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox Church.” Further, all categories of respondents - GOA and OCA members, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, younger and older parishioners, persons with either “conservative,” or “traditional,” or “moderate-liberal” theological stance were unanimous in their opinions about importance of an open discussion on this issue.

There was also a remarkable agreement among all categories of parishioners about second most important subject for an open Church discussion: “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church.” It was selected by 58% of respondents as “very important” to be openly discussed in the Church.

From the participants of focus groups conducted in 6 OCA and 9 GOA parishes we learned about the wide range of possible problems and situations in the daily lives of parishioners which can make it hard to be a “good Orthodox Christian” in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. The relatively strict requirements of fasting (avoiding meat and dairy products) on certain days and during certain periods (especially the seven week long Great Lent preceding Easter) complicate social interactions with non-Orthodox family-members, friends and work colleagues.

The necessity to permanently explain to the children “why we couldn’t be like everybody,” “why we should go on Sunday to liturgy instead of participating in various extracurricular activities” or “why you shouldn’t have today this type of food while your non-Orthodox friends do” is a great challenge for many Orthodox parents. The differences in “Western” and “Eastern” church calendars resulting in various data for Easter and, in some cases, for Christmas (one – for Orthodox, another – for non-Orthodox Americans) make it difficult to plan holidays and family events. The strict Church prohibition on giving sacraments (Holy Communion) to the non-Orthodox Christians discourage many parishioners to bring their non-Orthodox friends or family members to church services. The fact that only members of Orthodox Church can be “god-fathers” or “god-mothers” for baptisms can also be frustrating under certain circumstances. Some converts to Orthodoxy (many of whom were raised in very pious families) told us that their Protestant or Roman Catholic families and friends do not approve their decision to become Orthodox Christian. The generally low level of awareness in the mainstream America of “what the Orthodox Church is about” (for instance, many mix up Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Judaism) creates various situations of confusion and misunderstanding. This list of small and serious difficulties can go on resulting in a feeling perfectly summarized by one of our focus group participants who said “Being too unique is not a good thing. I have permanent temptation to be like ‘everybody.’”

The strong unanimity of laity on these two subjects which are most urgent for an open Church discussion (“Issue of youth and young adults leaving Orthodox Church” and “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church) gives a clear indication for the national Church leadership as to what requires particular attention, consideration and action.

The GOA and OCA members, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodox, younger and older parishioners were also quite uniform in their choice of one particular subject which is “not important to be discussed or don’t want it to be discussed.” 69% of the respondents (72% among men and 65% among women) said that question of “Ordination of women” is “not important or don’t want it to be discussed.” Even among church members who described their theological position and approach to Church life as “moderate or liberal,” absolute majority (53%) feel that “Ordination of women” is an issue which is “not important or don’t want it to be discussed.”

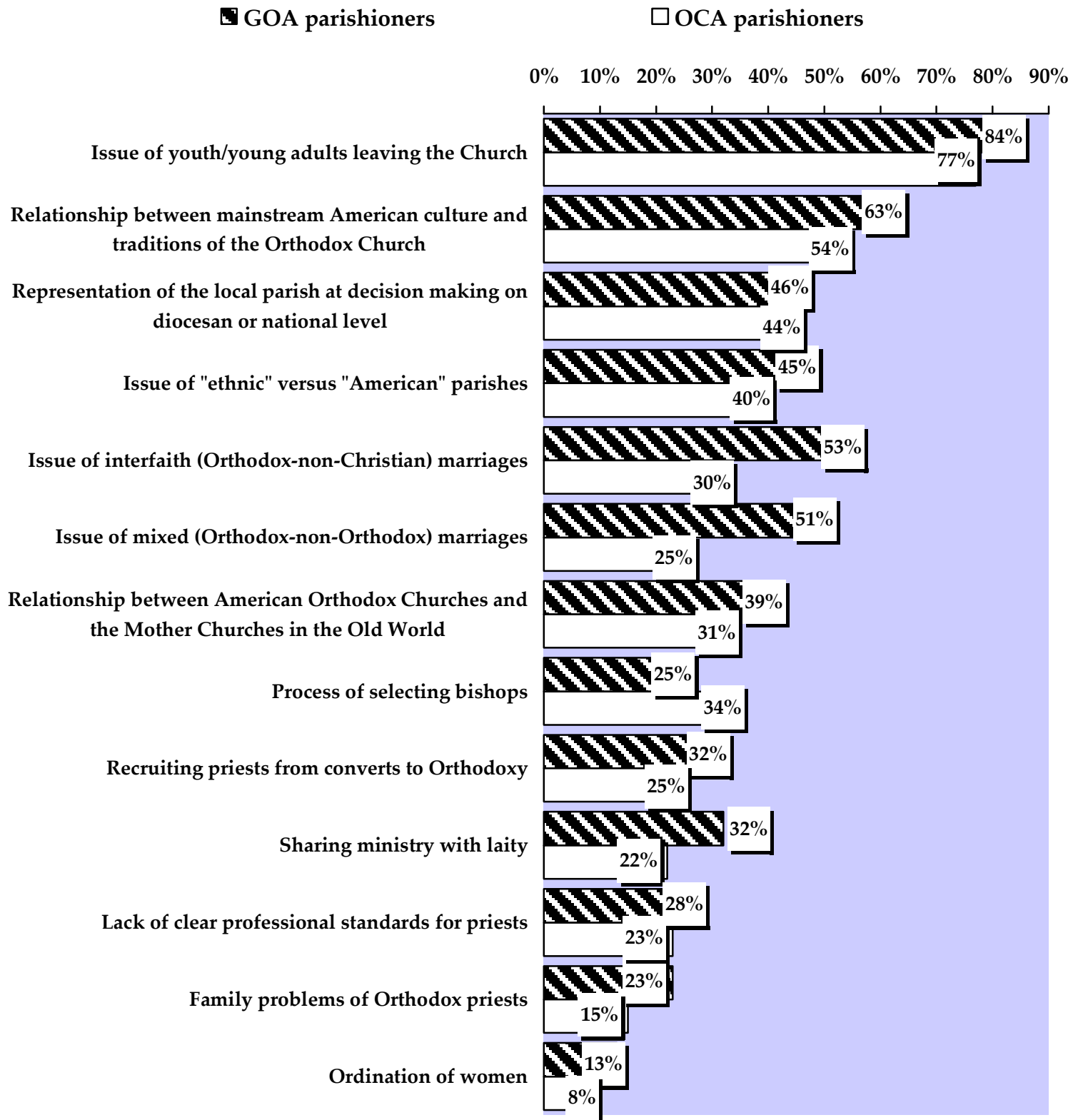
Tab. 20 shows that three further subjects scored more than 40% of laity votes as “very important” for an open church discussion: “Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level,” “The issue of ‘ethnic’ versus ‘American’ parishes,” and “Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages.” Again, the focus groups and interviews administered in 15 Orthodox parishes situated in various parts of the country confirmed importance of these issues.

Many parishioners feel that their voices and opinions of the ordinary “people in the pews” are never heard (not to mention “considered” or “taken into account”) by the diocesan hierarchs and national Church administrations. Many parishes are internally divided over the dilemma of “focusing on preservation our ethnic heritage or becoming an all-American local Orthodox community.” As for “interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages,” the Orthodox Church recognizes marriages only between Christians. Put differently, the Orthodox Christian (if he or she desires to remain a Church member in good standing) cannot marry a Jew, Muslim, Hindu or simply not religious (e.g. not baptized in the name of Holy Trinity) person. If an Orthodox marries a non-Christian person, technically he or she excommunicates him/herself from the Church and is denied Church sacraments. And this is a very painful subject for those Church members who found their loyalty being torn apart between their religion and devotion to the Church and their love for relationship with the non-Orthodox person.

Are there any significant differences between GOA and OCA laity in their opinions about importance of discussion on the various issues facing the Church? Fig. 37. shows one obvious distinction between GOA and OCA members. GOA parishioners are much more eager to bring to the public forum two issues which are related to the same general subject of intermarried families: “Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages” (selected by 53% GOA respondents as “very important” to be discussed in comparison with only 30% among OCA members) and “Issue of mixed (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages” (51% and 25%).

**Fig. 37 Subjects for an Open Discussion in the Church: Opinions of GOA and OCA Laity**

**% of parishioners who said that the following subjects are VERY IMPORTANT to be openly discussed in the Church**





A possible reason for this difference between GOA and OCA can be various strength of ethnic sentiments and culture which are much more pronounced in GOA than in OCA and which can make it much harder for a person to “cross the line” and to marry not Greek (thus, non-Orthodox) spouse. We saw earlier that, compared to OCA, proportion of “American” converts to Orthodoxy in GOA is relatively low (51% and 29% respectively). On the contrary, there are more first generation immigrants among GOA than among OCA laity. This difference between GOA and OCA members in the strength of their ethnic heritage can also explain the fact that more GOA (63%) than OCA (54%) parishioners feel that issue of “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church” needs to be urgently discussed.

Fig. 37 also indicates that more GOA (32%) than OCA (22%) members feel that subject “Sharing ministry with laity” ought to be openly discussed in the Church. We think this is related to the fact that laity always had somewhat more *administrative* power in the GOA than in OCA parishes. Indeed, in GOA, the parish councils elected by parishioners can easily challenge administrative and financial decisions of a priest. This would be much more difficult in OCA, where parish priest “by default” occupies position of the parish council’s president. This traditionally higher level of involvement of GOA laity in the parish administration can also inspire more GOA than OCA parishioners to think about “people in the pews” as playing leadership roles in the worship and sacramental life of a parish.

We looked at the answers to the question about what ought to be openly discussed in the Church provided by the various categories of respondents. There was very little difference in opinions between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, between university graduates and those without college degree, and even between persons who described their theological position and approaches to Church life as either “conservative,” or “traditional,” or “moderate-liberal.”

At the same time, some obvious distinctions between younger (under 45), middle aged (45-64) and senior (65 and older) parishioners should be mentioned. See Tab. 21. Compared to both younger and middle-aged church members, many more senior parishioners want an open Church discussion on six subject: “Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level,” “Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages,” “Issue of mixed (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages,” “The process of selecting bishops,” “Recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy,” and “The lack of clear professional standards for priests.”

**Tab. 21. What Needs to Be Openly Discussed in the Church: Opinions of Various Generations of Parishioners:** “Numerous issues relating to the Church life are being discussed today and may also have impact on your parish. How important would an open discussion be in the Church in the following areas?”

% saying that the following subject are <b>VERY IMPORTANT</b> to be openly discussed in the Church			
	Younger than 45	45-64	65 and older
Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level	33	45	61
Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages	33	35	50
Issue of mixed (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages	36	38	56
The process of selecting bishops	23	27	44
Recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy	24	24	44
The lack of clear professional standards for priests	17	26	34

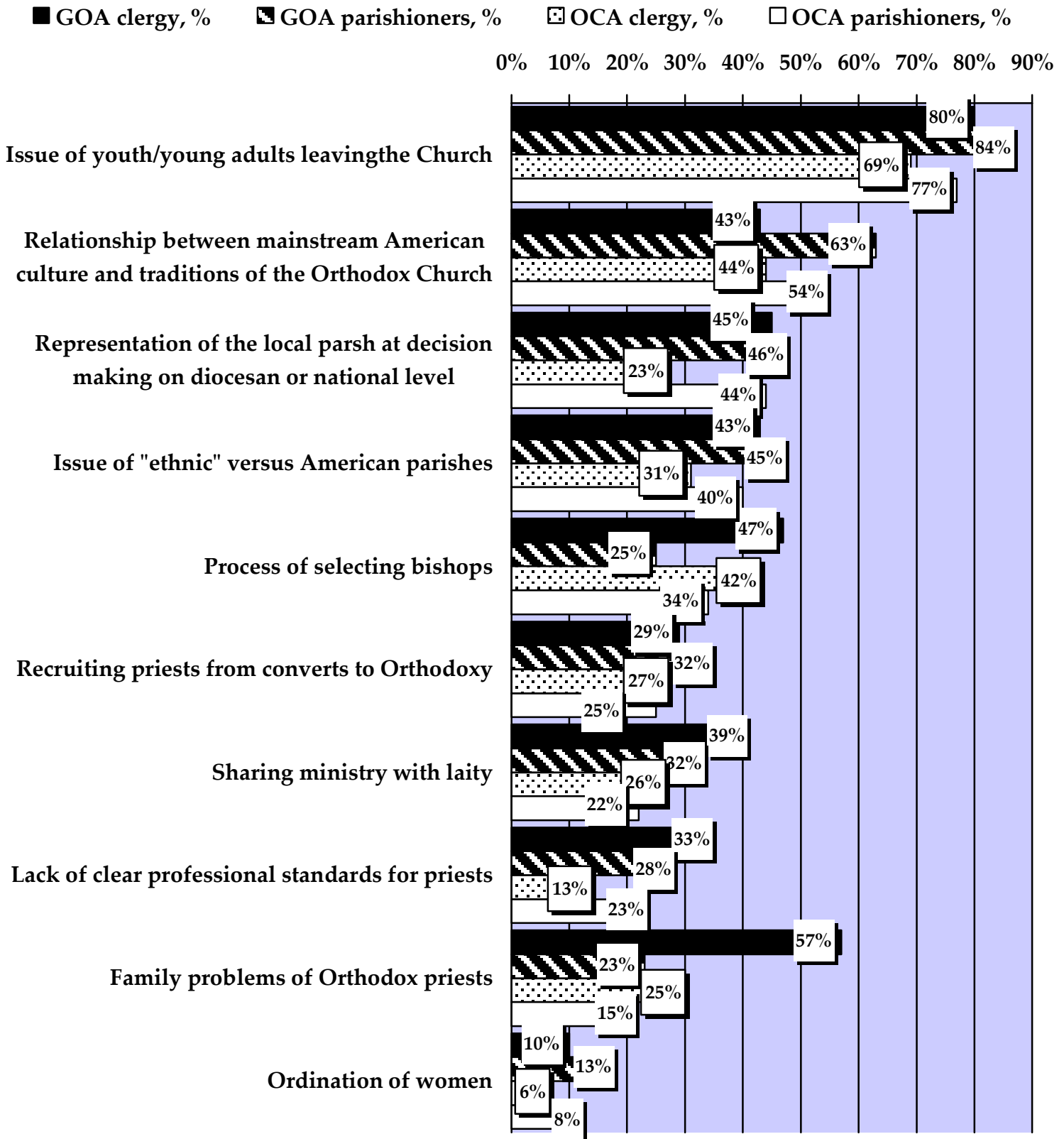
Why are senior church members much more eager than the younger and middle-aged persons to debate these subjects which cover wide range of apparently unrelated issues? Perhaps, they simply feel that their life experiences “entitle” them to address these various matters and to bring them for an open discussion in the Church. It may also be that during they occupy or have occupied more leadership roles in their parishes than younger respondents. At this point, this would be our best guess.

In 2006 national study “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America” (Krindatch 2006) we asked GOA and OCA clergy similar question about what needs to be openly discussed in the Church. The list of possible subjects for discussion given to the priests was somewhat different from the laity, but most of the items were the same. To what extent do the opinions of parishioners on what ought to be urgently discussed reflect those of their parish clergy? See Fig. 38 on the next page.

First, GOA and OCA clergy and laity are unanimous in their opinions that the issue of “Youth and young adults leaving the Church” is by far most urgent one for an open discussion in the Church. Second, GOA and OCA clergy and laity are also very similar in their unwillingness to raise the question of “Ordination of women.” Third, the problem of “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church” is clearly more urgent for laity than for the parish priests. Indeed, 63% of GOA and 54% of OCA lay members feel that this subject needs to be openly discussed in the Church in comparison with only 43% among GOA and 44% among OCA clergy. A very likely explanation for this difference is the fact that in their everyday activities the Orthodox laity are permanently exposed to and interact with the “Non-Orthodox America” (first of all through their secular jobs). Differently, the lives of the priests revolve to a great extent around Church related matters and their professional and, possibly, social relations are to high degree focused on their fellow Orthodox clergy or on their parishioners.

**Fig. 38 Subjects for an Open Discussion in the Church: Opinions of Orthodox Clergy versus Laity**

% of respondents saying that following subjects are VERY IMPORTANT to be openly discussed in the Church



The fact that professional and social lives of clergy are mainly limited to the Church community explains also why many more GOA (47%) and OCA (42%) priests than GOA (25%) and OCA (34%) laity are concerned with the subject “Process of selecting bishops” as being very important to be openly discussed. Indeed, in the Orthodox Church, neither lay members nor parish clergy have much input on the selection of bishops. Generally speaking, electing candidates for consecration and their following “assignment” to a particular diocese is largely in the hands of other bishops. While this fact is of relatively little significance for ordinary parishioners (most of them see their hierarchs only few times a year), the personality of the ruling bishop and good relationships with him are very important for the clergy.

GOA and OCA laity along with GOA clergy have very similar views on the importance of discussion of “Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan and national levels” and of “Issue of the ‘ethnic’ versus ‘American’ parishes:” 40-45% said that these subjects are very important to be openly discussed in the Church. For whatever reason, however, much fewer OCA priests feel that these matters ought to be publicly debated. Why OCA clergy dissent from both their parishioners and from their fellow GOA clergy? This pattern is difficult to explain.

In turn, Fig. 38 shows that GOA priests are very different from all other respondents in their eagerness to discuss the “Family problems of the Orthodox priests.” An absolute majority (57%) of GOA clergy believe that this subject is very important to be openly discussed, while less than one quarter of GOA and OCA laity and OCA clergy feel the same way. We think that the high proportion of GOA priests apparently willing to talk about “Family problems of the Orthodox priests” is a result of the particular timing of our 2006 clergy survey. It coincided with a number of “high profile” divorces among GOA clergy, thus, raising among them the question of how to reconcile the realities of life in today’s America (where divorces are “common place”) and the strict rules of the Orthodox Church which:

- recognizes only adultery as a valid reason for the divorce of a clergyman;
- does not allow divorced priests to be remarried;
- removes the divorced clergyman from the priesthood (unless the reason for divorce for adultery on the part of a priest’s wife).

Finally, we should note that there are two subjects on which clergy and laity *within* each jurisdiction largely agree with each other, but opinions of the OCA and GOA respondents (e.g. OCA clergy and laity versus GOA clergy and laity) are somewhat different. More GOA clergy (39%) and laity (32%) feel that time came to discuss the matter of “Sharing ministry with laity” than is the case among OCA priests (26%) and parishioners (22%).

We noted earlier, the most likely explanation for this pattern is the fact that GOA members traditionally have more *administrative* power in their parishes than OCA parishioners. Therefore, the idea of laity sharing in *ministry* (that is, getting more involved as leaders in worship and sacramental life) can be also more accepted in GOA than in OCA. Similarly more GOA priests (33%) and parishioners (28%) wanted discussion on the “Lack of the clear professional standards for priests,” while smaller number of OCA clergy (13%) and laity (23%) feel that this question is important to be openly debated in the Church. This is consistent with the finding from the previous chapter: in generally, GOA clergy and lay members are today more concerned with the professional status and image of Orthodox priesthood in the USA than OCA priests and parishioners.

We identified a number of issues which - from the lay people point of view – ought to be brought to public attention and discussed openly in the Church. What do GOA and OCA members think about major problems facing Church in America? The survey asked: “Below is the list of issues that some people consider problems in the Church. In your view, how much of the problem is each of the following?” The respondents were asked to evaluate each issue as either a “serious problem” or “somewhat of a problem” or “not a problem.” See Tab. 22. Several observations can be made.

**Tab. 22 Problems Facing the Church:** “Below is the list of issues that some people consider problems in the Church. In your view, how much of a problem is each of the following?” (% of all respondents, each row adds to 100%)

	Serious problem	Somewhat of a problem	Not a problem
That parents don't teach their children the faith the way they should	48	41	11
That youths and young adults are not as involved in the Church as much as they should be	45	42	13
That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith	36	50	14
That there is poor religious education in the local parishes	26	44	30
That clergy and laity are growing apart in their perceptions about Church life	17	45	38
That everyday Church life in many parishes is out of touch with reality and daily needs of parishioners	16	48	36
That lay people have little say in decision making in the Church	12	48	40
That preaching doesn't address the needs and issues of modern life	11	30	59
That the liturgy is hard to understand	10	24	66
That women are not involved enough in Church decision making	9	32	59
That lay people are not consulted enough in forming the Church's social and moral teaching	8	38	54

First, out of all possible problems, two were indicated by far more frequently than any other as the “serious problem” for the Church. Almost half (45-48%) of parishioners feel that the facts “That parents don't teach their children the faith the way they should” and “That youths and young adults are not as involved in the Church as much as they should be” are “serious problems” in the Church.

In other words, the laity are most seriously concerned with the question of the next generation of the Orthodox faithful in America: their proper religious upbringing by the parents and their actual involvement into Church life. This finding is consistent with what was discussed earlier: the anxiety of Church members to raise and to discuss openly the “Issue of the youth and young adults leaving the Church.”

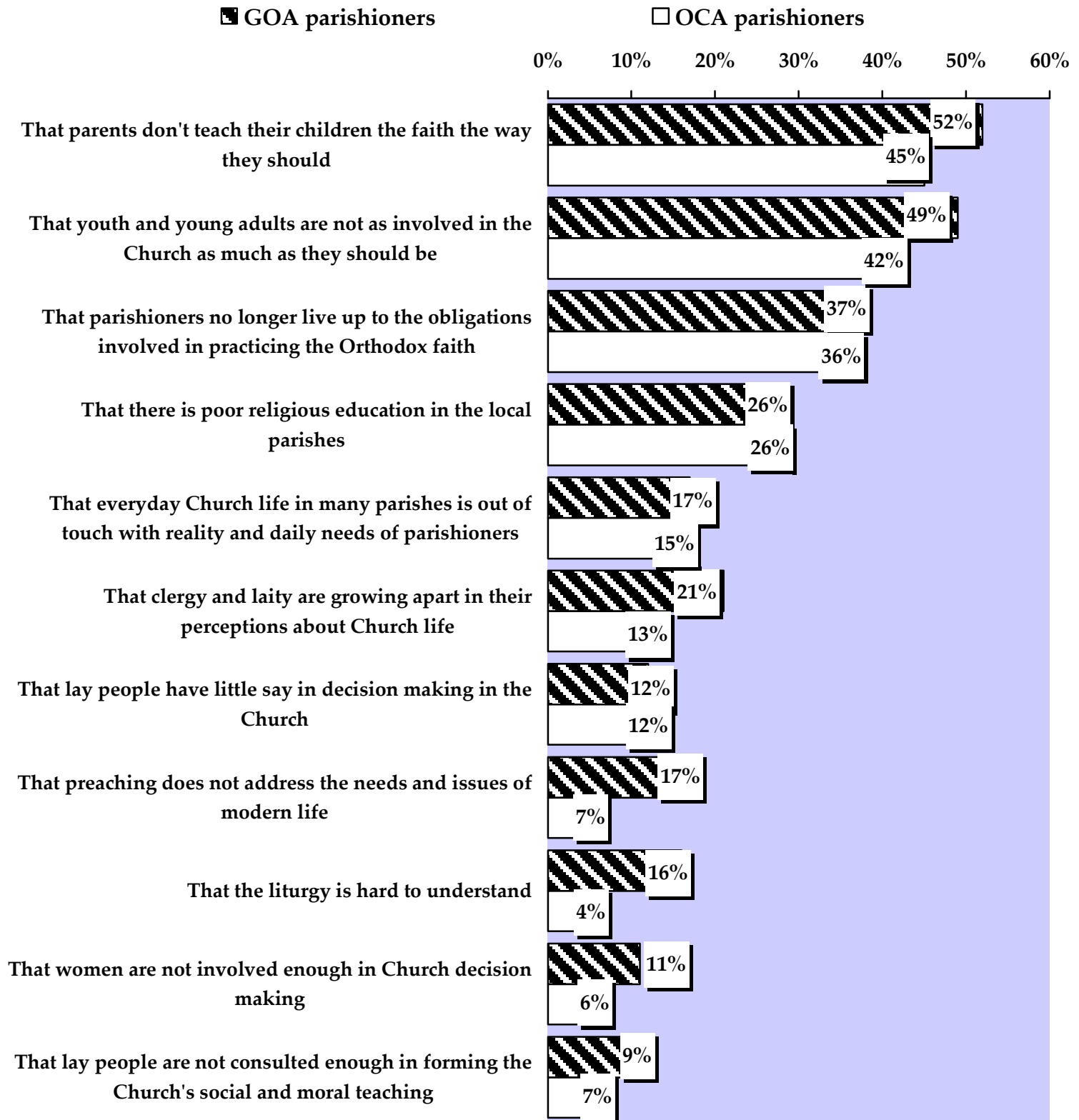
Second, two further subjects have been indicated as a “serious problem” in the Church by more than one quarter of the respondents: “That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith” (36% said that this is “serious problem” ) and “That there is poor religious education in the local parishes” (26%).

Third, on the contrary, a relatively small proportion of parishioners perceive the need for internal reforms in the Church - which would imply a greater role of the laity (women, in particular) in the Church and better connection between Church and everyday realities of life - as being “serious problem.” Indeed, no more than one out of six respondents believes that the facts “That everyday Church life in many parishes is out of touch with reality and the daily needs of parishioners,” “That lay people have little say in decision making in the Church,” “That preaching doesn’t address the needs and issues of modern life,” “That the liturgy is hard to understand,” “That women are not involved enough in Church decision making” and “That lay people are not consulted enough in forming the Church’s social and moral teaching” should be seen as “serious problem.”

We found that GOA and OCA parishioners are very similar in their opinions about major problems facing Orthodox Church in the USA. See Fig. 39.

**Fig. 39 Problems Facing Orthodox Church: Opinions of GOA and OCA Lay Members**

% of parishioners who said that the following is **SERIOUS PROBLEM** in the Church



At the same time, there are some obvious distinctions between various categories of parishioners in their vision of the major problems facing the Church.

First, more parishioners older than 65 believe “That lay people have little say in decision making in the Church” is a “serious problem” than the middle-aged (45-64) and younger (under 45) respondents: 18%, 14% and 7% respectively. We think that the older lay members feel that their experience and long-term involvement with their parishes give them also a legitimate right to be among those who make decisions in the Church. Conversely, compared to the younger and middle-aged respondents, much fewer senior parishioners said that issue of “Parishioners no longer living up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith” is serious problem in the Church: 42%, 38% and 22% respectively.

Second, somewhat predictably, compared to persons without college degrees, significantly more college graduates feel that “Poor religious education in the local parishes” poses serious problem for the Church: 19% and 30% respectively.

Third, more cradle Orthodox than converts to Orthodoxy believe that the fact “That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should” is a serious problem in the Church: 53% and 41% respectively. Perhaps, this reflects a commonly shared notion that converts to Orthodoxy typically have better knowledge of Orthodox doctrine and teachings than the persons born and raised in the Church. Accordingly, converts to Orthodoxy can be less concerned with issue of parents who “don’t teach their children the faith the way they should,” because themselves they do teach their children properly about Orthodox faith. Finally, there are clear disagreements between respondents with various theological outlooks in how they estimate the seriousness of one or other problems facing the Church. See Tab. 23.

**Tab. 23 Problems Facing the Church: Opinions of Theologically “Conservative,” “Traditional” and “Moderate-Liberal” Parishioners**

% of respondents who said that the following is “ <b>SERIOUS PROBLEM</b> ” in the Church			
	“Conservative” parishioners	“Traditional” parishioners	“Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners
That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should	56	48	41
That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith	40	39	28
That everyday Church life in many parishes is out of touch with reality and daily needs of parishioners	13	13	23
That preaching doesn’t address the needs and issues of modern life	7	8	19
That women are not involved enough in Church decision making	4	5	17



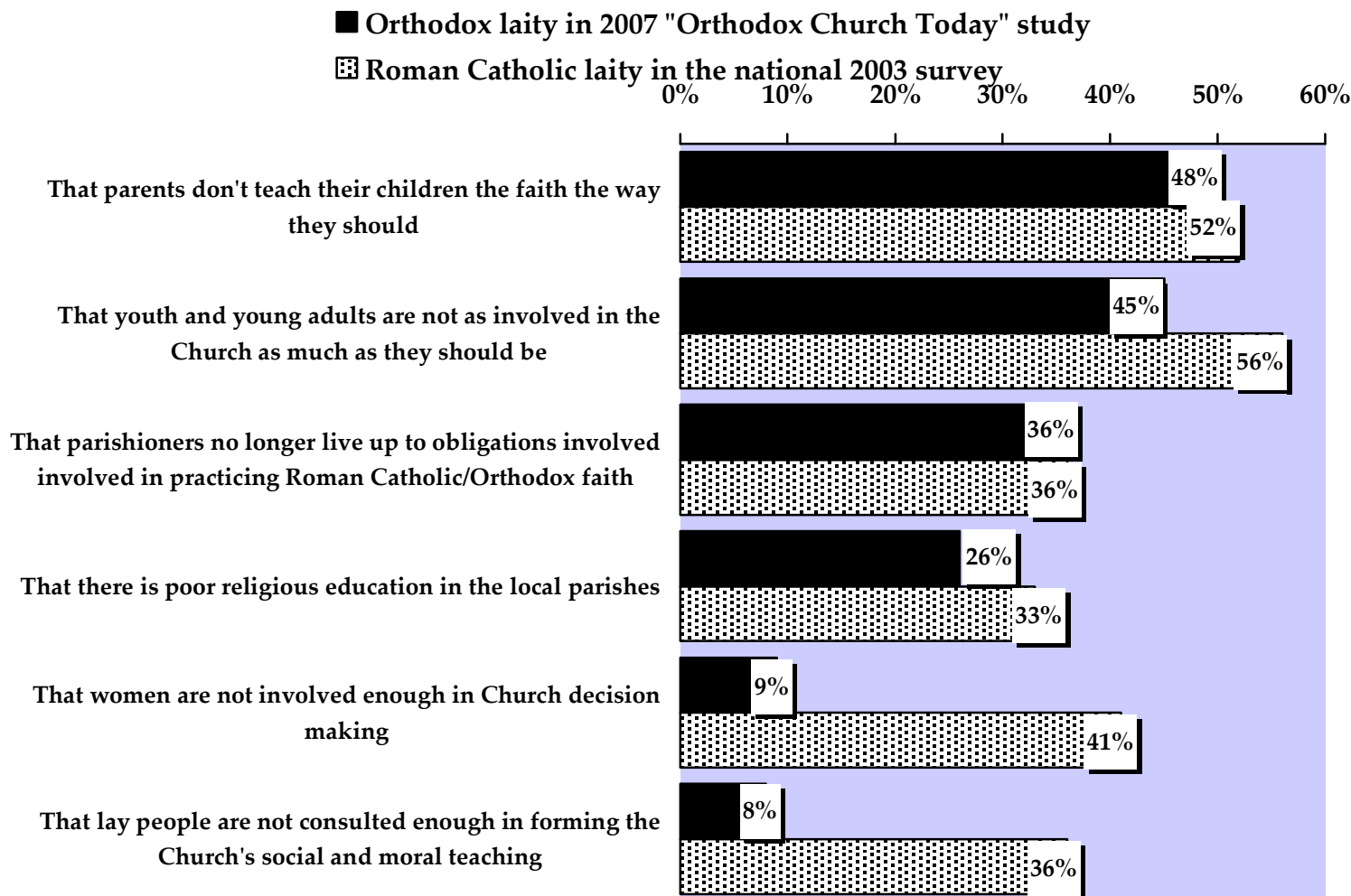
The laity who described their theological position and approach to Church life as “moderate-liberal” are significantly more concerned with what – they believe – should be *changed* in the Church. They feel that the facts “That preaching doesn’t address the needs and issues of modern life,” “That everyday Church life in many parishes is out of touch with reality and daily needs of parishioners,” and “That women are not involved enough in Church decision making” should be considered serious problems in the Church. Quite differently, the persons who identified themselves as “Conservative” or “Traditional” in their personal theology and approaches to Church life feel greater urgency of issues pertinent to the *keeping traditions* in the Church. They worry more seriously than the “Moderate-Liberal” church members about the facts “That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should,” and “That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith.”

A similar question about various problems facing the Church was asked in the 2003 US survey of Roman Catholic laity (D’Antonio 2007). Six items presenting potential problems for the Church in our survey were taken from the 2003 Roman Catholic survey. In many ways (theology, emphasis on liturgy and sacraments, church administration, the role of priests and bishops in Church), the Roman Catholic Church is closer to the Orthodox Church than any Protestant denomination. Hence, how do American Catholics compare to the Orthodox Christians in their visions of the problems facing the Church? Fig. 40 shows that three problems seem to be equally urgent for American Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches: “That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should,” “That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Roman Catholic/Orthodox faith” and “That there is poor religious education in the local parishes.”

Compared to Orthodox parishioners, Roman Catholic laity are more concerned with the fact “That youth and young adults are not as involved in the Church as much as they should be.” 56% of Roman Catholic respondents said that this is serious problem in the Church in comparison with 45% among Orthodox Church members. The largest gap between American Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, however, is in how they estimate the urgency of the involvement of laity generally and women in particular in the leadership Church position. Indeed, four out of ten Roman Catholic respondents say “That lay people are not consulted enough in forming the Church’s social and moral teaching” and “That women are not involved enough in Church decision making” is serious problem, but less than one in ten of Orthodox parishioners feel the same way.

**Fig. 40 Problems Facing the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches: Opinions of Roman Catholic and Orthodox Lay Members**

% of parishioners who said that the following is **SERIOUS PROBLEM** in the Church



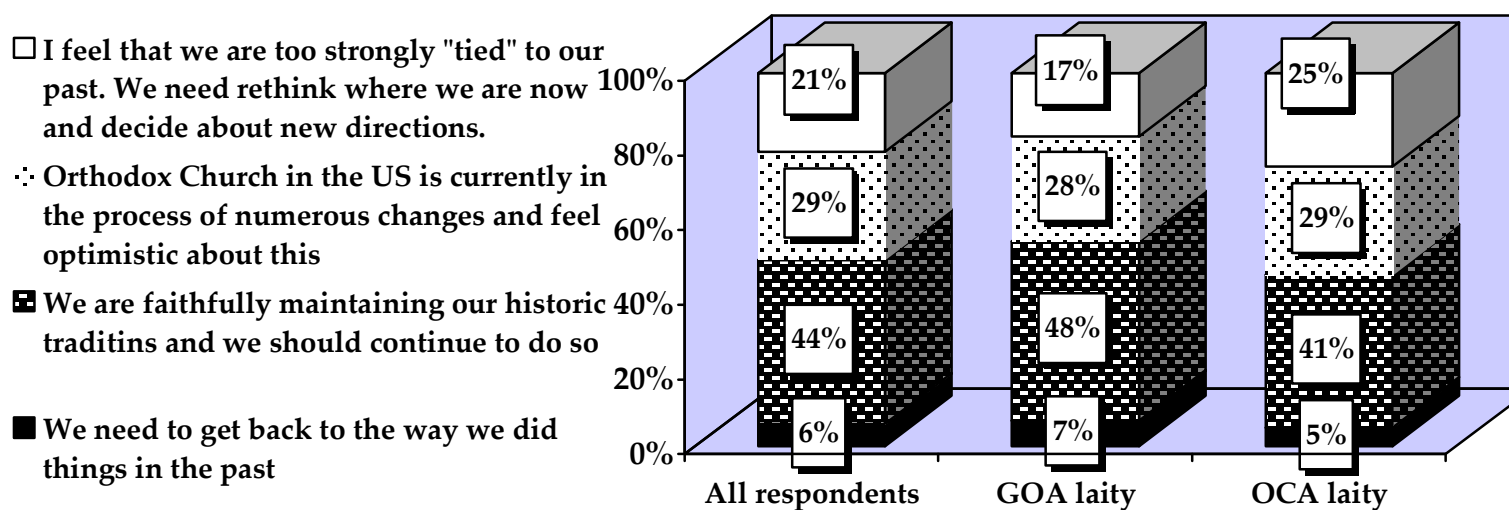
**Note:** Source of data for the Roman Catholic Church (D'Antonio 2007)

Finding a proper balance between established church traditions and denominational culture, on the one hand, and the necessity to adapt to changing social realities and various local contexts in which the church functions, on the other hand, is probably difficult for all Christian denominations. At the same time, because of the strong emphasis on the continuity and tradition in the Church life, this question is particularly challenging for American Orthodox Churches. What do ordinary "people in the pews" envision in this regard for the Orthodox Church in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? Do they prefer to keep all things in the Church the way they always used to be or do they promote changes and innovations in American Orthodoxy? Which way parishioners want to go?

Our survey asked “Of the following, which **ONE** best describes your opinion of the present and future directions for the Orthodox Church in the US?” We gave respondents four options to answer this question indicating either their preference for maintaining once and forever adopted patterns of church life or, to the contrary, their desire for change and innovation.

Fig. 41A shows that American Orthodox laity are divided equally in two groups. Half of parishioners approve or even encourage change in the Church by saying “The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this (29%)” or “I feel that we are too strongly ‘tied’ to our past. We need rethink where we are now and decide about new directions (21%).” Another half of respondents, however, praise tradition and stability in Church life and feel that “We need to get back to the way we did things in the past (6%)” or “We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so (44%)” One can see that there are somewhat more proponents of Church innovations in the OCA (54%), while slightly more than half (55%) of GOA parishioners insist on keeping the Church unchangeable. Yet, it is clear that the members of both the GOA and the OCA are almost equally divided among themselves in their vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the US.

**Fig. 41A. Laity Vision for the Church’s Future: “Of the following, which ONE best describes your opinion of the present and future directions for the Orthodox Church in the US?” (%)**

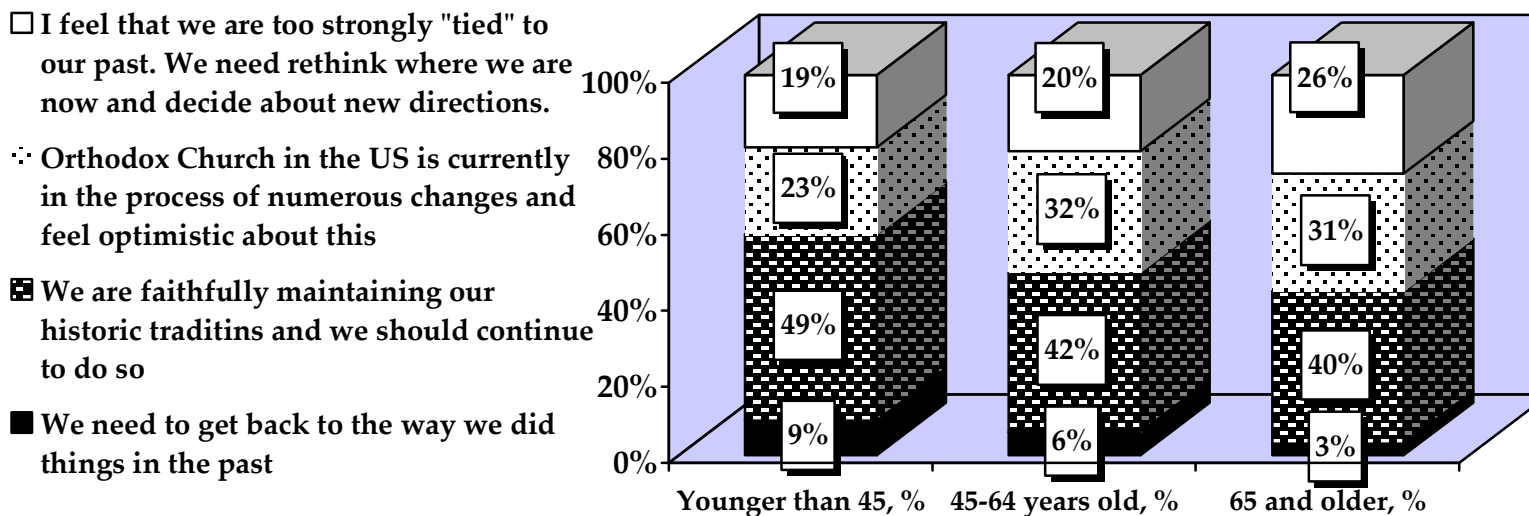


We found that various generations of Orthodox laity have different vision for the Church’s future. See Fig. 41B. The senior parishioners older than 65 are more likely to embrace changes in Church life. Absolute majority of them (57%) believe that either “The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this (31%)” or “I feel that we are too strongly ‘tied’ to our past. We need rethink where we are now and decide about new directions (26%).”

To the contrary, dominant majority (58%) of the younger Church members (under 45) reject changes in the Church. 9% of them feel that “We need to get back to the way we did things in the past” and 49% said “We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so (49%).” This greater conservatism on the part of the younger Orthodox laity, their relative unwillingness to accept changes in Church life are consistent with what we found in previous chapter: the fact that the younger parishioners have greater preference for the old “cultic” model of priesthood (while lay members older than 65 are stronger supporters of the “servant-leadership” model of priesthood which blurs the line of separation between the clergy and the laity and challenges ultimate authority of priest in a parish). Similarly, in the previous chapter we noted that the younger church members are more likely to view clergy as being bearers of established traditions, while senior parishioners have greater preference for the priests acting as promoters of changes and adaptations in Church. Finally, we saw also that compared to the older Church members, significantly more of younger parishioners feel that issue of “Parishioners no longer living up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith” is serious problem in the Church. Clearly, nostalgia for the way the things were done in the Church in the past is more present among younger generation of Orthodox faithful than among senior Church members.

**Fig. 41 B. Laity Vision for the Church’s Future: Opinions of Various Age Groups**

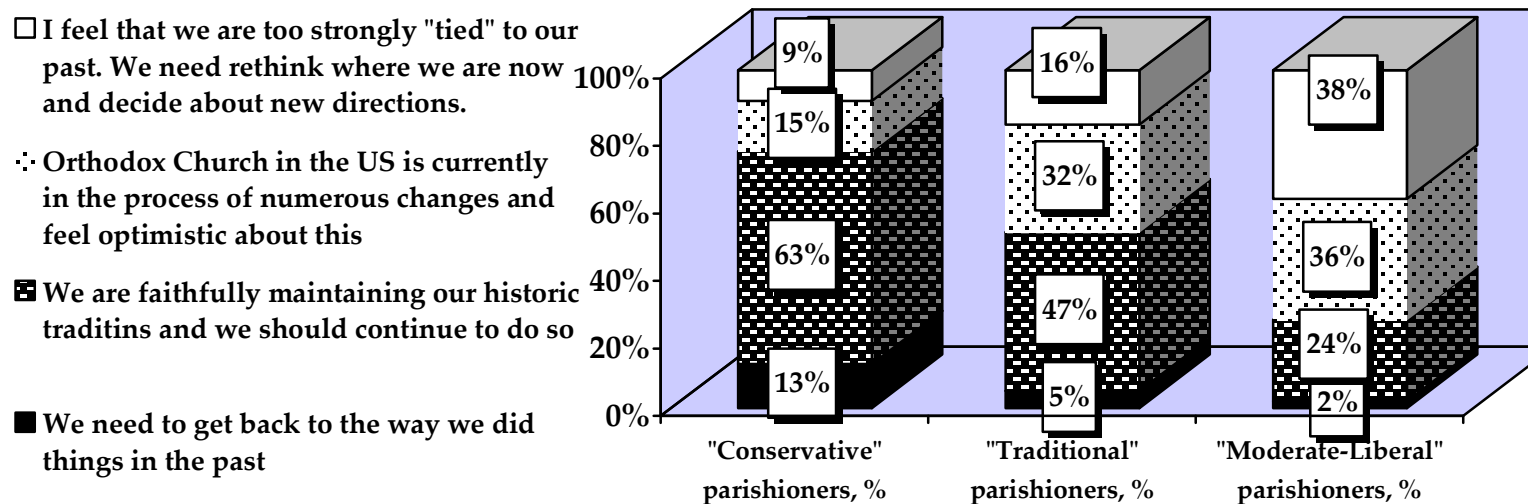
**“Of the following, which ONE best describes your opinion of the present and future directions for the Orthodox Church in the US?” (%)**



Predictably, there is a very serious disagreement in the vision for the Church’s future and in their relation to the possible innovations between parishioners who described their theological stance and approach to Church life as either “Conservative,” or “Traditional,” or “Moderate-Liberal.” See Fig 41C on the next page. More than three quarters (76%) of “Conservative” lay members are strong adherents of keeping Church life unchangeable. To the contrary, three quarters (74%) of “Moderate-Liberal” affirm changes and new developments in the Church.

**Fig. 41 C. Laity Vision for the Church's Future: Opinions of Theologically "Conservative," "Traditional," and "Moderate-Liberal" Parishioners.**

**"Of the following, which ONE best describes your opinion of the present and future directions for the Orthodox Church in the US?" (%)**



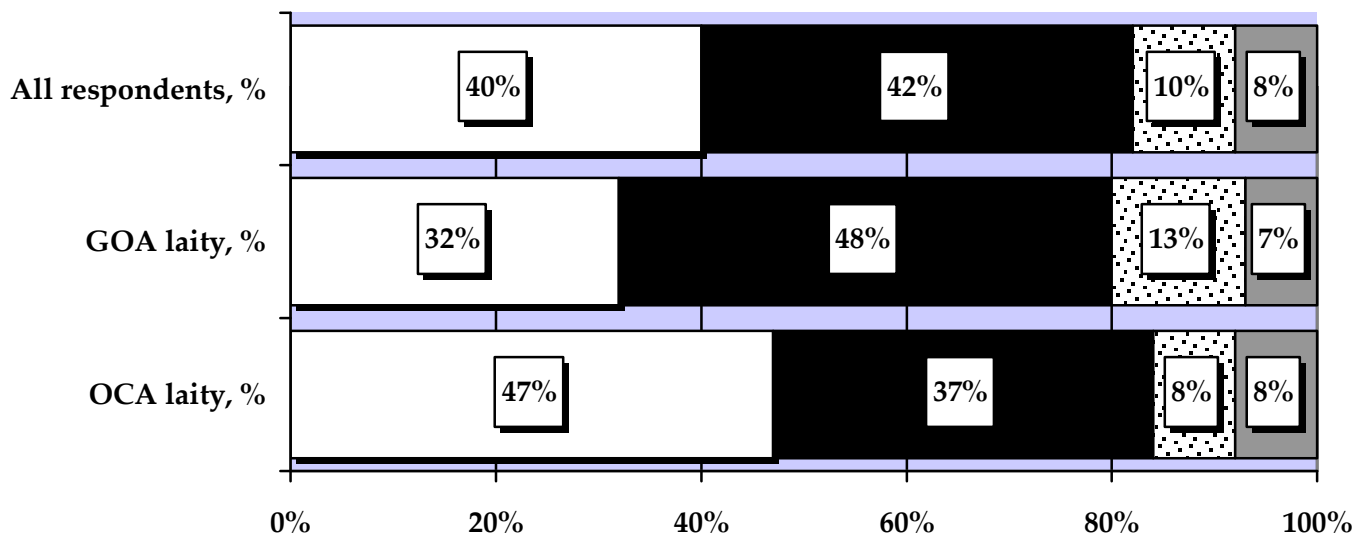
Along with either acceptance or rejection of changes and innovations in Church life, one more issue divides strongly American Orthodox Christians – the problem of the so-called “Orthodox Unity in America.” Today, the Orthodox Christian community in the US is divided among numerous independent and ethnically-based Church jurisdictions (denominations) with the GOA and the OCA being largest ones. Nine of these jurisdictions have a joint consulting body – the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in Americas (SCOBA). Yet, SCOBA serves merely as a forum for the regular dialogue and discussion among Orthodox bishops. There is little coordination and practical co-operation between American Orthodox jurisdictions. Similarly, on the local level and in most areas of the country, there is little or none communication between Orthodox parishes which belong to different jurisdictions. During past two decades, the subject of “Orthodox unity in America” implying creation of a unified Orthodox Christian Church in the US has been frequently debated among both clergy and laity. So far, however, only one practical step in this direction was made: the 1994 Ligonier meeting of 29 Orthodox bishops representing all SCOBA jurisdictions which produced the statement declaring a general intention to form a united Orthodox Church. For many reasons, this statement resulted in numerous controversies and tensions both within American Orthodox community and abroad (most of American Orthodox jurisdictions are to a greater or lesser extent subordinated to the Mother Churches in the so-called Old Lands of Orthodoxy). The discussion of arguments presented in the meantime by promoters and opponents of American Orthodox unity as well as possible practical models proposed for united Church are beyond limits of this study report.

The bottom line is simple: many Orthodox Christians in the US – clergy and lay members alike – feel that more practical actions and deliberate steps are urgently needed to achieve administrative unity of American Orthodoxy. At the same time, more than a few are also perfectly happy with the present situation.

The results of the “Orthodox Church Today” study confirmed that there is **NO** clearly dominant position and prevailing opinion among the GOA and OCA parishioners on the question of Orthodox unity in America. Our survey asked: “The subject of ‘Orthodox unity’ in America has been discussed for a long time. What do you think about the current situation and possible future developments?” The respondents were given three possible answers to choose from and also a possibility to write their own respond if neither of these answers reflects their opinions. See Fig. 42.

**Fig. 42 Laity Vision for the Orthodox Unity in America: “The subject of “Orthodox unity” in America has been discussed for a long time. What do you think about the current situation and possible future developments?”**

- ☐ I think that very little has been done so far to achieve this goal. We need more consistent efforts and should act more intentionally.
- ☒ I think that we are on the right path. Orthodox unity in US will be eventually achieved through the increasing cooperation among various American Orthodox jurisdictions - the way it goes now
- ☐ I think that the question of Orthodox unity is unnecessarily overemphasized in our church life. There are many other issues which are more important for the future of Orthodoxy in America
- ☐ Any other answer



First, one can see that only small number of respondents (10%) seem NOT to care at all about this question and said that “I think that the question of Orthodox unity is unnecessarily overemphasized in our Church life and that there are many other issues which are more urgent and important for the future of Orthodoxy in America.”

Second, two groups of parishioners representing different points of view are almost equal in size: 40% of respondents voice more consistent efforts towards Orthodox unity, while 42% are quite comfortable with the current situation.

Third, in GOA, the laity who are happy with current situation (48%) outnumber those who like to move faster towards united American Orthodox Church (32%). To the contrary, in OCA, relative majority of Church members (47%) leans towards making more intentional steps to achieve Orthodox unity in America. Neither in GOA nor in OCA, however, either of “camps” can claim absolute majority among Church members.

Fourth, there is no significant difference between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy in how they approach the subject of Orthodox unity in America. Similarly, there is no statistically significant difference in responses to the question about future of Orthodox unity provided by the parishioners who described their theological position and approach to Church life as “Conservative,” or “Traditional,” or “Moderate-Liberal.” That is, the personal “micro-theology” of Orthodox laity is irrelevant for their opinion on the theme of Orthodox unity in the US.

Fifth, quite differently, we found that the education level of respondents is a strong predictor for how they address the question about Orthodox unity in America. College graduates are much more inclined to move faster towards united American Orthodox Church, while a relative majority of parishioners without college degree are comfortable with present situation.

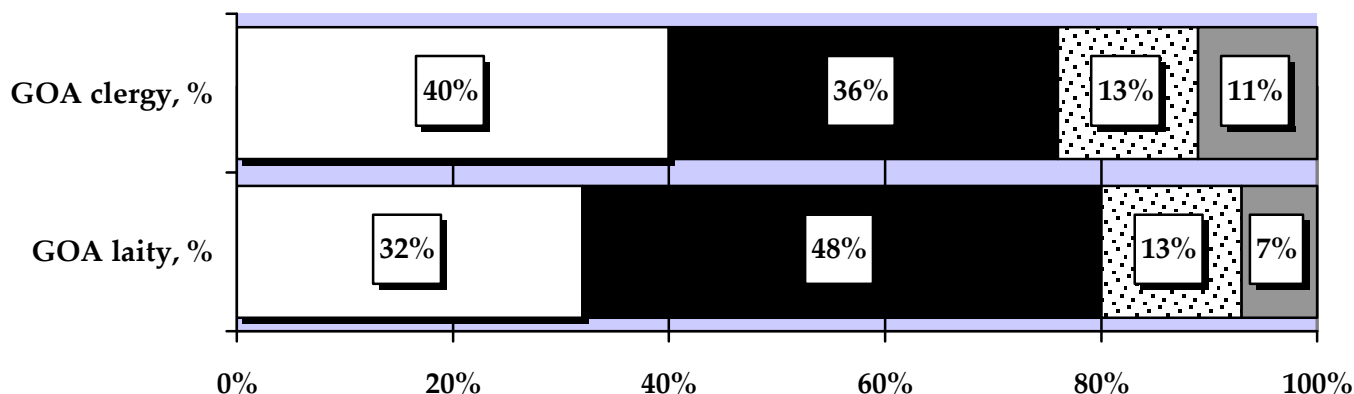
Sixth, various generations of Church members also have somewhat different preferences for the future of Orthodox unity in America. The relative majority of both younger (under 45) and senior (older 65) parishioners feel that “We are on the right path. Orthodox unity in US will be eventually achieved through the increasing cooperation among the various American Orthodox jurisdictions – the way it goes now.” On the contrary, among baby-boomers in the age between 45 and 65, more respondents believe “That very little has been done so far to achieve this goal. We need more consistent efforts and should act much more intentionally.”

In our 2006 study of American Orthodox clergy (Krindatch 2006) we asked GOA clergy the same question on the future of Orthodox unity in America. How do GOA priests compare to their flock in their vision for united Orthodox Church in the US? Fig 43. shows that relative majority of GOA parishioners (48%) prefer to keep current situation, but relative majority (40%) of their pastors believe that more immediate actions and steps are needed in order to move faster towards Orthodox unity in America.

**Fig. 43 GOA Clergy and GOA Laity Vision for the Orthodox Unity in America:**

**“The subject of “Orthodox unity” in America has been discussed for a long time. What do you think about the current situation and possible future developments?”**

- ☐ I think that very little has been done so far to achieve this goal. We need more consistent efforts and should act more intentionally.
- ☒ I think that we are on the right path. Orthodox unity in US will be eventually achieved through the increasing cooperation among various American Orthodox jurisdictions - the way it goes now
- ☐ I think that the question of Orthodox unity is unnecessarily overemphasized in our church life. There are many other issues which are more important for the future of Orthodoxy in America
- ☐ Any other answer



We also looked at responses of parishioners who decided to write “other answers.” Generally they fell in two categories: those who said that they don’t know much about issue of “Orthodox unity in America,” and those who expressed their serious doubts that united American Orthodox Church would be ever possible. There were three types of reasons given by the later group:

- Opposition from the Mother Churches abroad (as one parishioners wrote “Financial demands of European Orthodox churches will prevent North American unity.”);
- Unwillingness of American Orthodox bishops to properly pursue the goal of Orthodox unity (as one parishioner said “I believe the hierarchs mostly just give lip service to this issue.”);



- The “ethnocentrism” and strength of the “ethnic sentiments” still present in American Orthodox jurisdictions (one of the typical answers in this regard was “There remains too many ethnic divisions. Some ethnic groups just don't want it.”).

To conclude, the survey tells us that both among clergy and laity, both in GOA and in OCA, the question of “Orthodox Unity in America” can be seen as a divisive issue. Neither supporters of faster moving towards united American Orthodox Church nor those who are comfortable with current arrangements can claim *absolute* majority.

The final question in this chapter is “What GOA and OCA parishioners think about leadership qualities of those who have most power in the Orthodox Church – the Orthodox bishops?” We offered respondents the statement “Orthodox bishops in America strive to guide the Church wisely and competently” and asked them if they “agree,” or “disagree” or are “neutral or unsure.” See Tab. 24. Slightly more than half of the laity (57%) feel that American Orthodox bishops do their best to be competent and wise Church leaders. About one in five respondents (18%) disagreed with the statement that “Orthodox bishops in America strive to guide the Church wisely and competently.” A quarter of parishioners were unsure how to evaluate the leadership of the Church hierarchs.

**Tab. 24. “Orthodox bishops in America strive to guide the Church wisely and competently.”**

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
All respondents, %	57	18	25
GOA parishioners, %	62	15	23
OCA parishioners, %	53	20	27
Cradle Orthodox parishioners, %	55	26	19
Converts to Orthodoxy, %	61	23	16
Parishioners younger than 45, %	58	22	20
Parishioners 45-64 years old, %	56	28	16
Parishioners 65 years and older, %	59	21	20
Parishioners without college degree, %	61	25	14
College/university graduates, %	56	24	20
“Conservative” parishioners, %	67	18	15
“Traditional” parishioners, %	57	26	17
“Moderate-Liberal” parishioners, %	48	30	22

How to judge and interpret this result? On the one hand, absolute majority of both GOA (62%) and OCA (53%) laity approve the leadership of their hierarchs. On the other hand, in both jurisdictions there is rather significant number of Church members (38% in GOA and 47% in OCA) who are either unhappy with their bishops or have problems judging their work.

Tab. 24 shows also that there is not much difference in opinions about leadership of American Orthodox bishops between various generations of parishioners, between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and between persons with various level of education. At the same time, the personal “micro-theology” of Church members does play significant role in their judgment of the Church leaders. More than two-thirds (67%) of the respondents describing their theological stance and approach to Church life as “Conservative” believe that “Orthodox bishops in America strive to guide the Church wisely and competently.” Quite differently, less than half (48%) of “Moderate-Liberal” parishioners agreed with this statement.

## **VII. Changes and Innovations in the Orthodox Church: What Do Laity Think About?**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- An absolute majority of GOA and OCA parishioners do not like to see women in the positions of altar servers, deacons or priests. Only 3 in 10 respondents would support women being altar servers and deacons, and only 1 in 10 feel that women should be eligible to the Orthodox priesthood;
- American Orthodox clergy and laity are very similar in their attitudes towards ordination of women;
- Compared to the middle-aged and senior parishioners, significantly *fewer* persons under 45 years old would let women to be altar servers, deacons or priests;
- Only a small minority of both GOA (20%) and OCA (12%) parishioners agreed that “Orthodox Church should allow its local parishes more freedom to explore new forms and patterns of liturgical life;”
- Only 14% of OCA and 24% of GOA members supported the statement that “All Orthodox Christians should have the individual freedom to interpret Scripture and Orthodox Tradition for themselves and be tolerant of differing interpretations;”
- Of all age categories, the senior parishioners (65 and older) are more likely to agree that “Orthodox Church should allow its local parishes more freedom to explore new forms and patterns of liturgical life” and that “All Orthodox Christians should have the individual freedom to interpret Scriptures and Orthodox Tradition for themselves and be tolerant of differing interpretations;”
- In both OCA and GOA, more parishioners than clergy voice the idea of greater freedom for all Orthodox Christians to interpret personally Scriptures and Orthodox Tradition.

We saw earlier that GOA and OCA members are divided in their opinions about adaptations and innovations in Church life. In the previous chapter we found that half of our respondents generally approve changes in the Church. Indeed, responding to the question about their vision for the Church's future, 29% of them chose the answer "The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this" and 21% said "I feel that we are too strongly 'tied' to our past. We need rethink where we are now and decide about new directions." At the same time, another half of our study participants favor tradition and stability in the Church life. Answering the same question, they said either "We need to get back to the way we did things in the past (6%)" or "We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so (44%)." All these statements, however, merely indicate attitudes of parishioners towards the idea of new developments in the Church in general.

We explored opinions of Orthodox laity on three particular "hot" subjects related to possible innovations in the Orthodox Church:

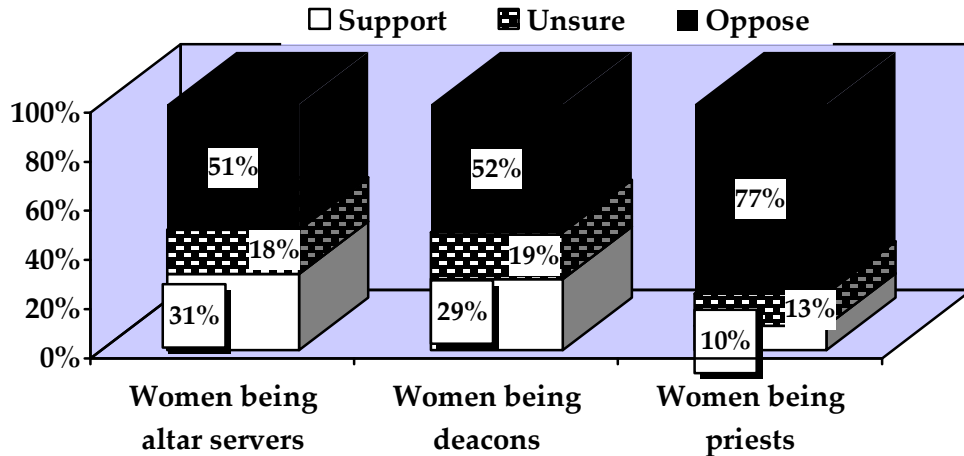
- Ordination of women;
- Greater freedom for individual parishes to experiment with forms of liturgical life;
- Greater freedom of individual Orthodox Christians to interpret Scripture and Orthodox doctrine.

We asked our respondents if they would support or oppose women in the three roles in the Church which are currently reserved exclusively for men: women as altar servers, women as deacons and women as priests. It should be noted that in the past the Orthodox Church had a female deaconate which "died out" in the middle ages. In 1988, the Pan-Orthodox Conference on the role of women held in Rhodes called for its reestablishment (FitzGerald 1998).

We do not know if our respondents were aware of this historical fact, but Fig. 44 o the next page shows that an absolute majority of GOA and OCA parishioners DO NOT like to see women in the positions of altar servers, deacons or priests. Only 3 in 10 respondents would support women being altar servers and deacons, and only 1 in 10 feel that women should be eligible to the Orthodox priesthood.

**Fig. 44 Ordination of Women:**

**“Would you support or oppose women in the following roles in the Church?” (%)**

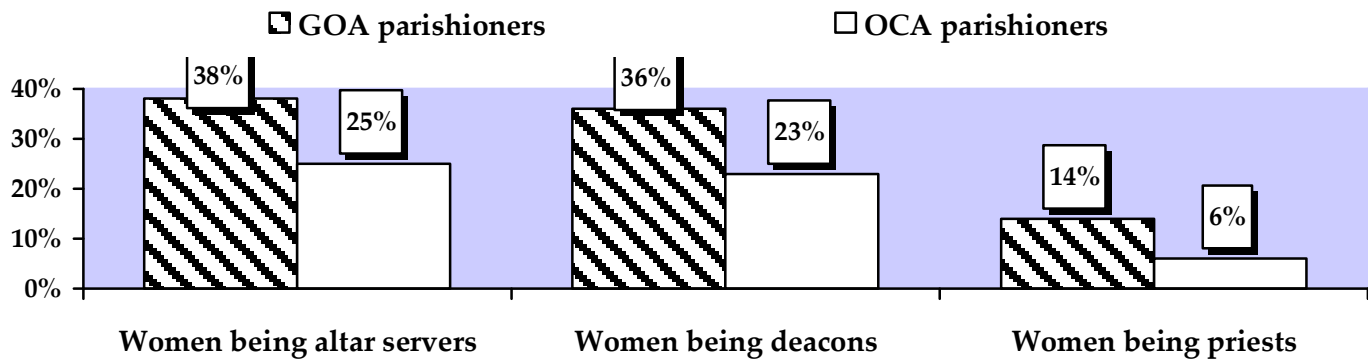


It should also be noted that there was no differences in the responses to this question given by the male and female study participants. That is, Orthodox men and women are fairly uniform in their opinions about positions that women may or may not occupy in the Church. Further, in the 2006 national study of American Orthodox clergy (Krindatch 2006) we asked GOA and OCA priests about their opinions about ordination of women to deaconate. Compared with Orthodox laity, almost the same proportion of GOA and OCA clergy said that they would either support (31%) or oppose (55%) women as deacons or that they are unsure about this issue (14%). That is, American Orthodox clergy and laity are very similar in their attitudes towards ordination of women.

Although majority of Orthodox laity agreed that women SHOULD NOT serve in the capacity of altar servers, deacons or priests, some differences in opinions between various categories of respondents need to be noted. First, compared to OCA laity, more GOA parishioners would support women in the roles of altar servers, deacons or priests. See Fig. 45 on the next page.

**Fig. 45 Ordination of Women: Opinions of GOA and OCA Members**

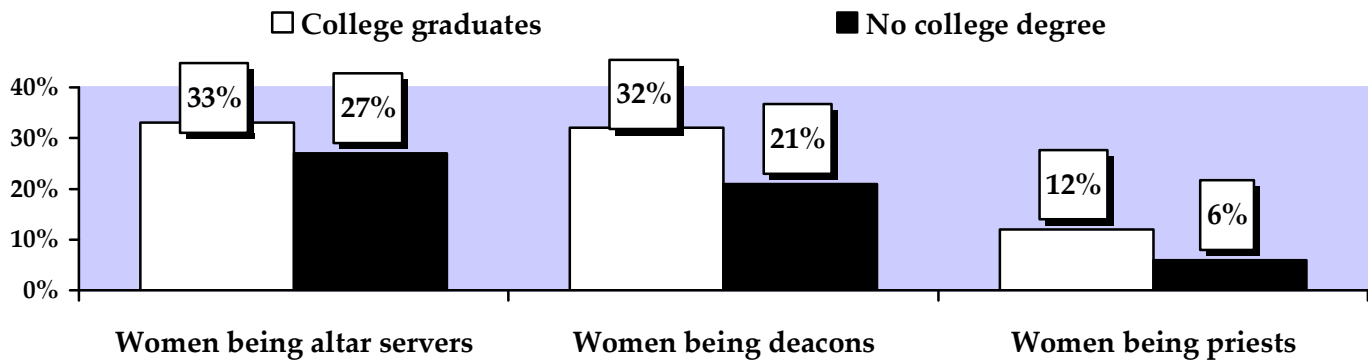
% of respondents who would SUPPORT WOMEN in the following roles



Second, parishioners with college degrees are significantly more in favor of women being altar servers, deacons or priests than the persons without a college education. See Fig. 46.

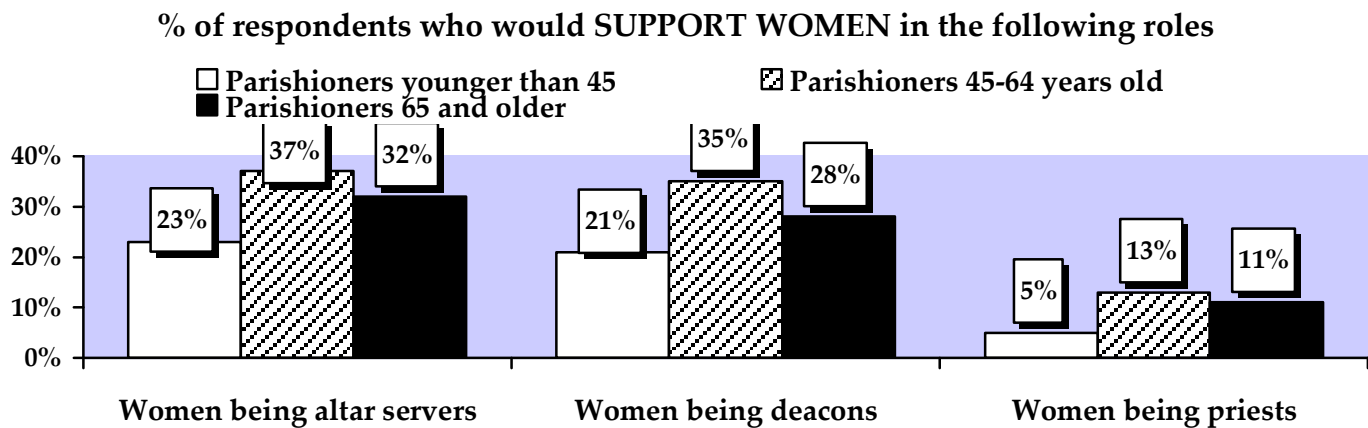
**Fig. 46 Ordination of Women: Opinions of Laity with Various Education Levels**

% of respondents who would SUPPORT WOMEN in the following roles



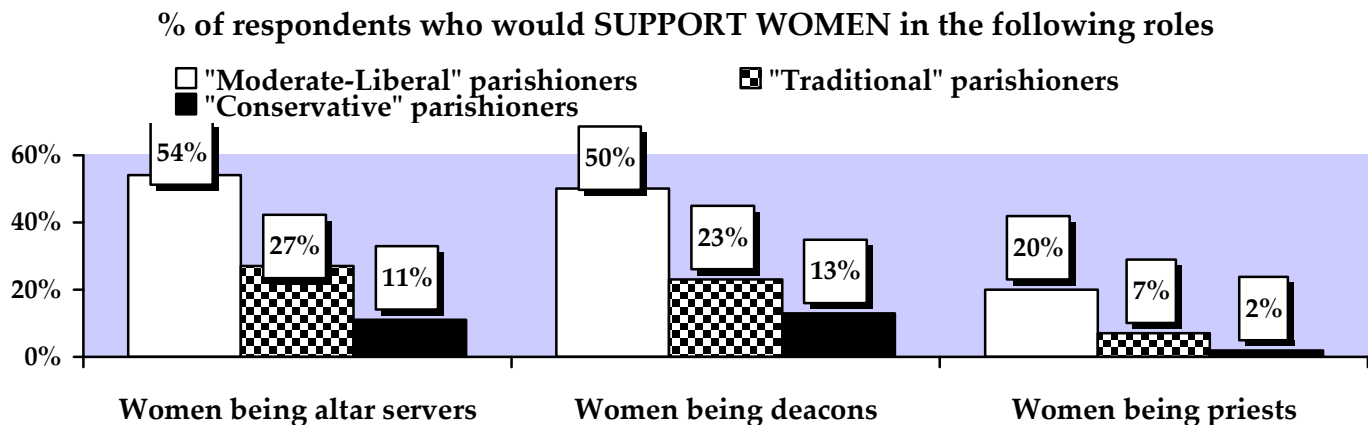
Third, we looked at opinions of the various generations of parishioners and noticed the pattern which has been already discussed earlier: the younger generation of the American Orthodox faithful (those under 45) tend to be in many ways more conservative in their Church attitudes than the middle aged (45-64) and the senior (65 and older) Church members. Indeed, compared to the middle-aged and senior parishioners, significantly fewer persons under 45 years old would let women to be altar servers, deacons or priests. See Fig. 47 on the next page.

**Fig. 47 Ordination of Women: Opinions of Various Generations**



Finally and predictably, the most serious gap in opinions on the ordination of women is determined by the personal “micro-theology” of the GOA and OCA members. That is, the respondents who defined their theological position and approach to Church life as “conservative,” “traditional” or “moderate-liberal” have quite different ideas about allowing women to become altar servers, deacons and priests. See Fig. 48. At least half of the “moderate-liberal” Church members would support women as altar servers (54%) or deacons (50%), in comparison with only about one-quarter among “traditional” parishioners and only about one-tenth among parishioners who described themselves as “conservative.”

**Fig. 48 Ordination of Women: Opinions of Theologically “Conservative,” “Traditional” and “Moderate-Liberal” Parishioners**



To conclude, the idea of ordination of women to the Orthodox *priesthood* (i.e., being presbyters) is fairly strongly rejected by all categories of Orthodox laity. Even in case of “moderate-liberal” respondents, only 1 in 5 would support women in the role of an Orthodox priest. At the same time, there is a relatively sizeable faction among GOA and OCA lay members who would welcome women in the capacity of altar servers and deacons.

Yet, overall American Orthodox laity are much less open to idea of women in the new roles in the Church than, for instance, the members of the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, the 2005 national survey of American Roman Catholics found that the *vast majority* of them would accept women serving as altar servers, deacons and priests. See Tab. 24.

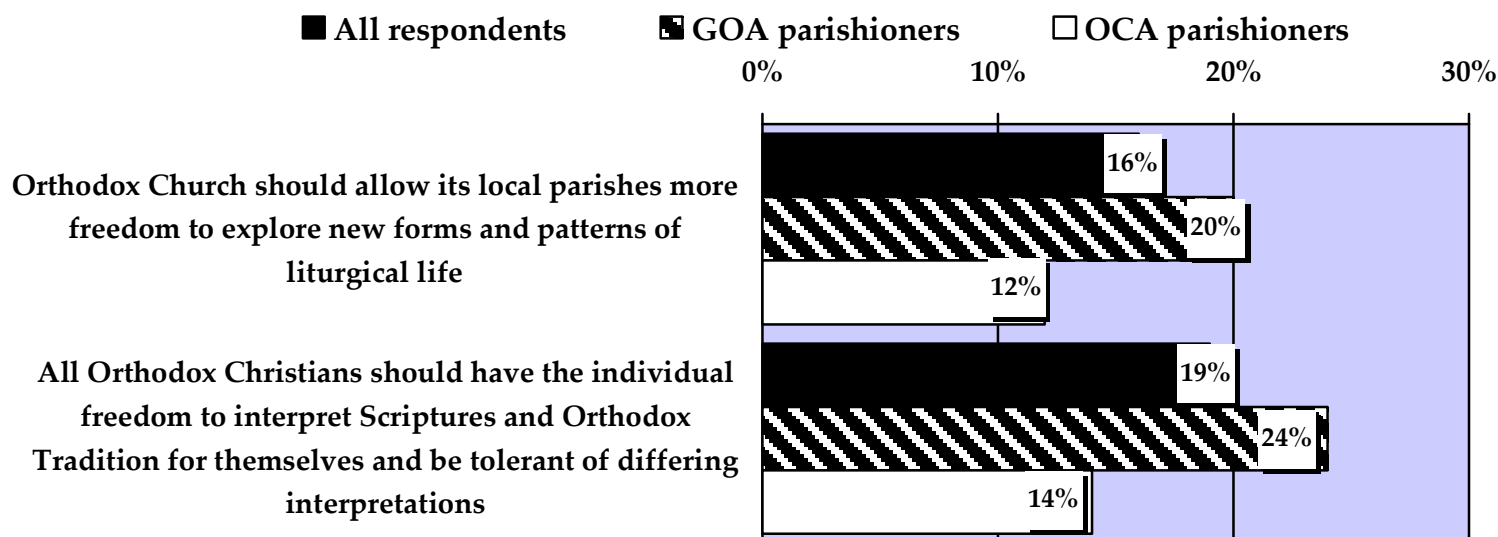
**Tab. 24 Ordination of Women:** “Would you support or oppose women in the following roles in the Church?”

% of respondents saying that they <b>WOULD SUPPORT WOMEN</b> in the following roles		
	Roman Catholic laity	Orthodox laity
Women as an altar server	93	31
Women as a deacon	81	29
Women as a priest	63	10

**Note:** Source of data for the Roman Catholic Church (D’Antonio 2007)

Our survey offered GOA and OCA laity two statements on possible changes in the life of the Church: “Orthodox Church should allow its local parishes more freedom to explore new forms and patterns of liturgical life” and “All Orthodox Christians should have the individual freedom to interpret Scriptures and Orthodox Tradition for themselves and be tolerant of differing interpretations.” Both statements challenge strong authority of the hierarchical Church and necessity to get approval from the bishops for any such innovations. They also reflect a more individualized approach to faith, more commonly found in American Protestant Churches. The proportion of parishioners who agreed with these statements is shown in Fig. 49 on the next page.

**Fig. 49 Attitudes of GOA and OCA Laity to the Changes and Innovations in the Church:**  
**% of GOA and OCA parishioners who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



Only a small minority of both GOA (20%) and OCA (12%) parishioners agreed that “Orthodox Church should allow its local parishes more freedom to explore new forms and patterns of liturgical life.” Similarly, only 19% of all respondents (14% of OCA, 24% of GOA members) supported the statement that “All Orthodox Christians should have the individual freedom to interpret Scripture and Orthodox Tradition for themselves and be tolerant of differing interpretations.”

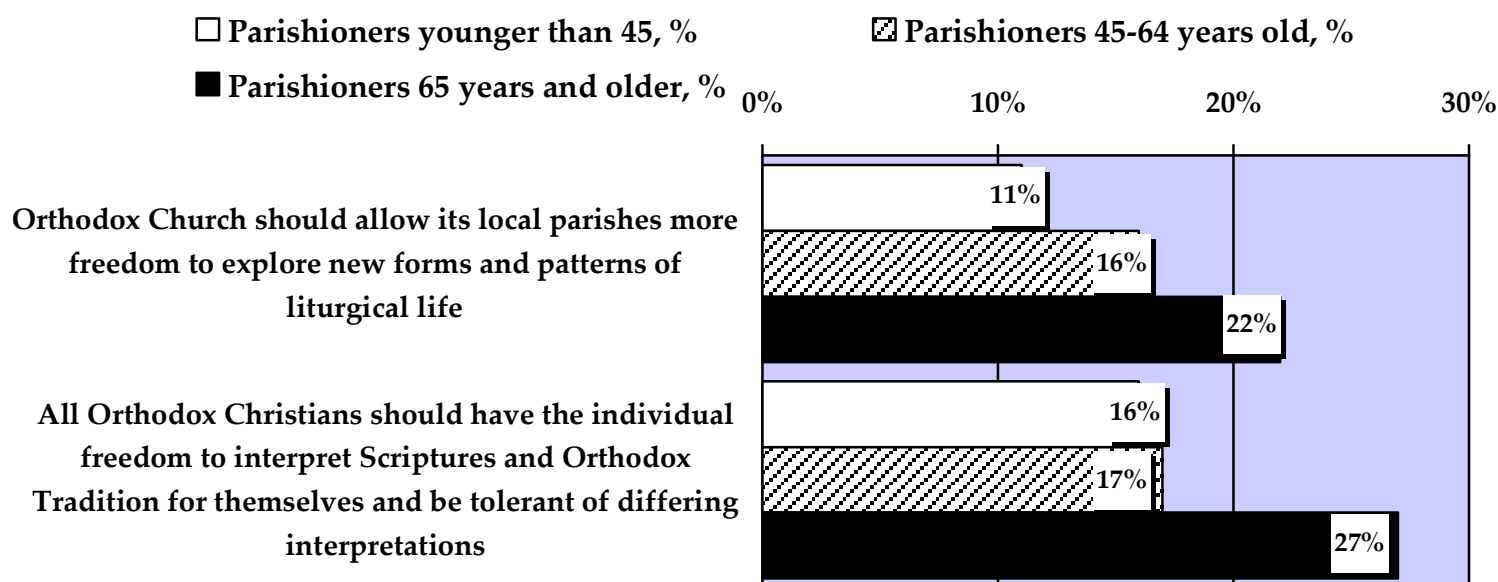
Compared to OCA, there were somewhat more GOA parishioners who agreed with both statements, thus, indicating their greater desire for innovation in the Church. At the same time, in an overall picture, no more than 1 out of 5 lay members feel that their parishes need greater freedom to experiment and to decide locally about innovations in liturgy and that ordinary Church members should be entitled to personal interpretation of Scripture and Orthodox Tradition. Of course, the study did not ask more specific questions about the nature of the liturgical changes that the respondents favored. For example, in the GOA, “liturgical changes” in some parishes could mean more extensive use of English (versus Greek), while in the OCA it could mean something else. More in-depth and jurisdiction specific research on this question is needed

What about age differences in approaches of laity to the questions of liturgical experimentation and personal interpretation of Scripture? Fig. 50 shows that of all age categories, the senior parishioners (65 and older) are more likely to agree that “Orthodox Church should allow its local parishes more freedom to explore new forms and patterns of liturgical life” and that “All Orthodox Christians should have the individual freedom to interpret Scriptures and Orthodox Tradition for themselves and be tolerant of differing interpretations.”



This fact is consistent with our earlier findings that parishioners older than 65 are more likely to embrace general changes in Church life than the middle-aged and younger church members (see previous chapter), that the senior parishioners have greater preferences for the priests acting as promoters of changes and adaptations in Church and that the older church members are stronger supporters of the “servant-leadership” model of priesthood which challenges ultimate authority of clergy in the Church (see chapter 5).

**Fig. 50 Age of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to the Changes and Innovations in the Church:**  
**% of parishioners in various age categories who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with**  
**the following statements**

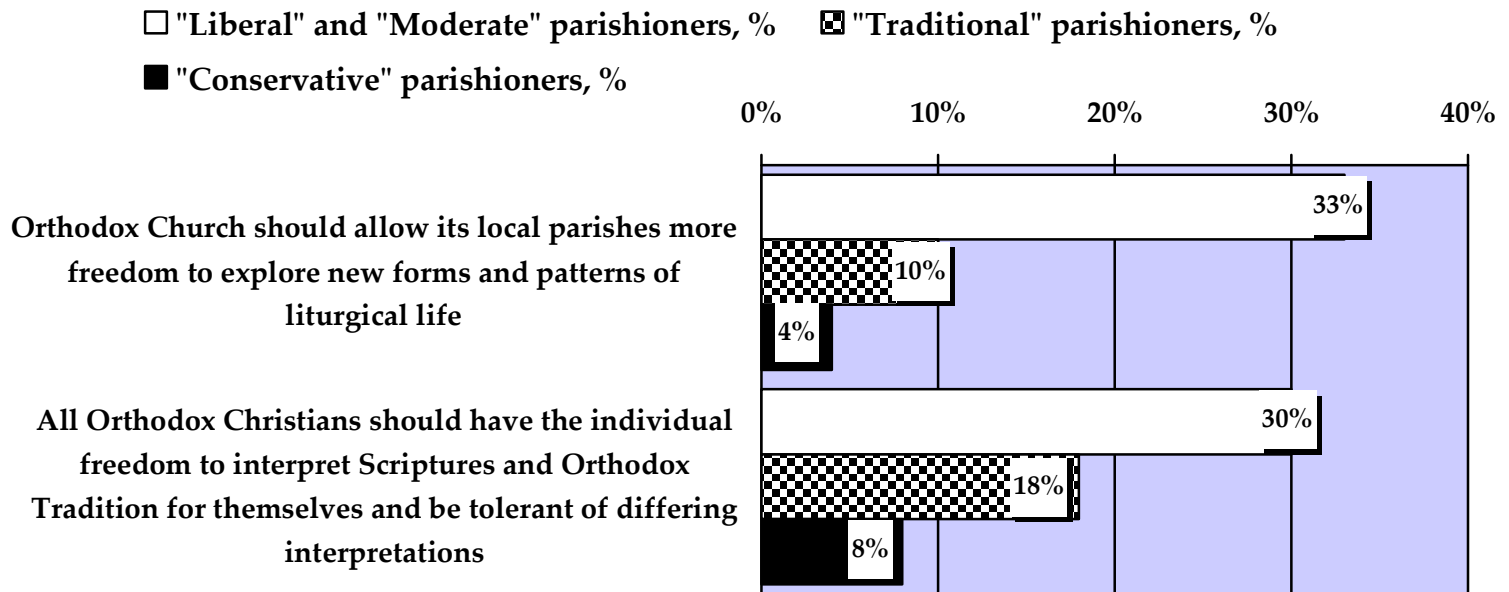


Predictably, in comparison with rather modest distinctions between GOA and OCA members and between various generations of parishioners, the “micro-theology” of the laity – their self-identification as being either “conservative,” or “traditional,” or “moderate,” or “liberal” – is the strongest predictor for the differences in responses to the statements about liturgical experimentation and personal interpretation of Scripture.

As one can expect, compared to “traditional” or, especially, “conservative” parishioners, the respondents who identified themselves as “liberal” and “moderate” were much more likely to agree with the statements “Orthodox Church should allow its local parishes more freedom to explore new forms and patterns of liturgical life” and “All Orthodox Christians should have the individual freedom to interpret Scriptures and Orthodox Tradition for themselves and be tolerant of differing interpretations.” Almost one third of “moderate” and “liberal” Church members supported these statements. See Fig. 51 on the next page.

**Fig. 51 Theological Stance of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to the Changes and Innovations in the Church:**

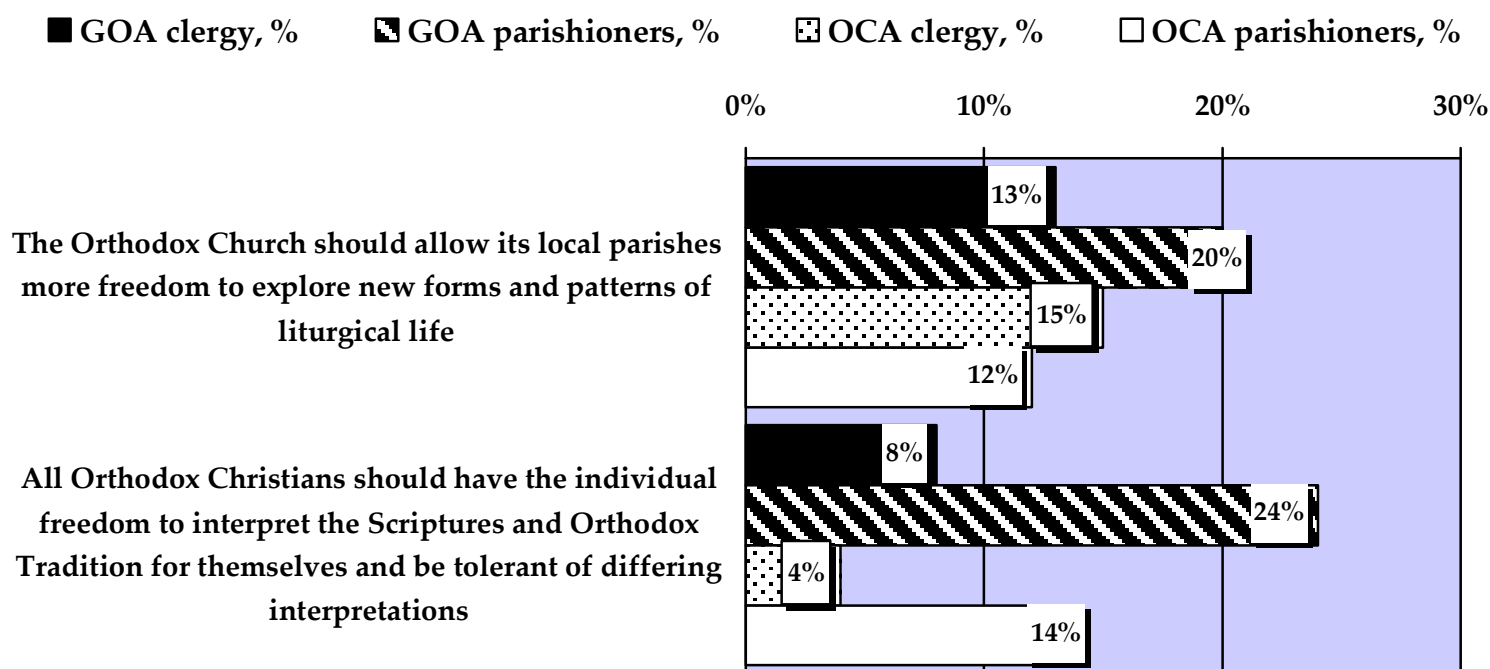
**% of parishioners with various theological stance who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



To what extent do the opinions of ordinary parishioners about freedoms of liturgical experimentation and of personal interpretation of Scripture reflect those of their parish priests? Are “shepherds” and their “flock” similar in their attitudes to these issues? Fig. 52 shows that GOA and OCA clergy and laity generally agree on the first subject – the question of greater freedom for individual parishes to experiment with forms of liturgical life. Only 12-20% of both GOA and OCA parishioners and parish clergy feel need for it. At the same time, in both OCA and GOA, more parishioners (24% GOA, 14% OCA) than clergy (8% GOA, 4% OCA) voice the idea of greater freedom for all Orthodox Christians to interpret personally Scriptures and Orthodox Tradition.

**Fig. 52 Laity and Clergy Attitudes to the Changes and Innovations in the Church:**

**% of GOA and OCA parishioners and clergy who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



**Note:** data for Orthodox clergy are from (Krindatch 2006)

In spite of some variations between GOA and OCA members, between older and younger Church members, and even between persons with various theological stance, by and large GOA and OCA parishioners DO NOT support ordination of women, or greater freedom for local parishes to experiment with liturgical life or greater freedom for individual believers to interpret Scripture. We conclude that:

- a vast majority of the American Orthodox lay members want to keep the current situation in which experimentation with liturgical life or interpretation of the Scripture is largely seen as a prerogative of the Church hierarchs while priestly vocation is reserved exclusively for men;
- there is rather strong agreement between American Orthodox clergy and laity on these subjects.

Hence, most GOA and OCA lay members do not favor ordination of women, or greater freedom for local parishes to experiment with liturgical life or greater freedom for individual believers to interpret Scripture. Are there any other “innovations in question” which are considered or, at least, discussed in American Orthodox community?

The focus groups and in-depth interviews administered in 9 GOA and 6 OCA parishes situated in various parts of the country helped us to answer this question. A total of 140 GOA and OCA parishioners participated in these focus groups, providing us with numerous insights and information about their personal Church experiences and religious lives and about their home parishes and clergy. Two particular questions which were discussed were pertinent to the subject of changes and innovations in the Church.

First, we requested focus group participants to complete in writing the sentence “If I could change just one thing about this parish, it would be...” Second, we asked parishioners to reflect on the question: “Are there any Orthodox Church rules or traditions that you think don’t fit with the realities of life in 21<sup>st</sup> century America?” Put differently, we asked respondents to think about both “small” and “big” issues, about desirable changes in their local home parishes and in Church in general. A number of responses to these questions were very consistent with one another, thus, indicating that certain ideas and desires are shared by many.

Here is what was said, in essence repeatedly and most frequently, in respond to the first question, “If I could change just one thing about this parish, it would be...”

- More connection and integration between the *teaching and the daily life* of Orthodoxy: I would like sermons to address current problems plus how we can or should cope. A weekly sermon strictly pertaining to the Bible - I don't find it relates to my current problems.
- We need to *expand the core community* within the church. Seek ways to make all individuals feel welcomed. There is not a sense of friendliness/warmth within the community unless you are tapped to be a part of the core community. Making everyone feel that they are important to the parish. That each person is an integral & important part of parish life.
- We need to treat the *church as a business*. We need to sell the services/church to draw people into the church.
- I would love the Greek speaking and English speaking parishioners to think of themselves *as ONE AMERICAN family*.
- To make parish more *open and friendly to visitors*, especially non-Greeks. I wish there was a regular meeting for non-Orthodox, but “curious” people interested in the Orthodox Church, “regular” could be 2-3 times per year.
- The one thing I would change would be *Christian education for adults*. To have more opportunity for group study of the faith. I would like to have more formal classes in which I grow to know the Bible better, to know more about the history of the church, both ours and other denominations, and the theological issues that are part of our faith and about the challenges we face today as Christians. I would like to be more educated as a lay person.

- That we do *more evangelization*. Besides advertising and participation in a couple of local charity groups, we do not do a great deal of evangelization. In addition to holding events/concerts here, where we hope people of other faiths will come, perhaps we could participate in other community fairs—of non-religious affiliation.
- The *assumption that we are an ethnic group*—known more for our festivals than our ministries, doctrine, practices and good works. However, the face we should be showing is that of Christ and his love and not that of a good pastry chef, or a great gyro slicer.
- The lack of unity/community spirit. This is a common issue that we've encountered in the many Orthodox parishes we have belonged to over the years. We have encountered many cliques everywhere, but *there is little “caring” about the people within our parishes*, and their needs. We could use a system for hospital follow-up until the person is able to return to church and normal activities; transportation volunteers for parishioners who don't or can't drive, etc. We don't seem to show a sense of “family” or warmth & caring. The Protestants and Evangelicals do a great job at this (we could learn a lot from them) but I have seen little of it in the Orthodox parishes we have belonged to, whether small or large.
- Better communication between the *various generations*. More active young adults. Just really making this church theirs and not just letting the elders of the church keep running most things. I feel like some young adults still need to make the commitment to really being a part of this church.

The second question about desirable changes in the Church - “Are there any Orthodox Church rules or traditions that you think don’t fit with the realities of life in 21<sup>st</sup> century America?” – was discussed by the focus groups participants orally. We recorded their “stories” and “propositions.” The following subjects were raised by many and frequently.

1). The issue of the Orthodox Church calendar. The American Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches and society at large operate on the Gregorian calendar, but the Orthodox Churches use the revised Julian calendar. The result is different – from other American Christian Churches - dates for various church festivals with Easter in the first place. Further, some of Orthodox Churches (the so-called “Old Calendarists”) continue to use the original (not revised) Julian calendar. In these Churches the date for Christmas is also different from the rest of American society (it is celebrated on January 7<sup>th</sup>). Needless to say that for ordinary parishioners the discrepancies between their “personal Orthodox” and “all American” calendars create numerous problems in their social (for instance, the “American” holidays and days off do not correspond with the Orthodox Church festivals) and family lives (many members of Orthodox Churches have religiously mixed families). Many focus group participants expressed an opinion that the Orthodox Church calendar must be adjusted to calendar which is used in society at large.

2) The problem of the so-called inter-communion. The Orthodox Church has a strict rule: Holy Communion, the Eucharist – which is highlight of Orthodox liturgy – is given only to Orthodox Christians. This rule discourages many parishioners to bring to the church their non-Orthodox friends or their non-Orthodox family members. Many focus group participants feel that this rule should be changed.

3) The question of who can serve as a sponsor in weddings but especially in baptisms (i.e. who can serve as “god-father” or “god-mother”). Today, only members of the Orthodox Church can be “god-fathers” or “god-mothers” for Orthodox baptisms. Many parishioners, especially from the religiously mixed families, told us that they want the Orthodox Church to permit their non-Orthodox close friends or their non-Orthodox relatives to be god-fathers or god-mothers for their children.

4) The problem of the marriages with non-Christians. The Orthodox Church recognizes only marriages between Christians: that is, between persons who were baptized in the name of Holy Trinity. In other words, according to Church requirements, Orthodox Christians cannot marry Muslims, Jews, Hindu, Mormons, Unitarians or simply “agnostic” (e.g. not baptized) persons. If they do, they technically excommunicate themselves from the Church and are denied sacraments (e.g. they still can attend worship, but they are not given sacraments and are not considered to be Church members in a good standing). In America, the country, where Orthodox form only tiny minority of population and the notion of religious and cultural pluralism is fundamental, many Orthodox Church members are facing a difficult and unnecessary challenge: they have to decide either to remain Church members or marry a person of his/her choice but abandon the Church. Many parishioners told us very personal stories about their friends and relatives (children, in first place) who found themselves in this painful situation. They feel that Orthodox Church should ease somehow this restriction on marriages with Christians only.

5) Similar issue of the place of the marriage with the non-Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox Church allows her members to marry other - non-Orthodox – Christians. At the same time, such marriage would be valid only if performed in Orthodox Church and by an Orthodox priest. In other words, if a prospective spouse is Roman Catholic or Protestant, the family-in-question has no choice as to where to be married. In many cases this rule results in tensions and misunderstandings between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox parts of the family and in-laws. Many focus group participants expressed their hope that this regulation will be changed.

6) There is a significant need for additional liturgies on a given week-end so that parishioners can choose when to attend. Today, in the vast majority of Orthodox parishes, the liturgy – the most important church service culminating in Holy Communion - is celebrated only once a week, on Sunday morning. Technically, the Orthodox Church rules do not allow the same priest to celebrate more than one liturgy on the same day.

The reality is that because of the busy work, social and family lives many parishioners feel great need for possibility to have several choices as to when attend liturgy. Many focus group participants reflected on fact that the multiple church services (Saturday evening, 2 or even 3 services on Sunday) are commonplace in the Roman Catholic Church and suggested that Orthodox Church should adopt this practice as well.

7) The desire for easier requirements for fasting. The Orthodox Church has strict rules on avoiding all meat (sometimes also fish) and dairy products on certain days every week and during relatively long periods of fasting which are part of Church liturgical calendar (including seven week long Great Lent preceding Easter). Many respondents feel that these rules are too excessive and pose unnecessary challenges on the ordinary church members, especially given the fact that they live and work in the non-Orthodox American society.

8) The need to allow married clergy to become bishops. Today, only celibate and monastic Orthodox clergy can be consecrated as bishops. The focus group participants feel that this rule limits dramatically the pool of worthy candidates available for the highest positions in the Church (only about 9 % of American Orthodox priests are celibate or monastic). Many also expressed an opinion that married bishops would better understand various family related problems and issues of the ordinary church members.

9) The desire for the overall greater role of laity in the Church. In particular, many focus group participants felt that Orthodox Church should adopt the practice of lay ministers (similar to Roman Catholic Church) and to allow laity to deliver sermons in their parishes.

10) A number of suggestions have been made in connection to the image and the ways of operation of American Orthodox bishops. Many parishioners said that bishops:

- should be more approachable and closer to people in the pews, that is, they should interact not only with clergy but also with ordinary parishioners;
- should be more accountable and transparent in their work;
- should be more consistent in equal treatment of all parishes and show less favoritism for certain churches and priests;
- should pay more attention to small Orthodox communities (especially missions) and their problems.

11) The need for greater emphasis on evangelization and reaching out into wider non-Orthodox society. The feeling commonly shared by many focus group participants was that – compared to other Christian denominations – Orthodox Churches remain “too parochial” and too focused on their internal lives.

The parishioners feel that reaching out into non-Orthodox community is important for several reasons:

- bringing new members into Orthodox Church;
- serving society at large – not only “our own” people – as Christian teaching requires;
- making Orthodox Churches more “visible” to American mainstream society.

12) The need to deal with the issue of the different status of men and women in the Church. In our mail survey we found that among current parish council members almost two-thirds are male and only 37% are female. Many focus group participants reflected on this fact. Another frequently raised subject (partially discussed earlier in this chapter) was the ordination of women. Many parishioners felt that ancient practice of female deacons in the Church needs to be revised and restored an (although virtually none mentioned possibility for women to become priests). One more sensitive matter has been raised several times – the so-called “uncleanness” of women. There is no one clear and unified Church position on this subject, but the fact is that many clergy consider menstrual periods as being evil and unnatural and they prohibit their female parishioners to receive Holy Communion during their period of menstruation and during the 40 days period after giving birth. The focus group participants felt that Church needs to deal openly with this issue and to take a clear stand on it.

13) The desire for “Orthodox Unity in America.” We discussed the results of our survey on this issue in previous chapter. Those focus group participants who raised this question typically mentioned two reasons to have one United Orthodox Church in America:

- the necessity for the overall small and further divided along ethnic lines American Orthodox community to “unite forces” and to speak with one voice to the mainstream America;
- the need for the greater local cooperation and better communication between all Orthodox Christians living in particular geographic area (which is currently not the case, because of their affiliation with various Orthodox jurisdictions).

14) Wider usage of various musical instruments in the Church. At this point, the music component in Orthodox Church services is generally limited to choir singing and chanting (although in GOA the use of the organ as an accompaniment to the choir is fairly standard). Many focus group participants felt that Orthodox Church should allow for more experimentation with various music styles and instruments.

The younger parishioners who participated in our focus groups frequently used word “more casual” to describe their preferences for the innovations in the Orthodox Church music.



## VIII. Democracy and Pluralism in the Church

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- More than two-thirds of GOA and OCA members prefer parishes that require uniformity of belief and practice and where people hold the same views. Only one in four respondents favor parishes that tolerate diversity of beliefs and practices and where members discuss openly their views on Church life;
- A hardly dominant majority (51%) of GOA laity support an idea that “The Orthodox Church needs to move faster in empowering lay persons in ministry,” but only 38% of OCA parish members agreed with this statement;
- Absolute majority of GOA and OCA members feel that they and their parish priests should have more impact on selection of diocesan bishops;
- Almost half of GOA and OCA members are not happy with the current practice of appointment parish clergy by the bishops, and would introduce instead the process of selection of the priests by parishioners;
- Parishioners older than 65 are most likely and church members younger than 45 are least likely to support idea that the lay members should have more power in the Orthodox Church either by holding leadership positions in various Church ministries or by having significant impact on selection of priests and bishops;
- At the same time, compared to senior parishioners, the younger Church members are stronger believers that lay people have the right to question different Church rules both nationally and locally;
- Both in GOA and in OCA, the proportion of parishioners who wish to select their pastors is much larger than the proportion of clergy who would allow their parish members to pick and choose the parish priests.

The notions of “democracy” and “pluralism” may seem incompatible with the general image of Orthodoxy. Indeed, the administrative structure of the Orthodox Church is highly centralized. Church hierarchs (bishops) are accorded high level of unconditional authority, the laity have relatively “little say” in the decision making, in many respects, Church life is organized according to “indisputable” traditions and rules. The question which needs to be answered is: “What do American Orthodox laity think about various issues pertinent to the broad subject of ‘democracy and pluralism in the Church’?”

First, we examined opinions of GOA and OCA members about diversity in attitudes to Church life in their home parishes. We wanted to know whether our respondents prefer the parishes where all members are expected to hold the same views and to follow the same practices, or do they favor parishes which tolerate diversity in opinions and which encourage open discussions on the possible disagreements and varied approaches to Church life. Our survey asked: “Which type of parish do you prefer?” The respondents were given three options to respond: “A parish that requires uniformity of belief and practice, where people hold more or less the same views,” “A parish where people hold different views but keep them to themselves,” and “A ‘big-tent’ parish that tolerates diversity of beliefs and practices, where people hold different views and openly discuss their disagreements and varied approaches.” See Tab. 25.

**Tab. 25 Pluralism in a Parish:** “Which type of parish do you prefer?” (%)

	GOA, %	OCA, %	Total, %
A parish that requires uniformity of belief and practice, where people hold more or less the same views	69	67	68
A parish where people hold different views but keep them to themselves	4	8	6
A “big-tent” parish that tolerates diversity of belief and practice, where people hold different views and openly discuss their disagreements and varied approaches	27	25	26

Clearly, more than two thirds of both GOA and OCA members prefer to be in parishes that require uniformity of belief and practice and where people hold the same views. Only one in four respondents favor parishes that tolerate diversity of beliefs and practices where members discuss openly their different views on Church life. Remarkably, there was little difference in responses to this question between younger and older parishioners, between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy and between persons with various level of education.

Yet, there was significant disagreement in opinions about “pluralism in a local parish” among parishioners who defined their personal theological position and approach to Church life as “conservative,” “traditional,” “moderate” and “liberal.” See Tab. 26.

**Tab. 26. Pluralism in a Parish:** “Which type of parish do you prefer?” (%)

	“Conservative” respondents, %	“Traditional” respondents, %	“Moderate” and “Liberal” respondents, %	Total, %
A parish that requires uniformity of belief and practice, where people hold more or less the same views	88	72	47	68
A parish where people hold different views but keep them to themselves	4	6	8	6
A “big-tent” parish that tolerates diversity of beliefs and practices, where people hold different views and openly discuss their disagreements and varied approaches	8	22	45	26

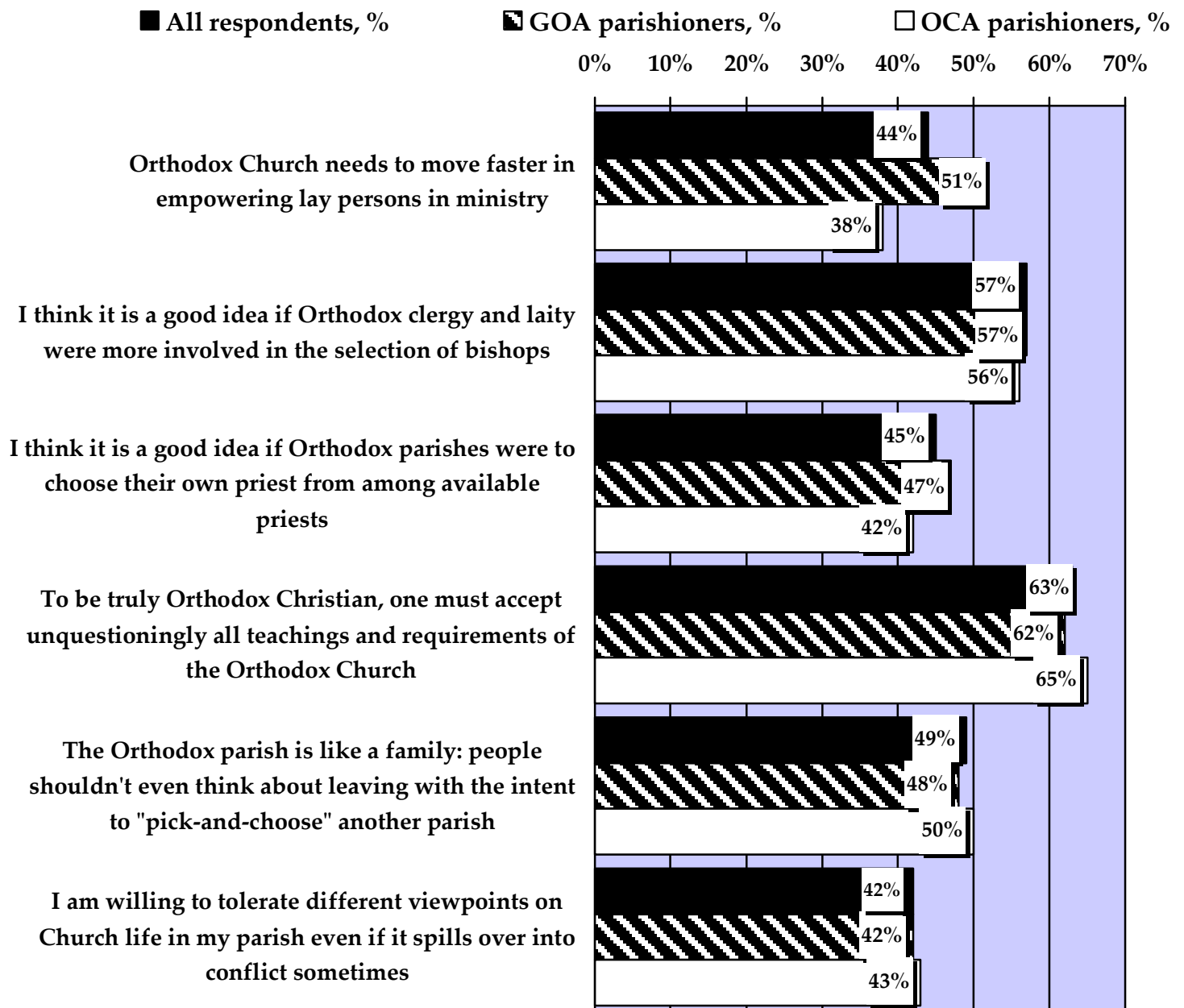
Almost nine in ten (88%) of “conservative” Church members think that parishes should require uniformity of belief and practice among all parish members, but less than half (47%) of “moderate” and “liberal” respondents share this view. On the contrary, almost half (45%) of “moderate” and “liberal” parishioners welcome diversity in opinions, belief and practice among their fellow parish members in comparison with only 8% in the case of “conservative” respondents.

One should note, however, that even among “moderate” and “liberal” Church members, there are more respondents who voice uniformity in their home parishes (47%) than those who favor “big-tent” parishes with members holding different views on the Church life (45%). Also more research is needed to determine precisely particular areas where “uniformity” is more desired by parishioners. For example, theoretically, there is uniformity in belief among all Orthodox Christians, but this study has revealed wide variety in practice within the Church.

We conclude that in an overall picture by far dominant majority of American Orthodox laity prefer parishes that encourage uniformity of belief and practice among members and do not support pluralism in opinions and approaches to Church life among their members.

We offered our respondents six statements exploring their opinions on the various aspects of the subject “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church”. Fig. 53 shows the proportion of OCA and GOA laity who agreed, either strongly or somewhat, with these statements.

**Fig.53 Attitudes of GOA and OCA Laity to the Issue of “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church:”**  
**% of GOA and OCA parishioners who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



We noted earlier that (unlike most other American Christian denominations) in the Orthodox Church, laity have relatively “little say” in comparison with clergy. Similarly, the idea of sharing in ministry between clergy and laity is new to American Orthodoxy. Further, at this point, there is no established practice of *professional lay* ministers in American Orthodox Churches. Do parishioners think that this situation should be changed and that they should be given more power in leading various Church ministries?

Fig. 53 shows that GOA and OCA members have different opinions on this matter. Indeed, majority (51%) of GOA laity support an idea of more proactive involvement of people in pew in the Church life, but only 38% of OCA parish members agreed with the statement “The Orthodox Church needs to move faster in empowering lay persons in ministry.”

This difference between GOA and OCA members in their attitudes to the laity involvement in various Church ministries is consistent with the finding discussed in chapter 6: that is, compared to OCA parishioners, significantly more GOA laity feel that the time has come to discuss openly the matter of “Sharing ministry with laity.” We also noted earlier, that the most likely explanation for this pattern is the fact that GOA members traditionally have more *administrative* power in their parishes than OCA parishioners. Therefore, the idea of laity sharing in *ministry* (that is, getting more involved as leaders in worship and sacramental life) can be also more accepted in GOA than in OCA.

While GOA and OCA parishioners have different opinions laity’s greater sharing in ministry, they show remarkably similar approaches to the other five statements about *Democracy and Pluralism in the Church*.

A dominant majority of GOA (57%) and OCA (56%) church members feel that “it would be a good idea if Orthodox clergy and laity were more involved in the selection of bishops.” Today, this procedure (selection of bishops) varies from one American Orthodox church to the other. In the GOA, a list of three candidates for an open diocesan seat is composed by the Synod of Bishops of the American Archdiocese. This list is submitted to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul). The Synod of Bishops in Istanbul elects one of the three proposed candidates (what usually happens) or it can also suggest a different name. In the OCA, the process of consecration and appointment of a bishop is entirely under control of its American based bishops. In both jurisdictions, however, neither laity nor parish clergy have much influence on electing the bishops. Hence, the survey data tell us that majority of GOA and OCA members feel that they and their parish priests should have more impact on selection of diocesan bishops.

The next statement “I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available ordained priests” touches another sensitive issue – the process of selection and appointment of candidates for a particular parish. Today, depending on the particular Orthodox jurisdiction and on local circumstances, the lay members are to a larger or smaller degree consulted during selection of a parish priest. Yet, both practically and legally (by Church canon law), the final authority in this process belongs to the ruling diocesan hierarchs (Metropolitans in GOA and Bishops in OCA). Technically speaking, the priests in American Orthodox parishes are not selected by members, but appointed by the diocesan hierarchs.

Laity responses to the statement “I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available ordained priests” show that nearly half of GOA (47%) and OCA (42%) members are not happy with the established Church practice of appointment parish clergy by the bishops, and would introduce instead the process of selection of the priests by parishioners.

Further, both in GOA and OCA, the supporters of direct election of parish clergy by parishioners constitute *relative majority* of church members. Indeed, only 27% of GOA and 29% of OCA respondents disagreed with the statement “I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available ordained priests,” while remaining 26% of GOA and 29% of OCA parishioners had no definite opinion on this subject. See Tab. 27.

**Tab. 27 Selection of Parish Priests:** “I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available priests.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
<b>GOA, %</b>	47	27	26
<b>OCA, %</b>	42	29	29
<b>Total, %</b>	45	28	27

There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, American religion is “marked” by a strong tradition of congregationalism. Perhaps, this has entered Orthodox parish life through the wider cultural experience, coupled with historical fact that most parishes were formed by laity who then sought the services of a priest. A second possibility is the control of parish life by board of trustees, frequently dominated by business people, who bring this mindset to parish life and consider the priest as an employee of the parish. Technically, the priest’s salary and benefits are paid by the parish, thus fostering this impression.

Despite the fact that almost half of GOA and OCA members would challenge the particular practice of appointment parish clergy by the bishops, a dominant majority of our respondents are of the opinion that, in general, church members should obey and follow unquestioningly all the rules and requirements of the Orthodox Church: 62% of GOA and 65% of OCA parishioners agreed with the statement “To be truly Orthodox Christian, one must accept without question all teachings and requirements of the Orthodox Church.”

Almost half of our respondents (49%) believe that church members should accept without question not only general requirements of the Orthodox Church but also particular traditions and patterns of church life in their home parishes. Indeed, 50% of OCA and 48% of GOA parishioners agreed that “The Orthodox parish is like a family: people shouldn’t even think about leaving with the intent to ‘pick-and-choose’ another parish.”

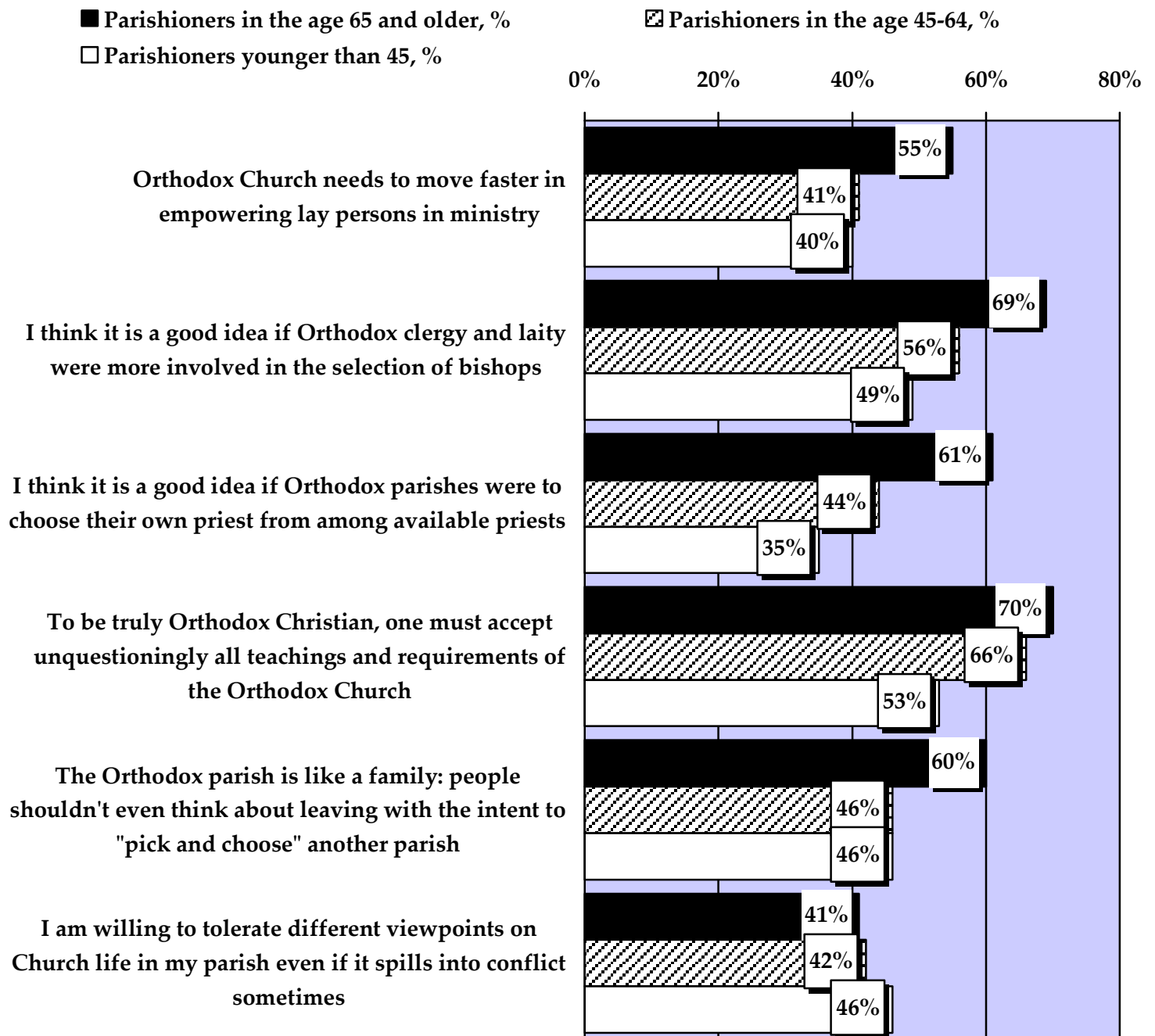
The last statement, “I am willing to tolerate different viewpoints on Church life in my parish even if it spills over into conflict sometimes,” touches the issue which was discussed earlier in this chapter: how much pluralism and diversity in opinions should be present among members of any given parish. A significant proportion (42%) of our respondents agreed with this statement. Yet, we should keep in mind that the fact that almost half of respondents are willing *tolerate* diversity in opinions among their parish members does not mean that they actually like to have this diversity in their parishes. As we saw earlier (Tab. 25), only one quarter of parishioners favor “big tent” parishes where “people hold different views and openly discuss their disagreements and varied approaches.”

We looked at the age differences in the attitudes of Orthodox laity to the subject of “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church.” The picture is somewhat puzzling. See Fig. 54 on the next page.

On the one hand, the younger (under 45) respondents showed more “orthodox” approaches to the subject of “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church” in a way that they were significantly less likely to agree than the middle-aged (45-64) and, especially, older parishioners (older than 65) with the three statements: “The Orthodox Church needs to move faster in empowering lay persons in ministry,” “I think it would be a good idea if the priests in a diocese were to choose their own bishop,” and “I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available ordained priests.” All three statements voice the same idea that the lay members should have more power in the Orthodox Church either by holding leadership positions in various Church ministries or by having significant impact on selection of priests and bishops. Fig. 54 shows that the older parishioners are most likely and the younger church members are least likely to support this idea.

This finding is consistent with what we found earlier. We saw in chapter 4 that parishioners older than 65 tend to be stronger supporters of the “servant-leadership” model of priesthood which challenges ultimate authority of clergy in the Church, while the younger respondents (under 45) expressed their greater preference for the “cultic” model of priesthood. In chapter 5, we also indicated that significantly more parishioners older than 65 feel “That lay people have little say in decision making in the Church” is a “serious problem” in the Church than this is the case among the middle-aged (45-64) and younger (under 45) respondents. Similarly, in chapter 5 we learned that senior parishioners are more likely to embrace changes in Church life, while the younger Church members tend to reject changes in the Church. Hence, no wonder that the older parishioners are also much stronger supporters of the idea of greater power of laity in the Church than the younger Church members.

**Fig.54 Age of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to the “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church:”**  
**% of GOA and OCA parishioners in various age categories who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and**  
**“rather agreed”) with the following statements**





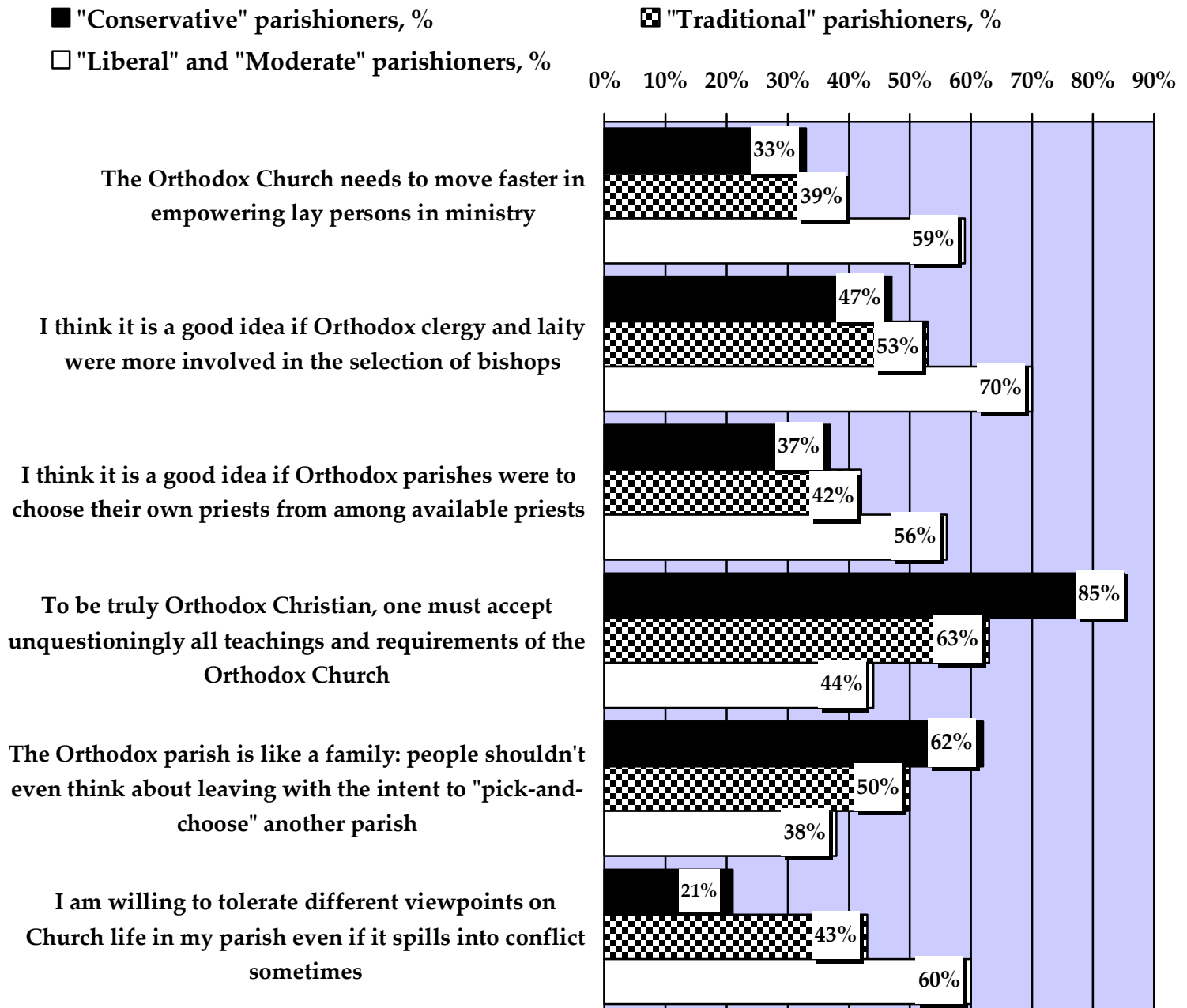
At the same time, compared to older parishioners, younger respondents are less inclined to accept the implicit and “voiceless” obedience to Church rules either in general or in their particular local parishes. Indeed, in comparison with persons 65 years and older, fewer Church members in the age 45-64 and younger than 45 agreed with the statements “To be truly Orthodox Christian, one must accept without question all teachings and requirements of Orthodox Church” (70%, 66% and 53% respectively), and “The Orthodox parish is like a family: people shouldn’t even think about leaving with the intent to ‘pick-and-choose’ another parish” (60%, 46% and 46%). Put differently, the younger Church members are stronger believers that the lay people have right to question different Church rules both nationally and locally.

The survey found that the personal theological stance of the parishioners has the greatest impact on their approach to the various issues connected with the subject “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church.” See Fig. 55 on the next page.

Predictably, in comparison with “conservative” and “traditional” laity, the respondents who defined their theological position and approaches to the Church life as “moderate” or “liberal” were much more likely to support statements about empowering laity in ministry, electing parish priests, participation of the lay members in selection of bishops, and tolerating different viewpoints on Church life in a local parish.

To the contrary, many more “traditional” and “conservative” than “moderate” and “liberal” Church members agreed with the statements “To be truly Orthodox Christian, one must accept without question all teachings and requirements of Orthodox Church,” and “The Orthodox parish is like a family: people shouldn’t even think about leaving with the intent to pick-and-choose another parish.”

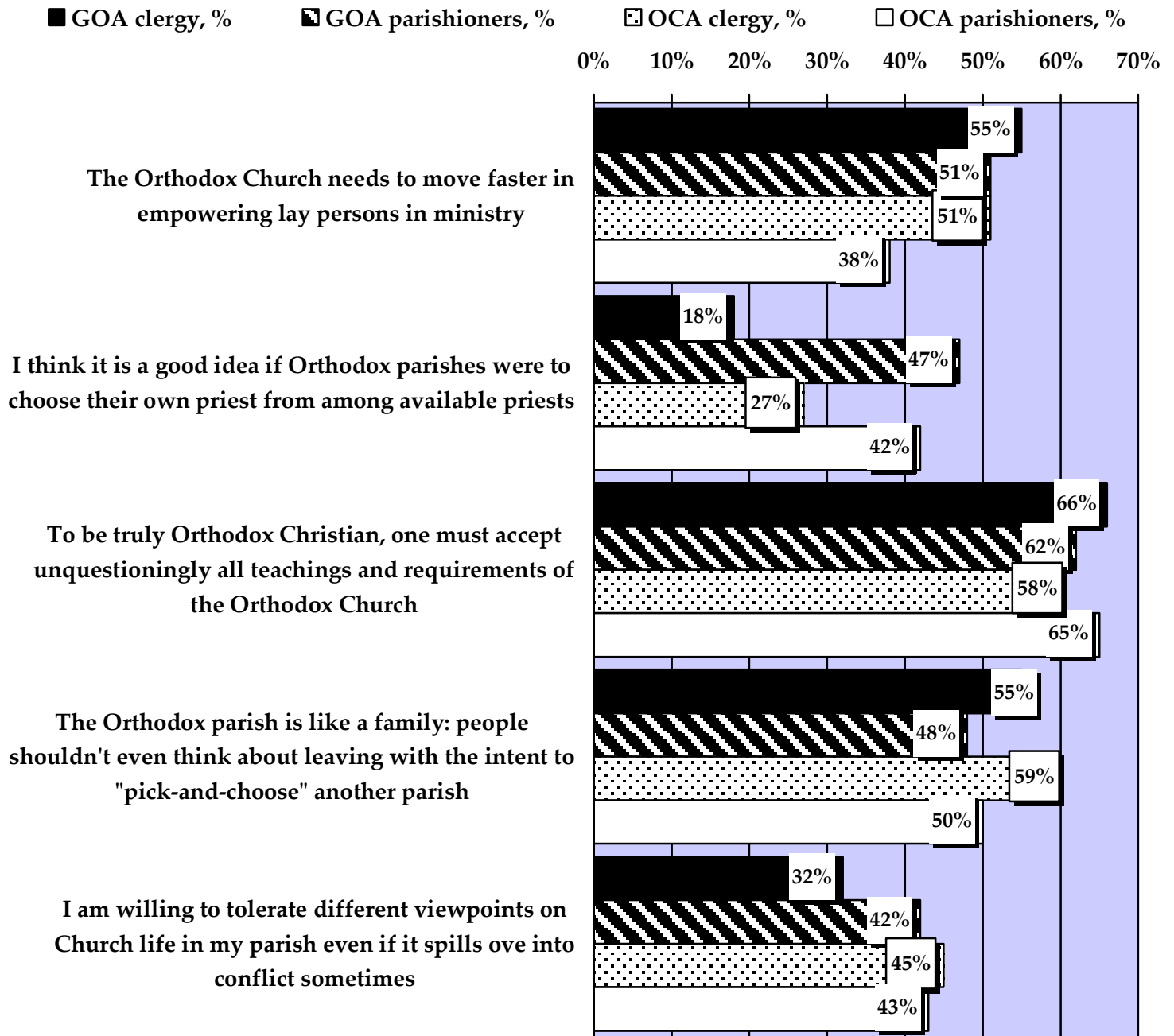
**Fig. 55 Theological Stance of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes to Democracy and Pluralism in the Church: % of parishioners with various theological stance who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



To what extent do the attitudes of Orthodox laity towards “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church” reflect those of their parish priests? Do “shepherds” and “flock” have rather similar or rather distinct opinions on this subject? The data from the 2006 national study “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America” (Krindatch 2006) help us to respond this question. See Fig. 56. Several observations should be made.

**Fig. 56** Laity and Clergy Attitudes to the “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church:”

% of GOA and OCA parishioners and clergy who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements



On the one hand, one can see that there is one particular subject about which laity and clergy clearly disagree: the idea that parish priests should be selected by parishioners. Both in GOA and OCA, the proportion of parishioners who wish to select their pastors is much larger than the proportion of clergy who would let parish members pick and choose their priests.

Indeed, almost half of OCA (42%) and GOA (47%) members agreed with the statement “I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available ordained clergy,” but only 18% of GOA and 27% of OCA priests supported this thesis.

Also, compared to their parishioners, both GOA and OCA clergy are stronger supporters of the idea that “Orthodox parish is like a family: people shouldn’t even think about leaving with the intent to ‘pick-and-choose’ another.” In other words, clergy and “people in the pews” tend to disagree on the issues pertinent to the norms of church life in the local parishes.

On the other hand, pastors and lay members equally supported the general statement that “To be truly Orthodox Christian, one must accept unquestioningly all teachings and requirements of the Orthodox Church.”

Finally, the picture of similarities and differences in opinions of clergy and laity in the case of two statements – “The Orthodox Church needs to move faster in empowering lay persons in ministry” and “I am willing to tolerate different viewpoints on the Church life in my parish even if it spills over into conflict sometimes” – is somewhat inconsistent.

More than half (51-55%) of GOA and OCA priests as well as of GOA laity think that “The Orthodox Church should move faster in empowering lay persons in ministry,” but only 38% of OCA parishioners support this statement. We surmised earlier that the most likely explanation for the difference in opinions about this statement between GOA and OCA *laity* is the fact that GOA members traditionally have more power in their parishes than OCA parishioners. Therefore, the idea of laity sharing in ministry is also more accepted among GOA than among OCA members. But why are OCA clergy much stronger supporters of empowering laity in ministry than OCA lay members? At this point, we do not have an answer to this question.

Similarly, nearly the same proportion (42-45%) of OCA parishioners and OCA priests and GOA laity are “willing to tolerate different viewpoints on the Church life in my parish even if it spills over into conflict sometimes,” but significantly fewer GOA clergy (32%) supported this statement. Again, this pattern is difficult to explain.

## **IX. Religious Particularism, Ecumenical Attitudes and Relation to the Outside Non-Orthodox Community**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- The vast majority of GOA (66%) and OCA (72%) laity have either half or even a majority of their personal friends outside of the Orthodox Church;
- A dominant majority of GOA (83%) and OCA (69%) church members feel confident explaining the Orthodox faith to the non-Orthodox people;
- Among both GOA and OCA members there are very few (7-8%) persons who think that “Only members of the Orthodox Church can be saved;”
- Nine in ten of GOA and OCA parishioners feel that they “cannot imagine being anything but Orthodox.” At the same time, for the majority of American Orthodox laity, commonly accepted norms of morality and social behavior are more important than their personal religious beliefs and practices;
- For the cradle Orthodox, common norms of morality and social behavior are relatively more important and for the converts to Orthodoxy they are relatively less important in comparison with their personal religious beliefs;
- Today, neither strong promoters nor firm opponents of the ecumenical contacts can claim a majority among American Orthodox laity;
- Although there are many more converts to Orthodoxy among OCA than among GOA members, the OCA and GOA parishioners are equally welcoming former Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers in the ranks of Orthodox clergy;
- American Orthodox Christians have a much stronger religious identity and sense of religious particularism than US Roman Catholics do.

We noted in chapter 6, that the notion of “distinctiveness” and a sense of a community which is ethnically, culturally and religiously different from the wider society were fundamental for the earlier generations of Orthodox believers in the US. Not as strong as in the past, but to a certain degree, this self-perception of being “a part of” and, at the same time, “apart from” the mainstream America remains intact among American Orthodox Christians.

In our study, we looked at two broad questions:

- How do American Orthodox laity relate themselves to the outside non-Orthodox community?
- How strong is the sense of religious particularism and the notion of being a “Distinct People” among Orthodox Christians in the US? What are their approaches to the various forms of ecumenical contacts?

First, we wanted to know to what extent the personal (not business) social relations of GOA and OCA parishioners are limited to the Orthodox community. We asked our respondents “Do you have close friends outside of the Orthodox Church?” See Tab. 28.

**Tab. 28. Social Relations with the Outside non-Orthodox Community:** Do you have close friends outside of the Orthodox Church? (%)

	GOA, %	OCA, %	Total, %
Not really, other than business, I have few personal social contacts with people who are Non-Orthodox	4	3	3
I have some friends who are Non-Orthodox, but most of my friends are Orthodox Christians. Basically, I prefer to have friends who are also Orthodox Christians	22	18	20
I probably have equal numbers of friends who are Orthodox and Non-Orthodox	43	39	41
Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians	23	33	28
I don't care much about the religion of my friends	8	7	8

Both in GOA and OCA, about one quarter of parishioners maintain most of their personal relations inside of the “Orthodox domain.” Indeed, 21% of OCA and 26% of GOA members said that either “Other than business, I have few personal social contacts with people who are Non-Orthodox” or “I have some friends who are Non-Orthodox, but most of my friends are Orthodox Christians. Basically, I prefer to have friends who are also Orthodox Christians.”

Both in GOA and OCA, the relative majority (39-43%) of church members have equal numbers of friends who are Orthodox and Non-Orthodox.

The data in Tab. 28 also tell us that there are significantly more OCA (33%) than GOA (23%) parishioners who have most of their personal relations with the not Orthodox persons and who reported that “Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians.” We think that this difference between GOA and OCA is due to the much higher proportion of converts to Orthodoxy among OCA (51%) than among GOA (28%) members. It is very likely that the Orthodox converts who were raised outside the Orthodox community continue to maintain their personal relations and friendships with the people whom they met prior to joining the Orthodox Church.

The data in Tab. 29 support this explanation: in comparison with less than one-quarter (24%) among the cradle Orthodox respondents, more than one-third (34%) of the converts to Orthodoxy said that “Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians.”

**Tab. 29. Social Relations with the Outside non-Orthodox Community: Converts and Cradle Orthodox.**

Do you have close friends outside of the Orthodox Church? (%)

	Cradle Orthodox, %	Converts to Orthodoxy, %
Not really, other than business, I have few personal social contacts with people who are Non-Orthodox	3	4
I have some friends who are Non-Orthodox, but most of my friends are Orthodox Christians. Basically, I prefer to have friends who are also Orthodox Christians	23	16
I probably have equal numbers of friends who are Orthodox and Non-Orthodox	40	41
Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians	24	34
I don't care much about the religion of my friends	10	5

Do younger (under 45 years), middle-aged (45-64) and senior (65 and older) parishioners make the same choices as to building their personal relations either within or outside of the Orthodox community? Tab. 30 shows that there is one obvious distinction between senior parishioners, on the one hand, and the younger and middle-aged church members, on the other hand. Much fewer of the older church members (17%) have most of their personal relations with the not Orthodox Christians than this is the case among the younger and middle-aged respondents.

**Tab. 30. Social Relations with the Outside non-Orthodox Community: Differences between Various Generations of Parishioners**

Do you have close friends outside of the Orthodox Church? (%)

	Parishioners younger than 45, %	45-64 years old, %	Parishioners 65 years and older, %
Not really, other than business, I have few personal social contacts with people who are Non-Orthodox	2	5	3
I have some friends who are Non-Orthodox, but most of my friends are Orthodox Christians. Basically, I prefer to have friends who are also Orthodox Christians	21	20	20
I probably have equal numbers of friends who are Orthodox and Non-Orthodox	40	36	48
Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians	32	31	17
I don't care much about the religion of my friends	5	8	12

We found also that personal theological stance of the respondents has certain impact on their choices of having personal friends either within or outside of the Orthodox realm. See Tab. 31. Only 13% of persons who defined their approach to Church life as “Moderate” or “Liberal” said that most of their personal friends are Orthodox Christians in comparison with 27% among “Traditional” and 30% among “Conservative” church members.

On the contrary, 35% of “Moderate” and “Liberal” respondents reported that “Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians,” while only 23-26% of the “Conservative” and “Traditional” parishioners have mostly friends who are non-Orthodox.

**Tab. 31. Social Relations with the Outside non-Orthodox Community: Parishioners with Various Personal Theological Stance.**

Do you have close friends outside of the Orthodox Church? (%)

	“Conservative” parishioners, %	“Traditional” parishioners, %	“Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners, %
Not really, other than business, I have few personal social contacts with people who are Non-Orthodox	6	3	2
I have some friends who are Non-Orthodox, but most of my friends are Orthodox Christians. Basically, I prefer to have friends who are also Orthodox Christians	24	24	11
I probably have equal numbers of friends who are Orthodox and Non-Orthodox	40	43	39
Most of my personal friends are not Orthodox Christians	26	23	35
I don’t care much about the religion of my friends	4	7	13

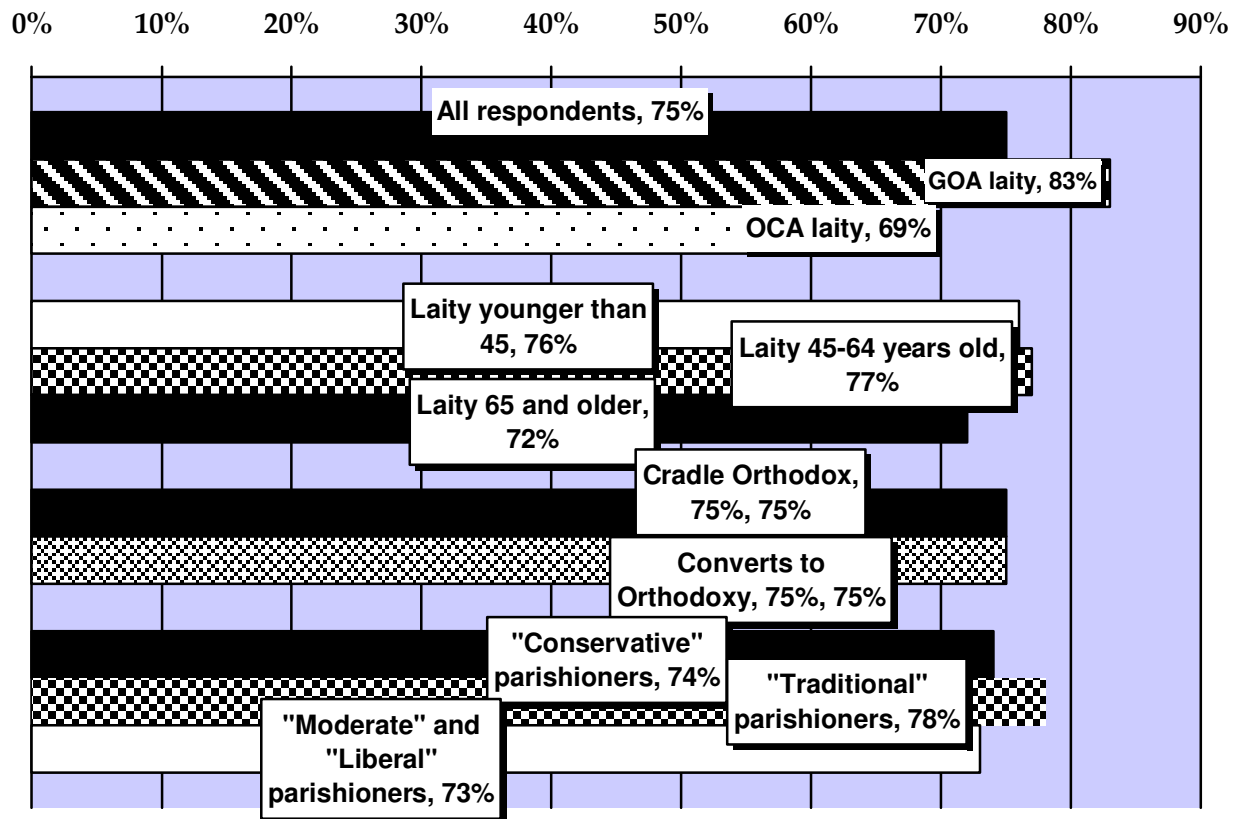
In spite of these differences between GOA and OCA church members, between various generations of parishioners, between cradle Orthodox Christians and converts to Orthodoxy and between persons with various personal theological stance and approach to Church life, the data in Tab. 28-31 indicate that among all categories of the American Orthodox laity the proportion of persons whose personal relations are limited to the Orthodox community is relatively small.

The fact that the vast majority of GOA and OCA lay members have either half or even majority of their personal friends outside of the Orthodox Church leads us to the next question: are Orthodox laity comfortable talking about and explaining their faith to Non-Orthodox persons?

From the participants of the focus-groups in the local parishes we learned that one of their major challenges of being Orthodox Christian in the US is very low level of knowledge of the wider American society about Orthodox Christianity and about the Orthodox Church. Put differently, an Orthodox Christian in America faces frequently various situations when he or she should be prepared to explain to “others” about the Orthodox Church. Are American Orthodox laity prepared to speak about their faith with the not Orthodox persons? We asked our respondents if they agree with the statement “I feel confident explaining the Orthodox Faith to non-Orthodox.” See Fig. 57.



**Fig. 57: % of various categories of the American Orthodox laity who AGREED with the statement “I feel confident explaining the Orthodox Faith to non-Orthodox.”**

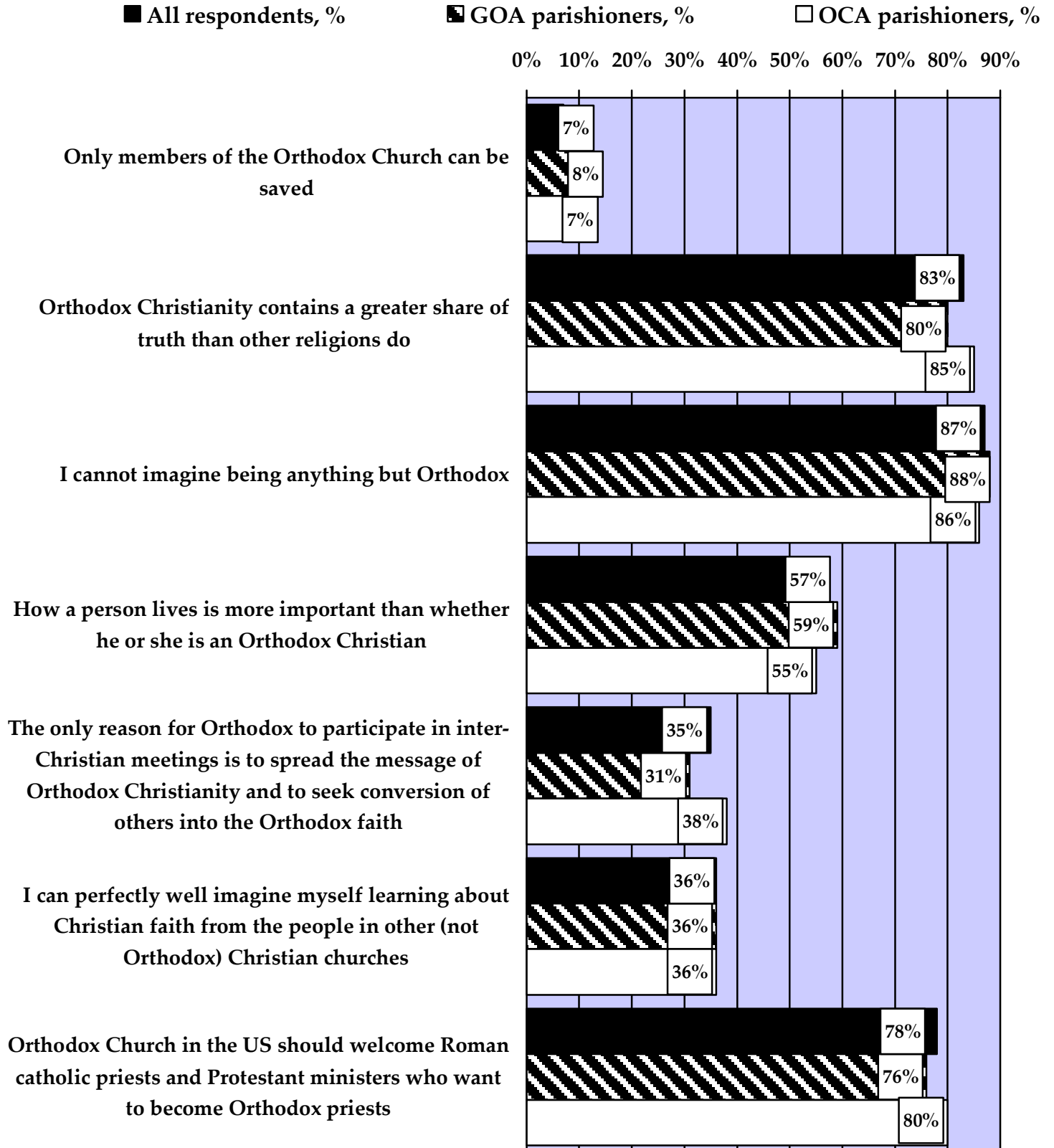


Two important observations should be made. First, vast majority - three quarters of all respondents (69% of OCA and 83% of GOA members) - feel confident talking about Orthodox faith with non-Orthodox people. Second, the younger and older church members, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and parishioners with various theological stance feel equally comfortable discussing their faith with the non-Orthodox.

The statements in Fig. 58 portray attitudes of the American Orthodox laity toward other Christian churches and also assess the levels of religious *particularism* versus *relativism* felt by our respondents. We define religious *particularism* as the belief that one particular religion (Orthodox Christianity in our case) carries ultimate truth and morality which should be authoritative for everyone. Conversely, religious *relativism* is an approach that all religions are equally true and good and that no one religious tradition has priority over another. On the one hand, the strong notion of religious pluralism which is fundamental for American society and availability of many religious options on US “religious market” invite American Orthodox to an attitude of relativism. At the same time, the historically inherited sense of a community set apart from the mainstream America contributes to the feeling of religious particularism among Orthodox Christians in the US. Which tendency is prevalent?

**Fig.58 Religious Particularism and Ecumenical Attitudes:**

**% of GOA and OCA parishioners who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**



The first statement, “Only members of the Orthodox Church can be saved,” presents an extreme expression of religious particularism. It asserts that the Orthodox Church is the only “true church” which offers a person the path to salvation. Clearly, among both GOA and OCA members there are very few (7-8%) “hard-liners” who would agree with this statement.

The second and third statements depict the sense of “Orthodox distinctiveness” among GOA and OCA parishioners. The second statement, “Orthodox Christianity contains a greater share of truth than other religions do,” voices clear preference for the Orthodox faith. At the same time and differently from the first statement, it does not deny the other religions as being entirely “wrong.” 83% of our respondents agreed that “Orthodox Christianity contains a greater share of truth than other religions do.” The third statement, “I cannot imagine being anything but Orthodox,” tells us about importance of the Orthodox identity for GOA and OCA laity. Almost nine in ten of both GOA (88%) and OCA (86%) members agreed with this statement, thus, indicating that being Orthodox is quite central and very important to them.

The fourth statement, “How a person lives is more important than whether he or she is an Orthodox Christian,” conveys the message that commonly accepted norms of morality and social behavior are more important than personal religious beliefs and practices. To a certain degree, this statement also assesses Orthodox tolerance of other religions. A slight majority (57%) of our respondents agreed with this statement.

The main lesson from the first four statements in Fig. 58 is that both GOA and OCA parishioners have a very strong sense of their Orthodox identity and clear preference for the Orthodox faith and church. At the same time, the clarity in their religious preferences do not reach the point of religious exclusiveness or condemnation of other religions. Further, for majority of Orthodox laity, their *personal* religious beliefs are less important than the commonly accepted norms of morality and social behavior.

The fifth and sixth statements in Fig. 58 tell us what parishioners think about ecumenical contacts and dialogues. The statement “I can perfectly well imagine myself learning about Jesus and Christian faith from the people in other (not Orthodox) Christian churches” voices worthiness of such contacts. On the contrary, the statement “The only reason for Orthodox to participate in inter-Christian meetings and discussions is to spread the message of Orthodox Christianity and to seek conversion of others into the Orthodox faith” generally denies the value of the inter-Christian dialogues and contacts. Neither of these statements were supported by majority of the respondents.

Only 36% of parishioners feel that they “can perfectly well imagine myself learning about Jesus and Christian faith from the people in other (not Orthodox) Christian churches” and only 35% expressed an opposite opinion that “The only reason for Orthodox to participate in inter-Christian meetings and discussions is to spread the message of Orthodox Christianity and to seek conversion of others into the Orthodox faith.” In other words, today neither strong promoters nor firm opponents of the ecumenical contacts can claim majority among American Orthodox laity.

While GOA and OCA lay members have rather mixed feelings about value and appropriateness of the inter-Christian contacts, a vast majority of them (78%) approve having more former Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy among their parish priests. We should also note that the level of approval of the last statement, “The Orthodox Church should welcome Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers who want to become Orthodox priests,” was virtually the same among GOA (76%) and OCA (80%) parishioners. Hence, the fact that there are many more converts among OCA (51%) than among GOA (28%) members has no impact on the degree of welcoming of the convert clergy by parishioners.

Fig. 58 shows that OCA and GOA lay members were very similar in their degree of agreement with all seven statements. Does age, education, religious upbringing or personal theological stance of the respondents make a difference for their attitudes towards religious particularism and towards ecumenical contacts?

We found that in most cases, the opinions of the younger and older parishioners, of the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy and of the church members with and without college degrees were very similar. Yet, several differences between various categories of parishioners should be noted.

First, more cradle Orthodox (90%) than converts to Orthodoxy (78%) said that “I cannot imagine being anything but Orthodox.” This is understandable: it is easier for a person who was raised non-Orthodox to admit possibility of being religiously something different than an Orthodox Christian. At the same time, more cradle Orthodox (62%) than converts to Orthodoxy (49%) are of the view that “How a person lives is more important than whether she or he is an Orthodox Christian.” That is, for the cradle Orthodox the common norms of morality and social behavior are relatively more important and for the converts to Orthodoxy they are relatively less important in comparison with their personal religious beliefs. This pattern is also easy to explain: the cradle Orthodox were “born into the Church,” while cradle Orthodox were deliberate and intentional in making their religious choices. Accordingly, the converts to Orthodoxy are more likely to place higher importance on their religious beliefs as being ultimate criteria for what is “right” and “wrong.”

Second, more college graduates (40%) than persons without college degree (27%) feel that they “can perfectly well imagine themselves learning about Jesus and Christian faith from the people in other (not Orthodox) Christian churches.” Perhaps, the persons with the university education are more “at ease” with the general idea of learning from the various sources of information.

Finally, more senior parishioners (65 years and older) said that “The Orthodox Church in the US should welcome Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers who want to become Orthodox priests” than this was the case among middle-aged (45-64) and younger (under 45 years) respondents: 88%, 80% and 71% respectively. This pattern is somewhat difficult to explain.

Similarly to what we saw in the opinions of parishioners on “Notion of Priesthood” or on “Democracy in the Church” or on “Innovations in the Church,” the greatest differences in laity’s attitudes towards religious particularism and in their approaches to the ecumenical contacts are based not on distinctions between GOA and OCA, and not on variations between generations or between cradle-Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, but on the theological stance of the respondents. In the other words, the GOA and OCA parishioners who defined themselves as either “Liberal” or “Moderate” or “Traditional” or Conservative” responded quite differently to most statements dealing with “Religious Particularism and Ecumenical Contacts.” See Fig. 59.

**Fig. 59 Theological Stance of Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes towards Religious Particularism and Ecumenical Contacts: % of parishioners with various theological stance who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with the following statements**

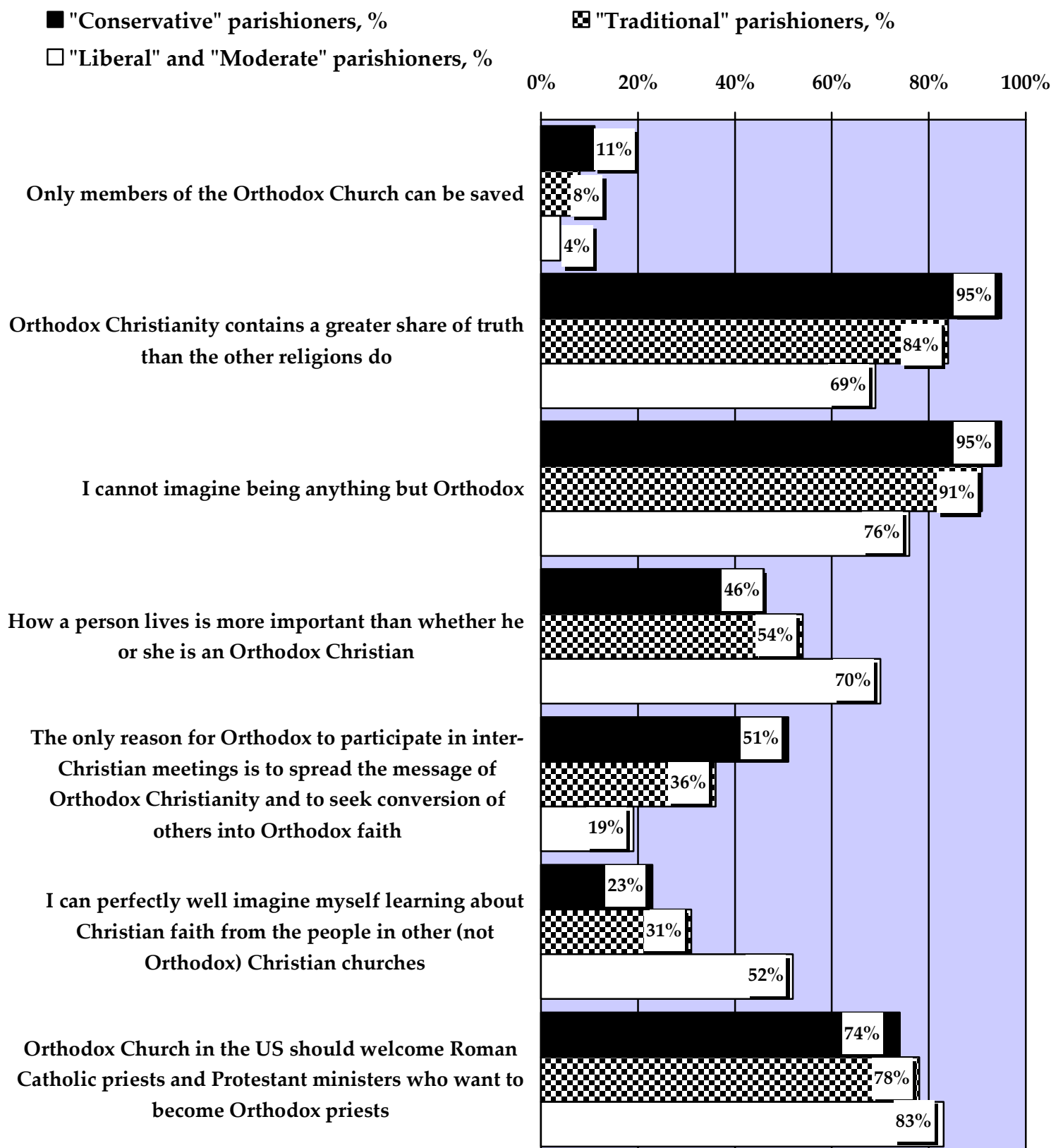


Fig. 59 shows that the respondents who defined their personal “micro-theology” and approach to Church life as “Traditional,” or, especially “Conservative” have a much stronger “Orthodox identity” and sense of “religious particularism” than the “Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners. On their part, the “Moderate” and “Liberal” church members favor more the idea of various ecumenical contacts than the “Conservative” and “Traditional” parishioners do.

Almost all (95%) “Conservative” church members are firm believers that “Orthodox Christianity contains greater share of truth than the other religions do,” but only 69% of “Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners agreed with this statement. Similarly, being Orthodox is extremely important for almost all (95%) “Conservative” laity, but only 76% of “Moderate” and “Liberal” church members said that “I cannot imagine being anything but Orthodox.”

On the contrary, a vast majority (70%) of “Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners are of the view that “How a person lives is more important than whether he or she is an Orthodox Christian,” but less than half (46%) of “Conservative” respondents believe that this is true.

More than half (51%) of “Conservative” church members deny the usefulness of the inter-Christian contacts by agreeing with the statement that “The only reason for the Orthodox clergy to participate in inter-Christian meetings and discussions is to spread the message of Orthodox Christianity and to seek conversion of others into Orthodox faith,” but less than one fifth (19%) of the “Liberal” and “Moderate” laity would take such a stance.

Conversely, more than a half (52%) of “Liberal” and “Moderate” parishioners said that “I can perfectly well imagine myself learning about Christian faith from the people in other – not-Orthodox – Christian churches,” but only 23% of “Conservative” persons agreed with this statement.

Finally, more “Liberal” and “Moderate” respondents (83%) feel that “Orthodox Church in the US should welcome Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers who wanted to become Orthodox priests,” than this is among “Traditional” (78%) or “Conservative” (74%) church members.

Two more important observations should be made with regard to the statements in Fig. 59. First, even among persons with “Conservative” micro-theology, there are very few (11%) radicals who think that the Orthodox Church is the only church offering path to salvation.

Second, we saw that the “Moderate” and “Liberal” church members tend to be greater religious “relativists” than their “Conservative” and “Traditional” fellow parishioners. Still, more than three-quarters of “Moderates” and “Liberals” cannot “imagine being anything but Orthodox.” We conclude that in overall picture the vast majority of American Orthodox laity have a very strong sense of religious identity: that is, being Orthodox is quite central and very important to them. Yet, the clarity and strength of the religious preferences among American Orthodox Christians do not lead to the point of denial of other religions as being entirely wrong.

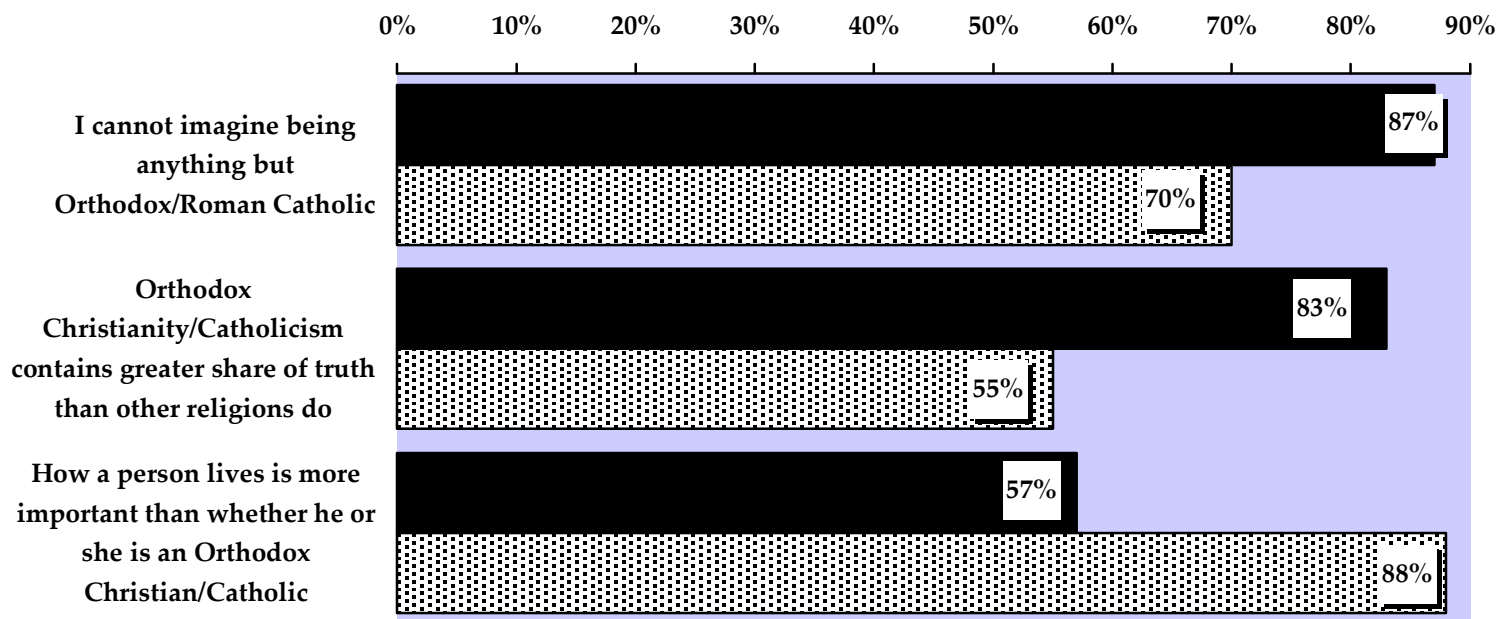
How do American Orthodox laity compare to the members of other Christian churches in their strength of religious identity and in their sense of “distinctiveness?” Three statements offered our respondents were also used in the 2005 national study of the US Roman Catholics (D’Antonio 2007). See Fig. 60.

**Fig. 60 Strength of Religious Identity of the American Roman Catholic and Orthodox Laity**

**% of Orthodox and Roman Catholic parishioners who AGREED with the following statements**

■ Orthodox laity in 2007 "Orthodox Church Today" study

▨ Roman Catholic laity in the national 2005 survey



**Note:** Source of data for the Roman Catholic Church (D’Antonio 2007)

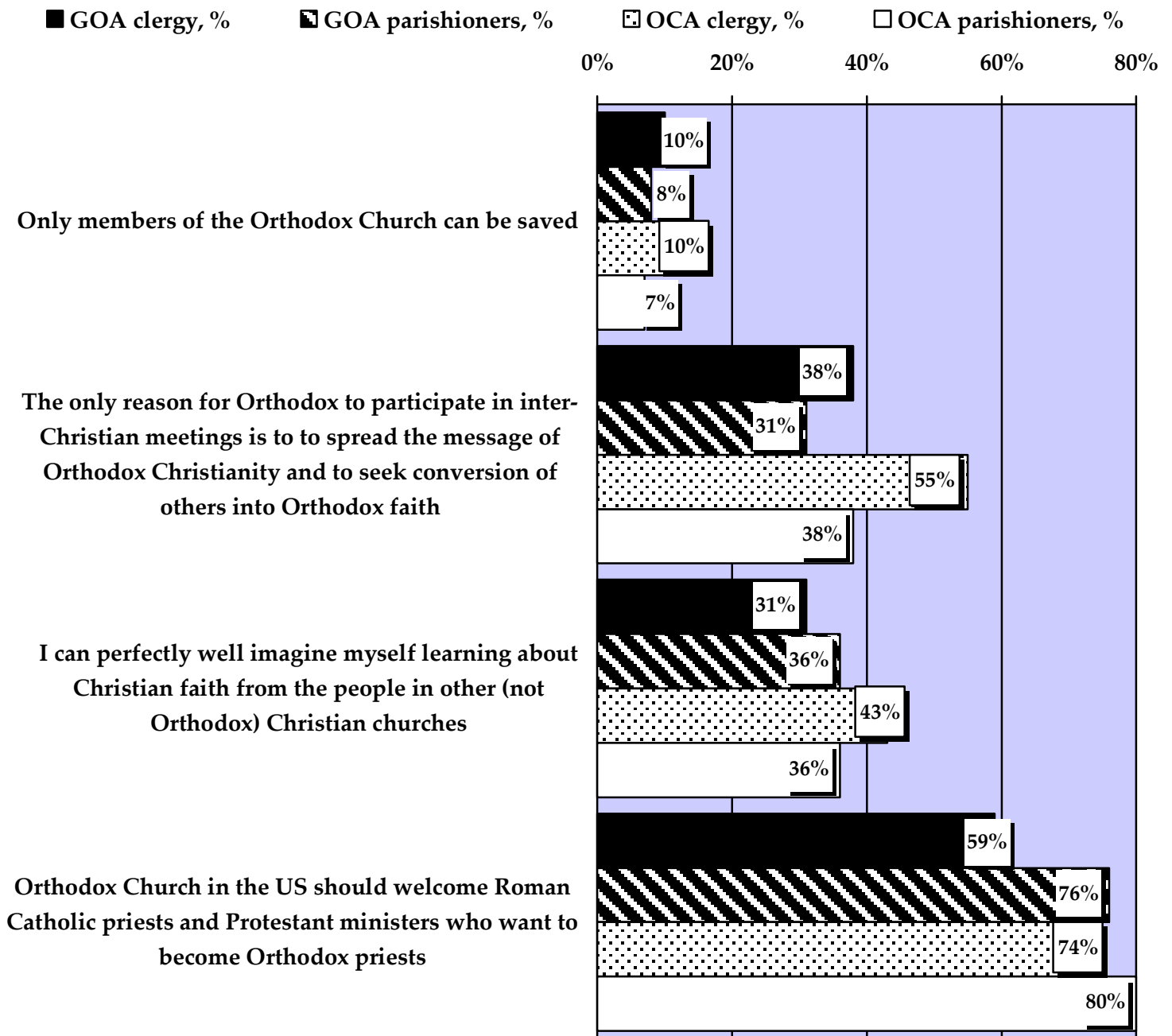
Clearly, in all measures, the American Orthodox Christians have stronger religious identity and sense of religious particularism than the US Roman Catholics do. Being “Orthodox” is central for 87% of the Orthodox Church members, but only 70% of US Roman Catholics agreed with the statement “I cannot imagine being anything but Roman Catholic.”



The gap between American Orthodox and Roman Catholics is even wider in the degree of their agreement with the statement that “Orthodox Christianity/Catholicism contains greater share of truth than other religions do:” 83% of Orthodox parishioners supported this statement in comparison with only 55% among Roman Catholic laity. That is, relatively comparable numbers of Orthodox and Roman Catholics indicated importance of their religion by agreeing with the first statement, but for many more Orthodox than Roman Catholics this personal religious preference is also associated with firm conviction that their religious beliefs are “better” than the other religions. Finally, nearly 9 in 10 (88%) of Roman Catholics think that commonly accepted norm of morality and social behavior are more important than one’s religious beliefs and practices, but only slightly more than half of the American Orthodox laity (57%) agreed that “How a person loves is more important than whether she or he is an Orthodox Christian/Catholic.”

How do American Orthodox laity, the GOA and OCA members, compare to their parish priests in their feelings and opinions about other (not Orthodox) Churches? In 2006 national study of American Orthodox priests (Krindatch 2006), we offered Orthodox clergy four statements which were later used in 2007 survey of American Orthodox laity. See Fig. 61.

**Fig. 61** Laity and Clergy Attitudes to the “Religious Particularism and Ecumenical Contacts:”  
 % of GOA and OCA parishioners and clergy who AGREED (“agreed strongly” and “rather agreed”) with  
 the following statements



The responses of “shepherds” and “flock” to the first statement, “Only members of the Orthodox Church can be saved” are fairly similar: very few of both pastors and parishioners think that Orthodox Church possesses “monopoly” for the path to salvation.

With regard to the second and third statements, the GOA priests hold the same attitudes as GOA and OCA laity, but the position of OCA priests is somewhat different from all other respondents. Significantly more OCA clergy than GOA priests and OCA and GOA laity think that “The only reason for Orthodox clergy to participate in inter-Christian meetings and discussions is to spread the message of Orthodox Christianity and to seek conversion of others into the Orthodox faith” and that “I can perfectly well imagine myself learning about Christian faith from the people in other (not Orthodox) Christian churches.” Put differently, compared to all other respondents, the OCA clergy are most skeptical about usefulness of inter-Christian dialogues and discussions, but, at the same time, they are most supportive of idea that one can learn about Christian faith from non-Orthodox people.

This somewhat contradictory attitude on the part of OCA priests can be possibly explained by the fact that absolute majority of them (59%) are converts to Orthodoxy who were raised in the other (non-Orthodox) churches (while only 12% of GOA clergy are converts). We believe that this special position on the part of convert clergy reflects their personal life stories. On the one hand, as persons who changed their religion, they can well imagine learning about and turning into other’s faith. At the same time, their professional priestly experience can tell them that there is not much practical outcome from the formal ecumenical meetings and discussions. Also, about one-third of convert clergy in our 2006 study were former Evangelical Christians who typically demonstrate rather negative attitudes toward ecumenism in general. This explanation, however, does not clarify why OCA lay members hold somewhat different from their pastors position, although 51% of OCA laity are also converts to Orthodoxy. Perhaps, the ordinary parishioners (converts and cradle Orthodox alike) simply have much less exposure to the ecumenical dialogues and discussions than their parish priests and, therefore, they also have less “disappointing experiences” with these ecumenical contacts. Similarly, perhaps, continuing learning about faith has greater importance for clergy than for people in the pews, and, therefore, the convert clergy have greater appreciation for possibility to get more wisdom from the other (non-Orthodox) Christians than their parishioners do.

In the case of the last statement, “The Orthodox Church in the US should welcome Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers who want to become Orthodox priests,” the position of the GOA priests seem to be different from both their fellow parishioners and from OCA clergy and laity. There are fewer GOA priests (59%) who are happy to see former Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers as becoming Orthodox clergy than this is the case among all other respondents (74%-80%). Why? We know that today a vast majority of GOA clergy are cradle Orthodox (88%). Are they suspicious of former non-Orthodox clergy and afraid to admit them in the ranks of Orthodox priesthood? More research is needed to clarify this issue.

## **X. Social Attitudes of American Orthodox Laity**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

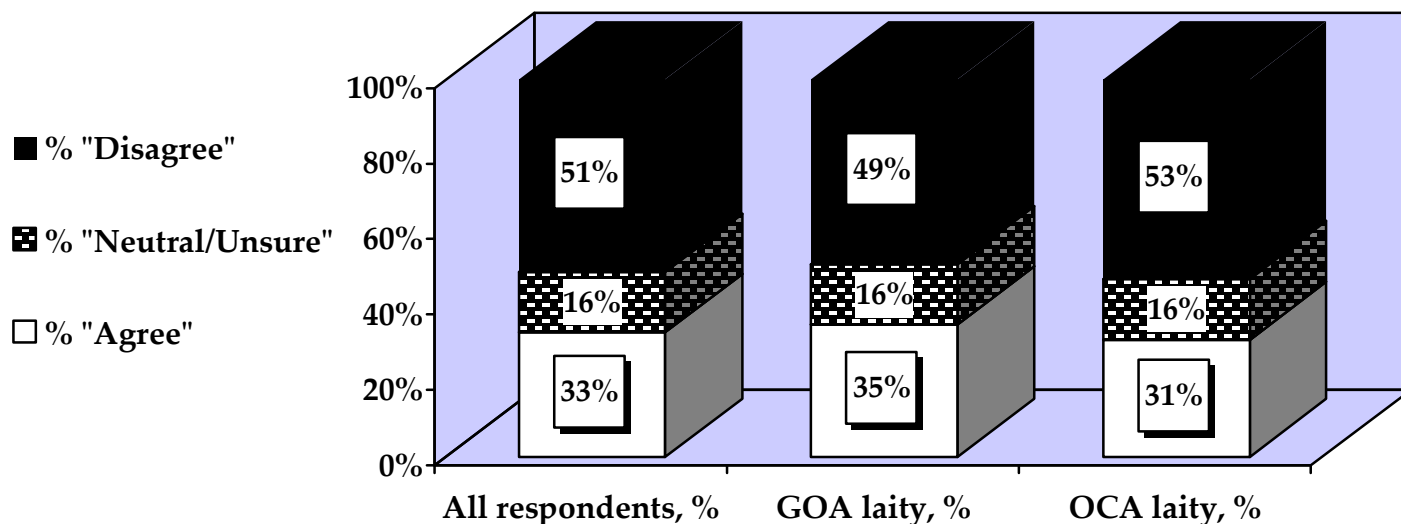
- Only one out of three GOA and OCA parishioners support legal equality for same-sex couples and “traditional” families;
- The GOA and OCA church members are divided in two equal groups: those who think that “The primary calling of married women is in the sphere of home and family. All other social and business activities should be considered as secondary in comparison with family duties and obligations” and those who reject this statement;
- Relative majority of GOA and OCA parishioners support early exposure of children to a variety of cultural and religious choices existing in American society;
- American Orthodox laity (GOA and OCA alike) are divided in three almost equal groups: those who favor teaching creationism instead of evolution in American public schools (33%), those who reject this idea (35%) and those who are unable to take one or other stand on this matter (32%);
- Less than one third of GOA and OCA parishioners support an idea of intentional and thorough secularity of the American public schools. In this regard American Orthodox laity are very similar to their parish clergy.

Our study examined opinions of American Orthodox laity about four “touchy” social issues:

- Homosexuality;
- Role and position of women in a family;
- Desirable style of children education;
- Religion and public education.

We first asked GOA and OCA parishioners if they agree that “even if homosexuality is wrong, the civil rights of gays and lesbians – including legal status for ‘same-sex couples’ - should still be protected.” See Fig. 62.

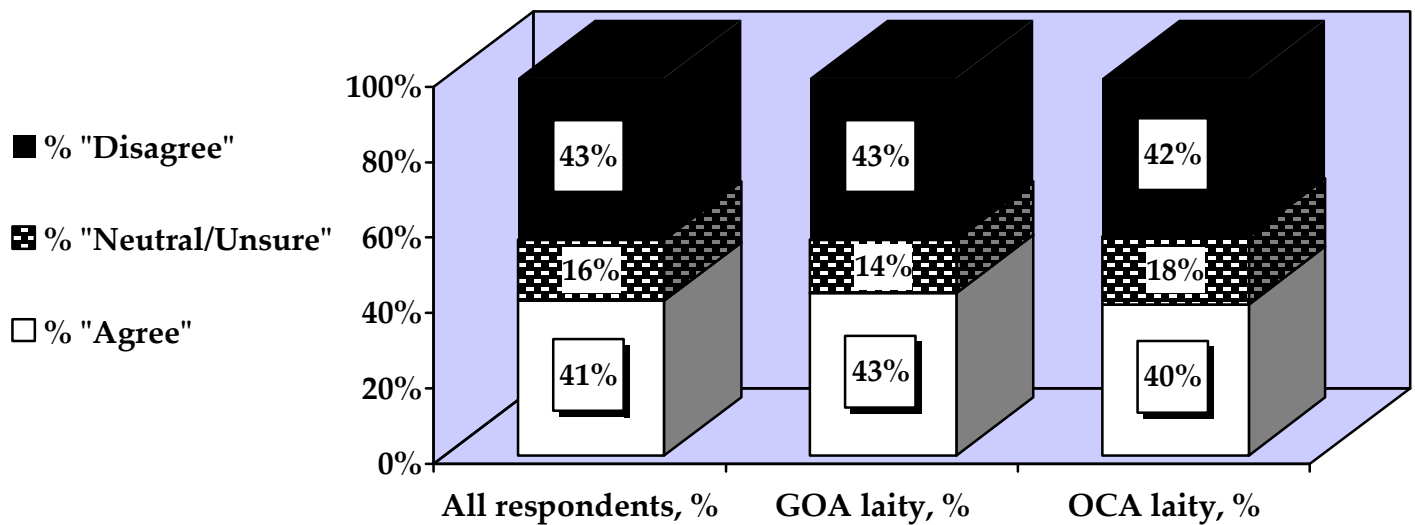
**Fig. 62. “Even if homosexuality is wrong, the civil rights of gays and lesbians – including legal status for ‘same-sex couples’ - should still be protected.”**



Both in GOA and in OCA, only one out of three parishioners support legal equality of homosexual and “traditional” families. Either absolute (OCA) or relative (GOA) majority of church members do not approve this idea and disagree with the statement “Even if homosexuality is wrong, the civil rights of gays and lesbians – including legal status for ‘same-sex couples’ - should still be protected.”

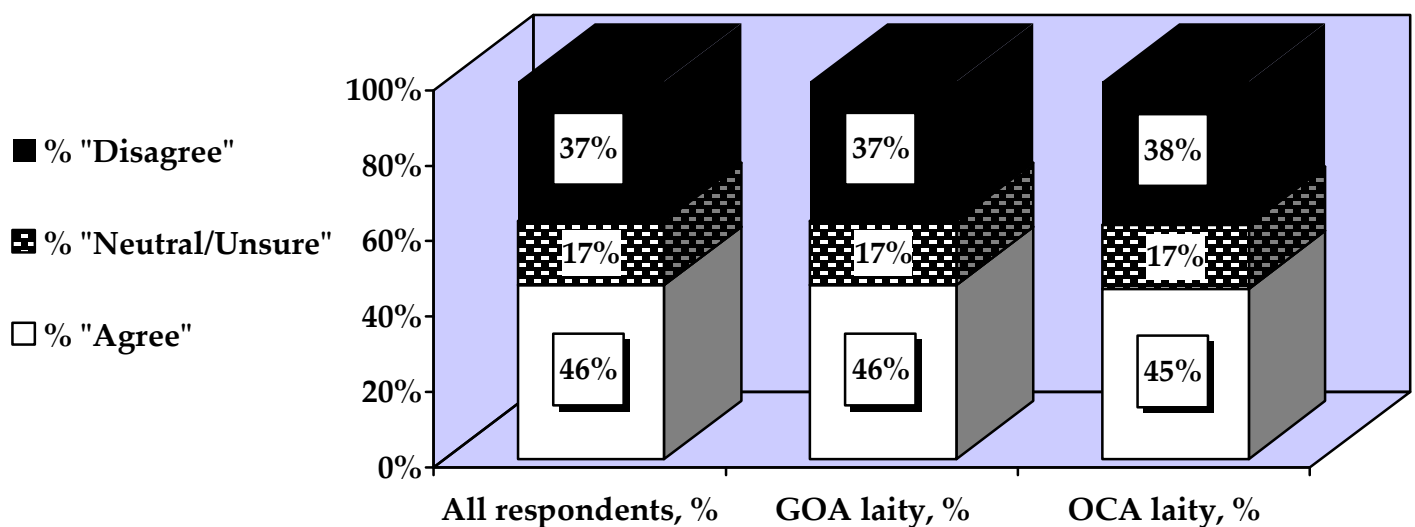
We further asked GOA and OCA church members whether they agree or disagree with the statement “The primary calling of married women is in the sphere of home and family. All other social and business activities should be considered as secondary in comparison with family duties and obligations.” This statement raises an old question of what should be the position of the women in family life: should they pursue their own career and be – equally with men - “bread winners” or should they rather assume the role of a full-time home-maker? Fig. 63 on the next page shows that this statement touches quite a divisive issue. Almost equal number of parishioners either agreed with this statement (43% of GOA and 40% of OCA members) or rejected it (43% of GOA and 42% of OCA members).

**Fig. 63.** “The primary calling of married women is in the sphere of home and family. All other social and business activities should be considered as secondary in comparison with family duties and obligations.”



The next statement offered to our respondents, “Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults,” voices an idea that children should be familiar with and experience for themselves the cultural and religious diversity of American society. See Fig. 64.

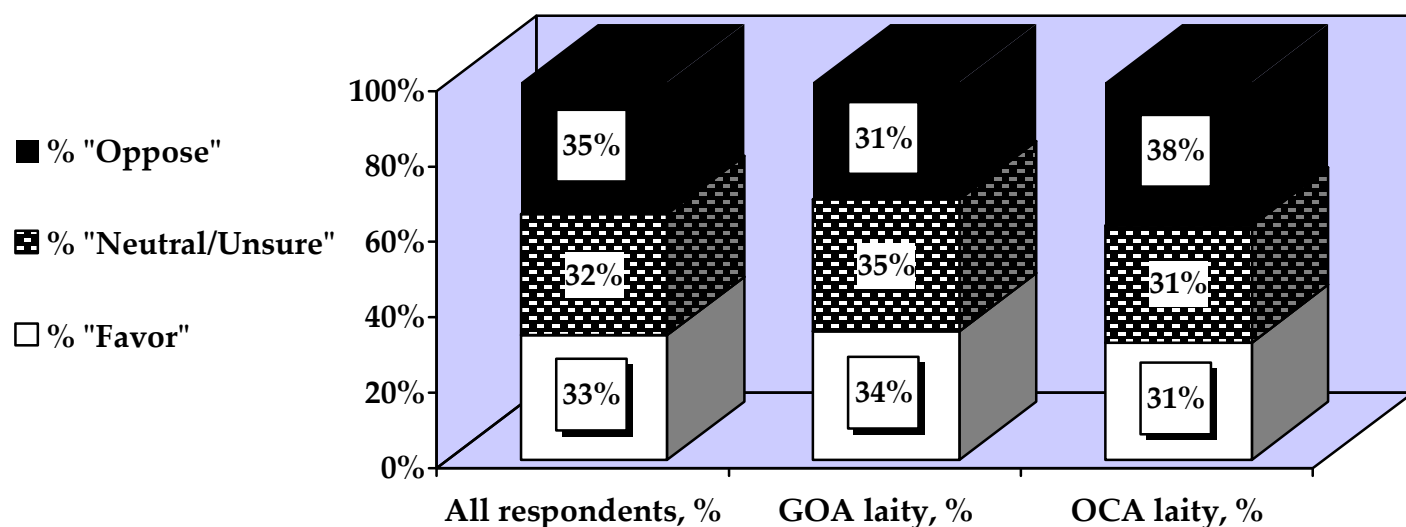
**Fig. 64.** “Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults.”



Slightly less than half of GOA (46%) and OCA (45%) laity share this approach to the education of children by agreeing with this statement. We should note, however, that supporters of early exposure of children to a variety of cultural and religious choices constitute relative majority among both GOA and OCA members: indeed, only 37-38% of our respondents DO NOT approve the statement “Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults.”

We then asked our respondents whether they would favor or oppose teaching creationism **INSTEAD** of evolution in public schools. See Fig. 65.

**Fig. 65.** “Would you generally favor or oppose teaching creationism **INSTEAD** of evolution in public schools?”



It came as a somewhat of surprise to find out that American Orthodox laity (GOA and OCA alike) are divided in three almost equal groups: those who favor teaching creationism instead of evolution in American public schools (33%), those who reject this idea (35%) and those who are unable to take one or other stand on this matter (32%).

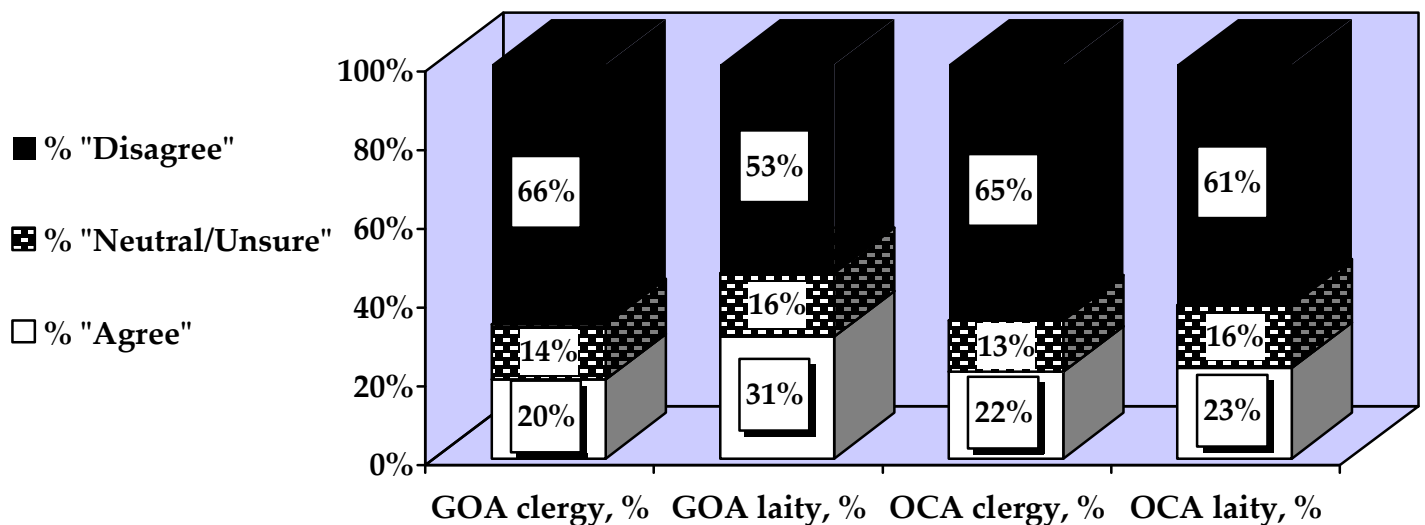
It should be noted, however, that there were significantly more supporters of teaching creationism instead of evolution among persons without college degree (43%), while relative majority of university graduates (41%) rejected this idea. See Tab. 32.

**Tab. 32.** Would you generally favor or oppose teaching creationism **INSTEAD OF** evolution in public schools?

	"Favor"	"Oppose"	"Unsure/No opinion"
Persons without college degree, %	<u>43</u>	21	36
College graduates, %	28	<u>41</u>	31
All respondents, %	33	35	32

We finally asked our respondents whether they agree or disagree that “it is important that public schools at all levels keep religion and religious issues ‘out of classrooms’.” This statement examines a sensitive and frequently debated subject: the presence of religion in American public education. The same statement was offered to American Orthodox clergy in our earlier 2006 national study “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America” (Krindatch 2006). The responses of GOA and OCA clergy and laity to this statement are in Fig. 66.

**Fig. 66. “It is important that public schools at all levels keep religion and religious issues ‘out of classrooms’.”**



Clearly, only relatively small proportion of American Orthodox clergy and laity supports an idea of intentional and thorough secularity of the American public schools. Indeed, only 20% of GOA and 22% of OCA priests, and only 31% of GOA and 23% of OCA laity agreed that “It is important that public schools at all levels keep religion and religious issues “out of classrooms.”

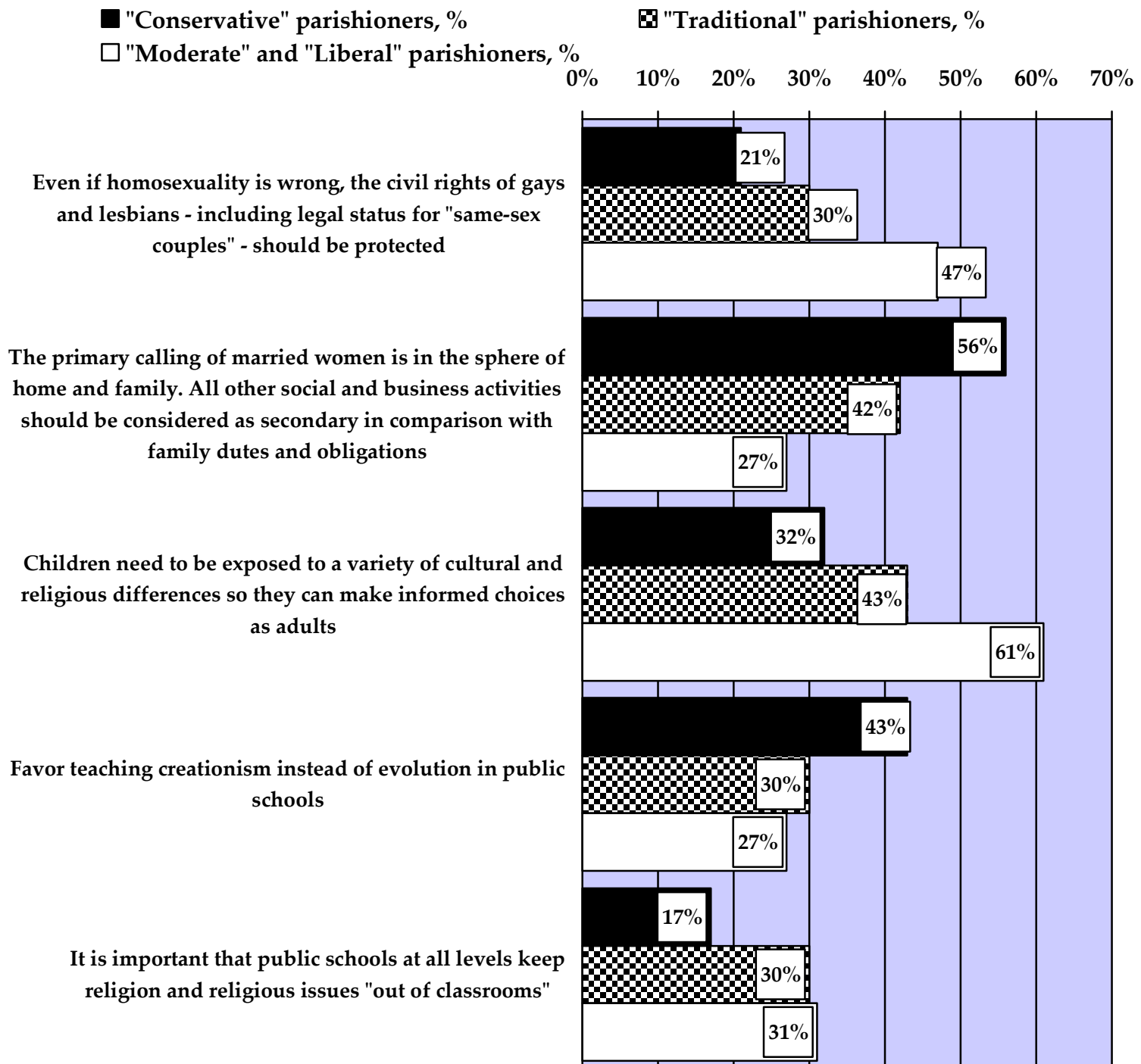
We found that here was very little difference in responses to all five statements between GOA and OCA members, between younger and older parishioners, between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy and between respondents with various education level (with exception of their various preferences for teaching creationism instead of evolution). Put differently, the opinions of various generations of American Orthodox laity, of church members with different religious upbringing and of persons with various education levels with regard to issues of homosexuality, position of women in family life, education of children and religion in public education system are relatively uniform.



At the same time, and similarly to what we saw in case of opinions on “Notion of Priesthood” or on “Democracy in the Church” or on “Innovations in the Church” or on “Religious Particularism and Ecumenical Contacts,” there was serious disagreement between parishioners who identified their approach Church life as either “Conservative,” or “Traditional,” or “Moderate,” or “Liberal” in their responses to all five statements discussing various social issues. See Fig. 67.

**Fig.67 Theological Stance of Orthodox Laity and their Social Attitudes:**

**% of parishioners with various theological stance who AGREED with the following statements**



Almost half (47%) of “Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners support legal equality of same-sex and heterosexual couples as compared to only one in five “Conservative” church members. Conversely, more than half (56%) of “Conservative” respondents are of the view that married women should stay at home and take care of the family, but only one quarter (27%) of theologically “Moderate” and “Liberal” persons think that this should be the case. Compared to those who said that they have “Conservative” approach to Church life, almost twice as many of “Moderate” and “Liberal” respondents voice idea of early exposure of children to the cultural and religious diversity of American society: 32% and 61% respectively. 43% of “Conservative” church members think that creationism should be taught instead of evolution in American public schools, but only 27% of “Moderate” and “Liberal” respondents would support this idea.

The pattern of responses of the parishioners with various theological attitudes to the last statement (“It is important that public schools at all levels keep religion and religious issues ‘out of classrooms’.”) is somewhat different. This was the only statement where opinions of “Moderate” and “Liberal” church members (31% agreed with this statement) were very similar to the opinions of persons who identified their theological stance as “Traditional” (30% agreed). Put differently, Fig. 67 tells us that even among theologically “Moderate” and “Liberal” parishioners less than one third support idea of separation of religion and public education. Still, compared to “Liberal,” “Moderate” and “Traditional” church members, even fewer number of “Conservative” respondents (17%) approved the statement “It is important that public schools at all levels keep religion and religious issues ‘out of classrooms’.”

## **XI. Personal Beliefs and Practices.**

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

- For an overwhelming majority of the American Orthodox laity, “Christianity” essentially means “Orthodox Christianity;”
- Nine in ten parishioners feel that keeping their children in the Orthodox Church is essential to them;
- Three in ten respondents struggle with the inability to talk about their faith with non-Orthodox;
- Compared to US Roman Catholics, the American Orthodox Christians adhere to their Church more strongly and are more clear about the content of their faith;
- The American Orthodox laity are deeply divided among themselves in their approach to the compatibility of evolutionism and creationism. Almost equal proportions of the respondents either agreed (41%) or disagreed (38%) with the statement “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.” More than one-fifth (21%) of parishioners were unable to evaluate this statement and said that they are “Neutral or unsure;”

- The American Orthodox laity are essentially uniform in their vision of the *hierarchy of importance* of the various Church teachings, requirements and practices for being good Orthodox Christian. The personal beliefs in Jesus' resurrection and Jesus' actual presence in the Eucharist are perceived by the Orthodox laity as the most crucial criteria of being "a good Orthodox," while regular Church attendance, obeying the priest and observing Great Lent and fasting are seen as relatively insignificant for being a good Orthodox Christian;
- "Sacred Scripture" and "Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church" are by far most imperative sources of authority for Orthodox parishioners: nine in ten respondents said that these sources of authority are "fundamental" to them;
- American parish clergy also enjoy quite high level of authority: three in four parishioners feel that the guidance of their parish priest is "fundamental" to them as a source of authority;
- The "Guidance of the ruling Bishop/Metropolitan" is seen by majority of Orthodox parishioners as a relatively insignificant source of authority;
- Various Church based sources of authority are *relatively* more imperative for converts to Orthodoxy, while cradle Orthodox Christians pay higher attention to following general principles of "Human reason and understanding" and their "Personal experiences;"
- College educated church members are *less willing* to subordinate themselves to the authority of the clergy – both priests and bishops - than parishioners without college degrees;
- "Guidance of the parish priest" and "Human reason and understanding" are more imperative sources of authority for women than they are for men;
- The personal theological stance of the parishioners has a very strong impact on their evaluation of both Church-based and non-Church sources of authority.

In chapter 9, we arrived at the general conclusion that American Orthodox laity have a strong sense of their religious identity and clear preference for the Orthodox Faith and Church. We saw that both GOA and OCA members feel that "being Orthodox" is quite central and important for them. In this chapter, we will look into *how* American Orthodox Christians interpret and practice their faith. We will also try to answer the question: "When a person says that she or he is Orthodox, what is it about the Orthodox Church that is really important for that person?" Put simply, what do our respondents think is essential and what is nonessential for being a "good Orthodox Christian?"

To begin with, we found that for an overwhelming majority of the GOA and OCA parishioners, “Christianity” essentially means “Orthodox Christianity.” We asked our respondents “What is your approach to teaching the meaning of the Christian faith?” Eight out of ten parishioners (79%) selected the answer “There is *one best and true* interpretation and the Orthodox Church comes closest to teaching it.” Only one-fifth of our respondents were of the view that “different churches may be equally correct teaching Christian faith” (12%) or that “there is one best interpretation of the Christian faith, but no Christian Church can legitimately claim to be closer to it than another” (9%). See Fig. 68.

**Fig. 68. What is your approach to teaching the meaning of the Christian faith? (%)**

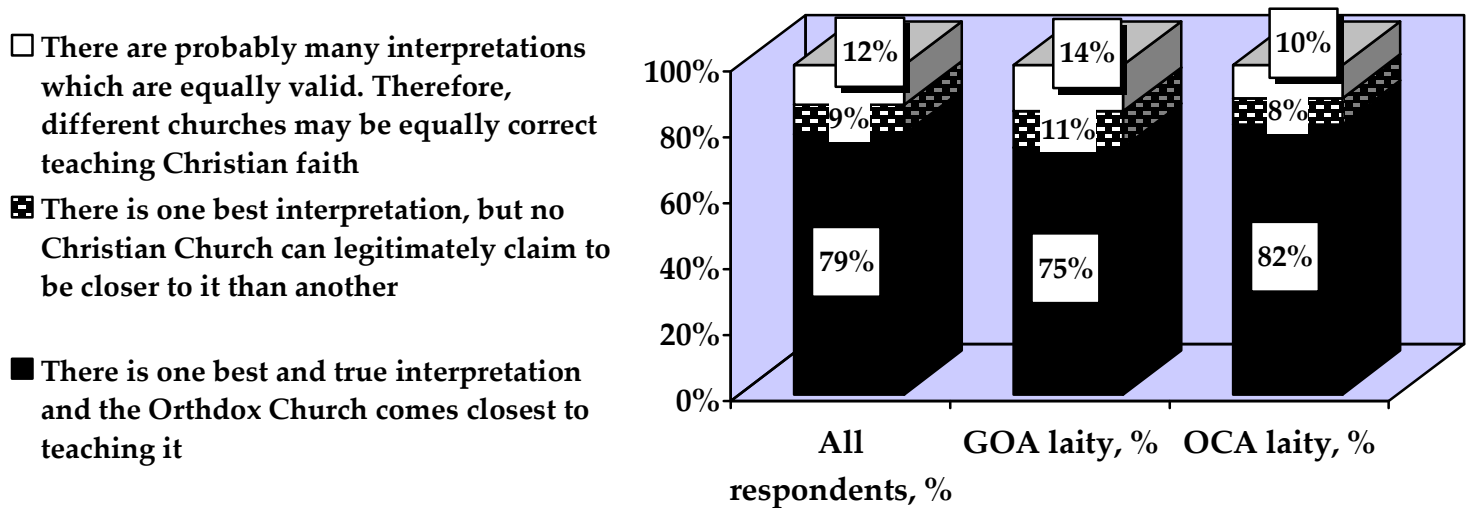
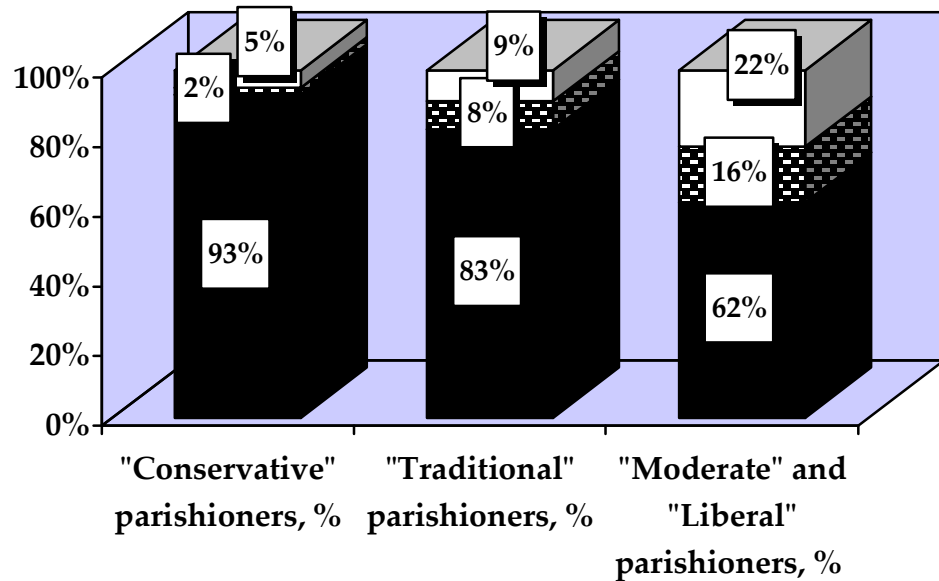


Fig. 68 indicates that GOA and OCA parishioners are very similar in their opinions about meaning of the Christian faith. Further, the younger and the older parishioners, the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and the persons with and without college education also answered this question similarly. In other words, in many ways, American Orthodox laity are quite uniform in their understanding of the meaning of Christianity.

The only significant difference in interpretation the meaning of the Christian faith was associated with the personal “micro-theologies” of the GOA and OCA church members. See Fig. 68A on the next page. 38% of the theologically “moderate” and “liberal” parishioners hold the view that the Orthodox Church does NOT possess a monopoly in the true interpretation and correct teaching the Christian faith: 16% of them believe that “there is one best interpretation of the Christian faith, but no Christian Church can legitimately claim to be closer to it than another” and 22% think that “there are probably many interpretations which are equally valid. Therefore, different churches may be equally correct teaching Christian faith.” Quite differently, only 17% of the theologically “traditional” and only 7% of the theologically “conservative” church members have chosen either of these answers.

**Fig. 68A. Theological Stance of the Orthodox Laity and Interpretation of the Meaning of the Christian Faith: “What is your approach to teaching the meaning of the Christian faith?” (%)**

- ☐ There are probably many interpretations which are equally valid. Therefore, different churches may be equally correct teaching Christian faith
- ☒ There is one best interpretation, but no Christian Church can legitimately claim to be closer to it than another
- ☒ There is one best and true interpretation and the Orthodox Church comes closest to teaching it



We should note, however, that even among persons who defined their theological stance and approach to Church life as “moderate” and “liberal,” almost two-thirds of respondents are still convinced that “there is *one best and true* interpretation and the Orthodox Church comes closest to teaching it.”

Two more questions in our survey helped to judge the strength of religious beliefs of the American Orthodox Christians. We asked parishioners whether they agree or disagree with the statements “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians” and “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others.” The first statement emphasizes an importance of “handing down” one’s religious beliefs to the next generation. The degree of agreement (or rather disagreement) with the second statement is a good indicator of how much do Orthodox parishioners *know* about their faith and how confident do they feel explaining their beliefs to the “others.” See Tab. 33 and 34 on the next page.

Nine in ten parishioners (89%) feel that keeping their children in the Orthodox Church is essential to them. It is interesting to note, however, that despite their eagerness to see their children remain Orthodox, the study completed by the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese pointed out that 80% of Church school teachers report that “parents disinterest in their children religious education” is a major problem.

**Tab. 33.** “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
GOA laity, %	93	3	4
OCA laity, %	86	3	11
All respondents, %	89	3	8

Tab. 34 shows that only three in ten respondents (28%) struggle with the inability to talk about their faith with the non-Orthodox. On the confidence level of Orthodox to discuss their faith, it would be very interesting to research what a “typical” Orthodox Christian actually says when offering an explanation to a non-Orthodox Christian and the accuracy of these “belief statements.”

**Tab. 34.** “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
GOA laity, %	24	66	10
OCA laity, %	32	58	10
All respondents, %	28	62	10

The comparable data from the 2005 national study of the US Roman Catholic laity show that American Orthodox Christians adhere more strongly to their Church and seem to be more clear about the content of their faith than American Roman Catholics. Indeed, Tab. 35 shows that compared to the US Orthodox Christians, fewer American Roman Catholics are keen on passing their religion to their children. On the contrary, Tab. 36 indicates that many more Roman Catholics (49%) than Orthodox Christians (28%) have problems explaining their faith to the “others.”

**Tab. 35.** “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians/Roman Catholics.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
US Roman Catholics, %	78	22	0
US Orthodox Christians, %	89	3	8

**Note:** Source of data for the Roman Catholic Church (D’Antonio 2007)

**Tab. 36** “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
US Roman Catholics, %	49	51	1
US Orthodox Christians, %	28	62	10

**Note:** Source of data for the Roman Catholic Church (D’Antonio 2007)

Remarkably, the responses to the statements “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians” and “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others” provided by the various categories of American Orthodox laity were mostly uniform.

That is, the younger and the older parishioners, the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, the respondents with various education levels, and the theologically “conservative,” “traditional” or “liberal-moderate” Church members are essentially similar to one another in their devotion to passing their faith to their children and in their awareness about content of their faith. Yet we also found some slight variations.

First and predictably, keeping their children in the Orthodox Church is somewhat more important for the respondents who described their approach to the Church life as “conservative” or “traditional” than for the persons who defined themselves as being theologically “moderate” or “liberal.”

**Fig. 69.** “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians.”

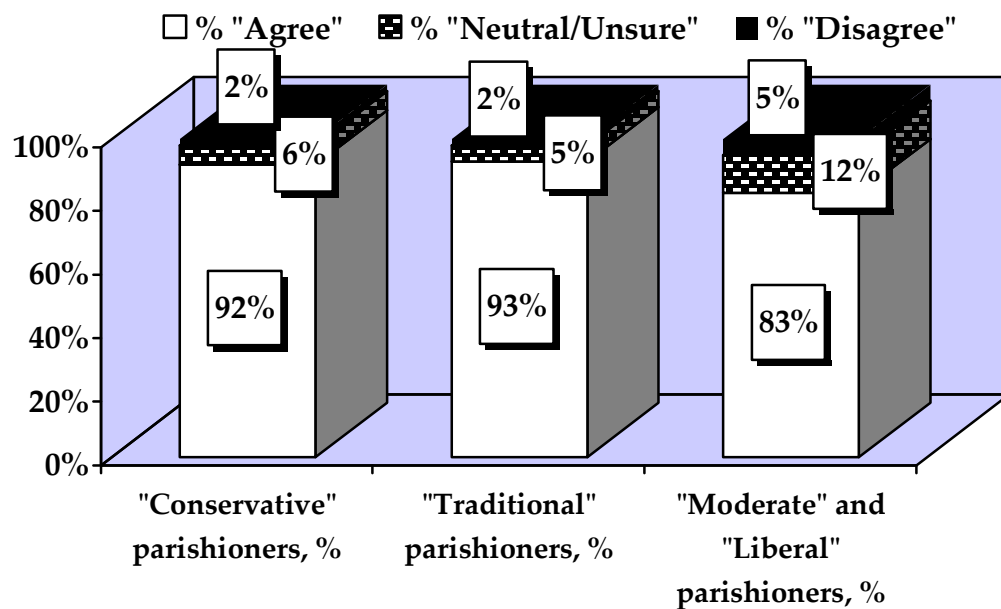
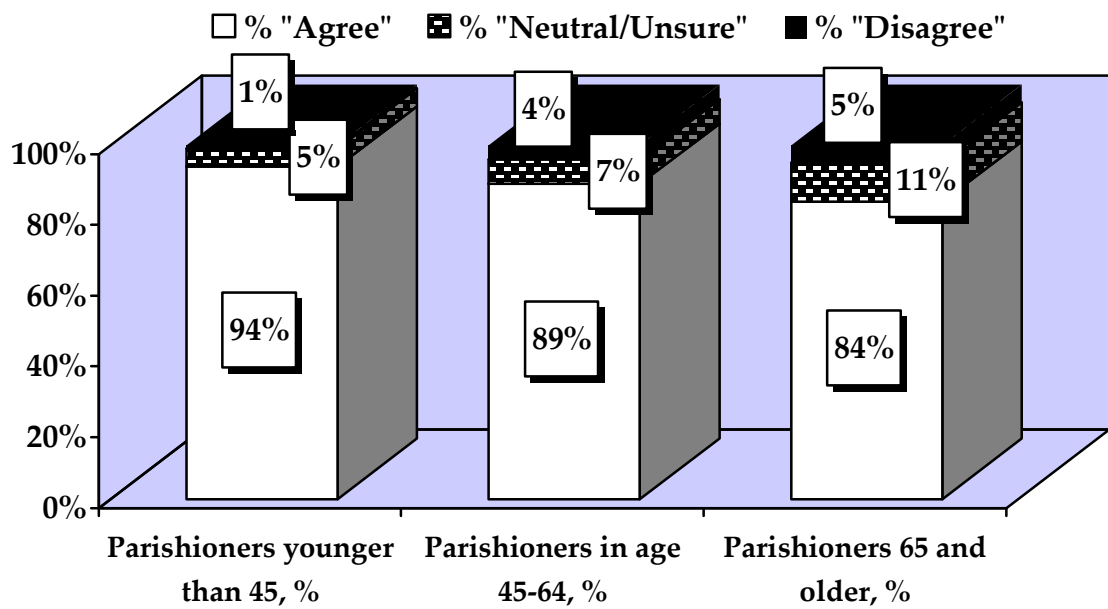


Fig. 69 shows that 92-93% of theologically “conservative” and “traditional” parishioners said “it is very important to them that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians” in comparison with 83% among theologically “liberal” and “moderate” Church members.

Second, passing their faith to their children is also somewhat more important for the younger (under 45 years) than for the senior (65 and older) parishioners. 94% of the respondents younger than 45 agreed with the statement “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians” in comparison with 84% among Church members in the age 65 and older. See Fig. 70 on the next page.

We think this difference is attributed to the fact that the younger parishioners still have children in such life-stages when their future “religious choices” are still in question. And this is why they are more concerned with the need to keep their children in the Orthodox Church. To the contrary, the chances are great that the children of the senior parishioners have decided long time ago about their religious preferences and affiliations. Therefore, the senior parishioners are less likely to worry about “growing up the younger generation of their families as Orthodox Christians.”

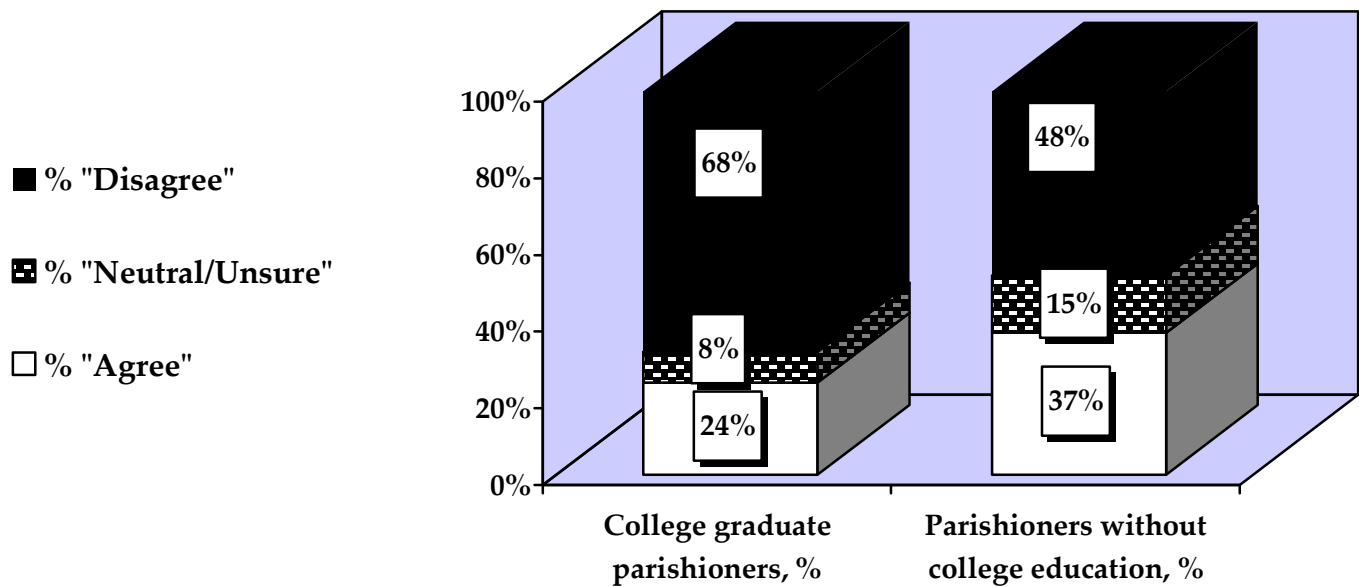
**Fig. 70. “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians.”**





Third, the level of education has an obvious impact on the person’s ability to articulate his or her religious beliefs and to talk about their faith. Fig. 71 shows that the parishioners without college education have more problems explaining their religion to the non-Orthodox than the college graduate respondents: only 24% of the college graduate said that “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others” in comparison with 37% of parishioners without college degree.

**Fig. 71.** “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others.”



One more important finding should also be noted. The responses to the statements “It is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians” and “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others” were **NOT** related to one another. That is, person’s ability to talk easily about his or her faith is not necessarily associated with the keenness on keeping his or her children in the Orthodox Church.

How do American Orthodox faithful “reconcile” their religious beliefs with secular knowledge? One question in our survey provides a good insight into this subject. We asked our respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.” See Tab. 37.

**Tab. 37.** “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.”

	“Agree”	“Disagree”	“Neutral or unsure”
GOA laity, %	40	40	20
OCA laity, %	42	37	21
All respondents, %	41	38	21

Compared to their relatively uniform understanding of the meaning of the Christian faith (“There is *one best and true* interpretation and the Orthodox Church comes closest to teaching it”) and their overwhelming agreement that “it is very important to me that the younger generation of my family grow up as Orthodox Christians,” the American Orthodox laity are deeply divided among themselves in their approach to the compatibility of evolutionism and creationism. Almost equal proportions of our respondents either agreed (41%) or disagreed (38%) with the statement “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.” Further, more than one-fifth (21%) of parishioners were unable to evaluate this statement and said that they are “Neutral or unsure.”

The same question was asked in the study of one of the major American mainline Protestant denominations – the Presbyterian Church USA. See Tab. 38. Compared to American Orthodox Christians, many more American mainline Protestants have no problems reconciling the idea of God as Creator with evolutionary theory: 61% of them agreed with the statement “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.”

**Tab. 38.** “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.”

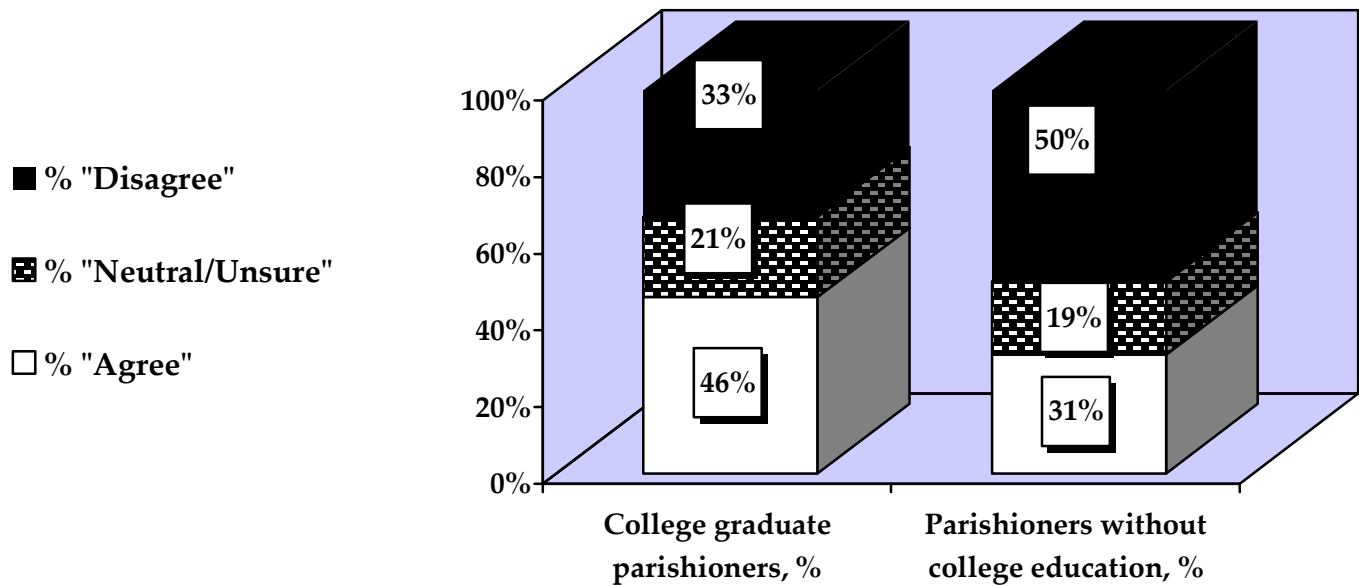
	<b>“Agree”</b>	<b>“Disagree”</b>	<b>“Neutral or unsure”</b>
Orthodox Christians, %	41	38	21
Members of the Presbyterian Church USA	61	32	7

Note: source of data for Presbyterian Church USA is (Research Services 1999)

What are distinct characteristics and features of parishioners who either agreed or disagreed with the statement “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator?” We found that level of education, religious upbringing and personal theological stance of the Orthodox laity have significant influence on their understanding of relation between idea of God as Creator and evolutionary theory.

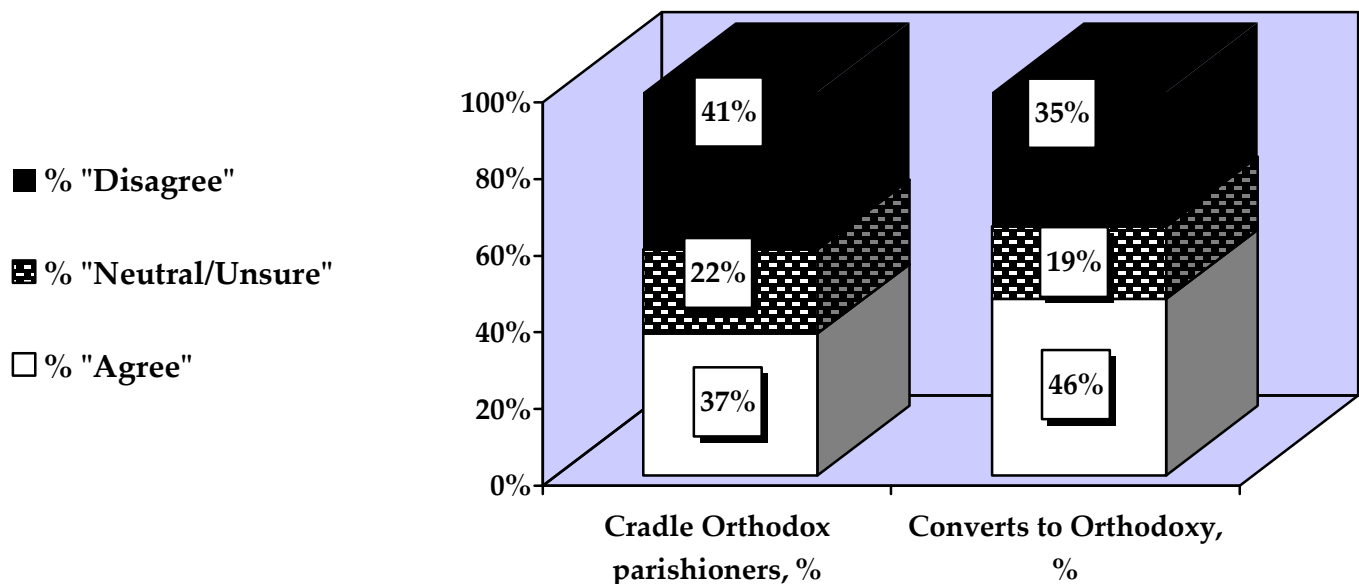
First, college educated parishioners were much more likely to agree that “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator” than the church members without college degrees: 46% and 31% respectively. See Fig. 72.

**Fig. 72.** “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.”



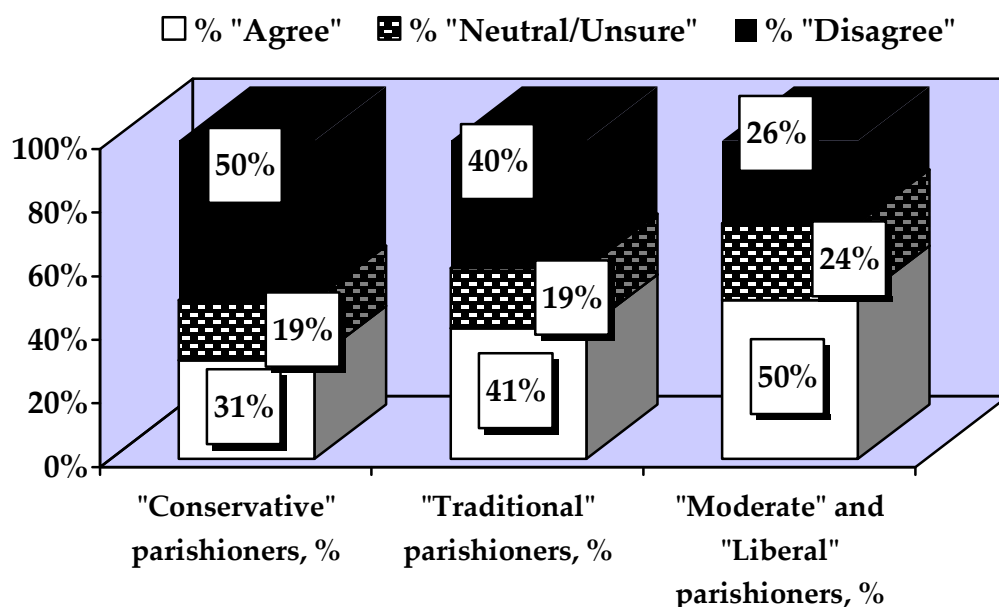
Second, many more converts to Orthodoxy are of the view that “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator” than is the case among cradle Orthodox church members: 46% and 37% respectively. See Fig. 73.

**Fig. 73.** “I often feel that I cannot explain my faith to others.”



Third, the most significant difference in laity’s approaches to the statement “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator” is defined by their personal theological stance. See Fig. 74. Half (50%) of the church members who defined their approach to Church life as “moderate” or “liberal” said that “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator” in comparison with only 41% among theologically “traditional” and only 31% among theologically “conservative” parishioners.

**Fig. 74. “Evolutionary theory is compatible with the idea of God as Creator.”**



What does it mean from the laity’s perspective to be a “good Orthodox” and how do parishioners feel about the importance of the various requirements endorsed by the Orthodox Church? Put differently, the “objective” Church teachings, requirements and practices as described in various official Church documents may or may not be the same as the set of the “subjective” rules which an individual holds for him or herself in order to *feel* a “good Orthodox Christian.” It would be also safe to assume that most of Church members make personal selections among various norms of Church life, holding firmly to what – they think – is central for their faith and approaching the rest as desirable but not really crucial. In other words, we speak here about personal hierarchy of importance of various Church requirements and practices. Generally, we can divide these requirements and practices in three broad categories:

- Religious beliefs that every person holds,
- Actual participation in sacraments and involvement into local parish life,
- Following to the certain social practices endorsed by the Church.

Our survey asked GOA and OCA parishioners “The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian without performing these actions.” We provided our respondents with the list of eight items. With regard to each item, they can respond that without doing this he/she “cannot be considered a good Orthodox Christian” or “still can be a good Orthodox Christian.” See Fig. 75.

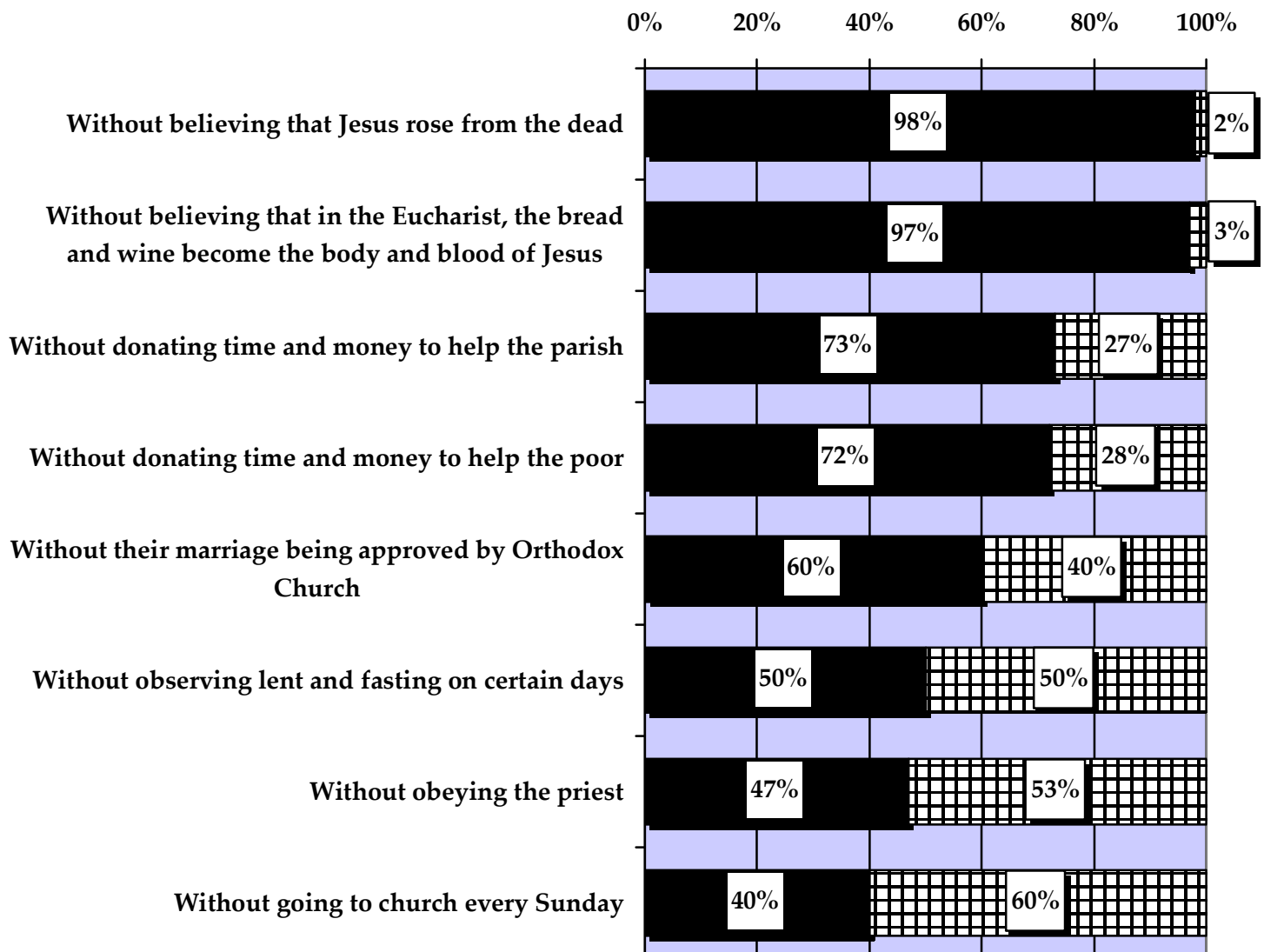
**Fig. 75 Importance of Various Beliefs and Practices for Being “Good Orthodox Christian:”**

“The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian *WITHOUT* performing these actions?”

% of respondents saying that:

■ No, he/she cannot be considered a good Orthodox Christian

▤ Yes, he/she still can be a good Orthodox Christian



One can see that from the perspective of Orthodox laity, the personally held “creedal” beliefs are by far more important for being “good Orthodox Christian” than anything else. Indeed, virtually all (97-98%) respondents are of the view that a person cannot be a good Orthodox Christian without believing in Jesus’s resurrection and without believing that “in the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and the blood of Jesus.” Next in importance for being a good Orthodox Christian come the obligations to donate time and money to help both the local church (parish) and the poor. Almost three quarters (72-73%) of the respondents said that a person cannot be a good Orthodox Christian “without donating time and money to help the parish” and “without donating time and money to help the poor.”

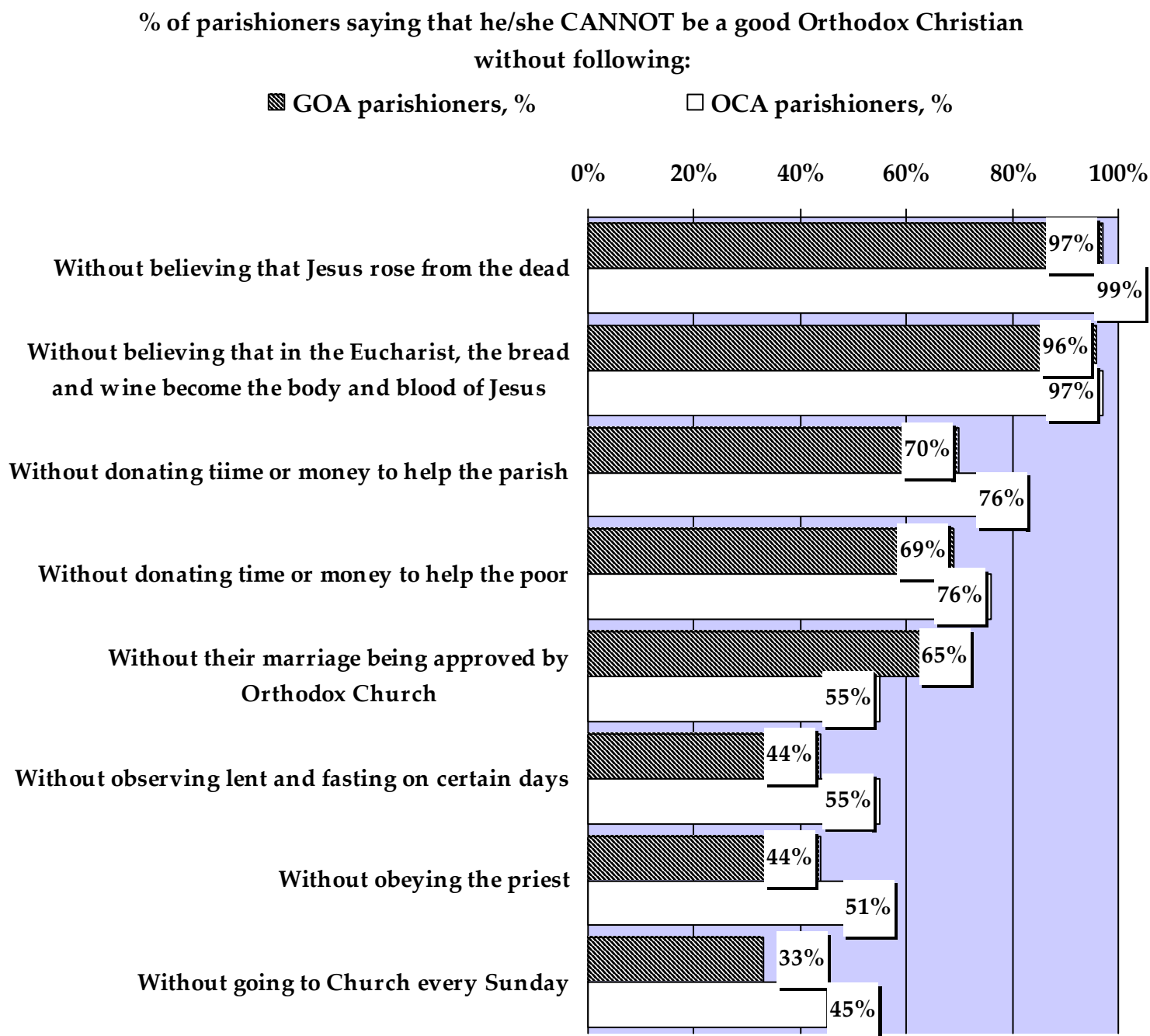
On the opposite side, at the bottom of the Fig. 75, are three requirements which are seen as least imperative for being good Orthodox Christian: attending Church every Sunday, obeying the parish priest and observing Great Lent and fasting. No more than half of GOA and OCA parishioners think that these requirements are really crucial for being a good Orthodox Christian.

Put simply, the personal creedal beliefs are seen by American Orthodox laity as fundamental for being a good Orthodox Christian, but regular church attendance and obeying parish clergy are perceived as relatively non-essential.

Are there any significant differences between GOA and OCA members in their visions of what really matters for being a good Orthodox Christian? The general answer to this question is “No.” See Fig. 76.

**Fig. 76 Importance of Various Beliefs and Practices for Being “Good Orthodox Christian:” GOA and OCA Lay Members.**

“The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian *WITHOUT* performing these actions?”



First, one can see that the hierarchy of importance of the various Church requirements and practices (what comes first and what comes last) is the same for the GOA and OCA parishioners. Second, in the case of most items there is little difference in proportion of GOA and OCA members saying that “he/she cannot be a good Orthodox Christian without doing this or that.”

The variations worth mentioning between GOA and OCA laity are in how they evaluate the importance of a marriage being approved by the Orthodox Church, the regular church attendance and observing lent and fasting requirements. More GOA (65%) than OCA (55%) members think that the marriage which is properly approved by the Orthodox Church really matters for being Orthodox. On the contrary, more OCA than GOA parishioners feel that the regular church attendance and observing lent and fasting days are crucial for being good Orthodox Christian. Yet, in overall picture, there is not much difference between these two Orthodox jurisdictions in how they members evaluate the importance of various Church norms and requirements for being good Orthodox Christian.

What about differences between various categories of parishioners? Do college graduate and persons without college degree, young people and older people, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, theologically “conservative,” “traditional,” “moderate” and “liberal” parishioners agree on what one needs to be a good Orthodox? First, we found that the level of education *does not* make a difference for how a person perceives the relative importance of various rules and norms of the Church life.

Second, various generations of the Orthodox parishioners have somewhat different visions for what one needs to consider himself a good Orthodox. Fig. 77 on the next page shows that the most significant differences between younger (under 45), middle-aged (45-64) and older (65 and older) parishioners are related to the issues of donating time and money to the parish (the younger respondents saw this as *less* essential), of observing lent and fasting (middle-aged church members are more insistent than the younger and senior parishioners about importance of obeying this requirement), and of obeying the priest (the younger parishioners are more likely to see it as essential for being good Orthodox than the middle-aged and senior persons). Yet, the generational differences among Orthodox laity in how they evaluate the importance of various rules and practices are also relatively insignificant. For all generations, the beliefs in Jesus’ resurrection and in Jesus’ actual presence in the Eucharist are by far most important criteria for being good Orthodox, while regular Church attendance, obeying priest and observing lent and fasting are seen as relatively insignificant.

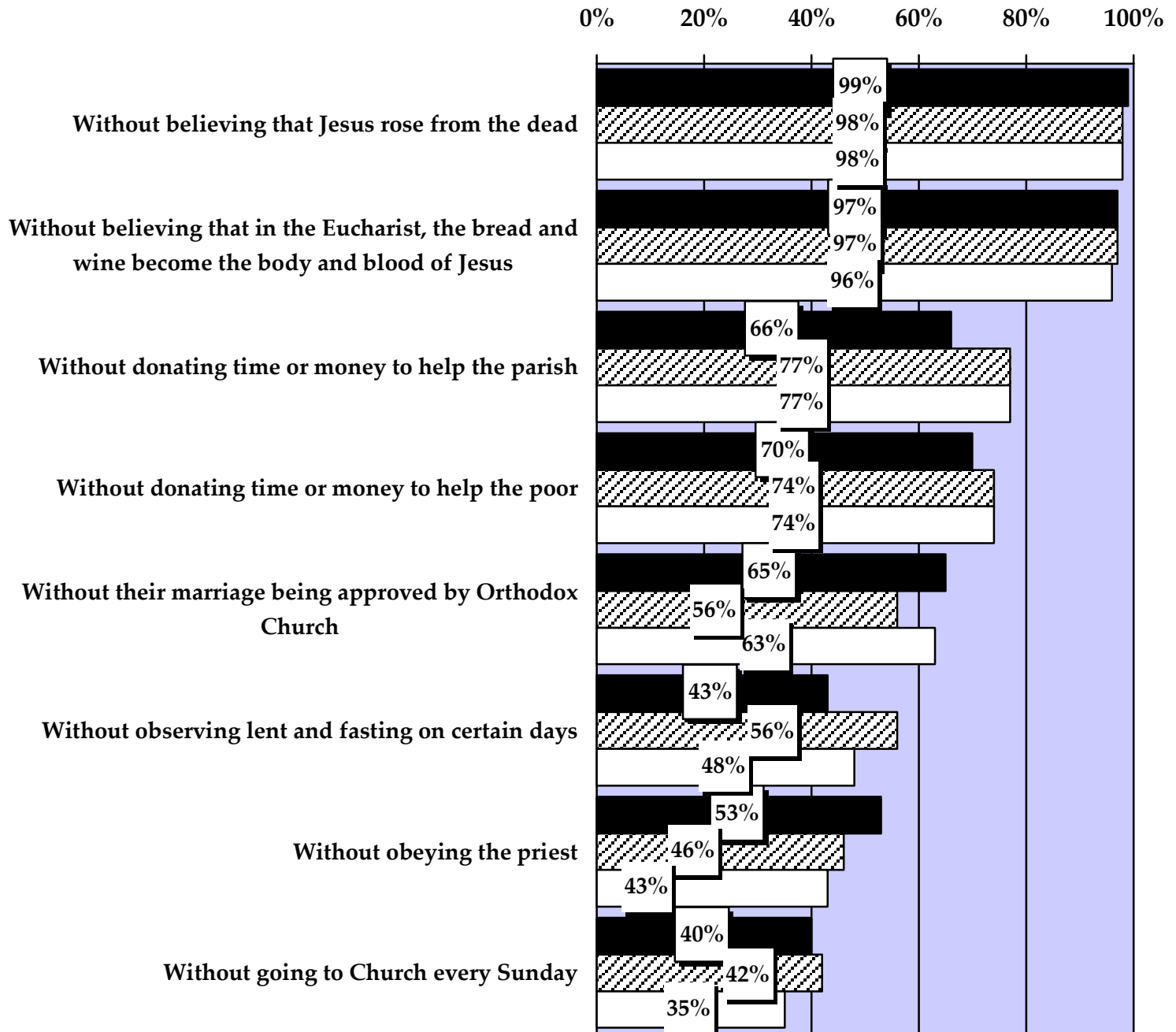


**Fig. 77 Age of the Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes towards Importance of Various Beliefs and Practices for Being “Good Orthodox Christian:”**

“The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian *WITHOUT* performing these actions?”

% of parishioners saying that he/she CANNOT be a good Orthodox Christian without following:

■ Parishioners in the age 65 and older, %    ▨ Parishioners in the age 45-64, %  
 □ Parishioners younger than 45, %

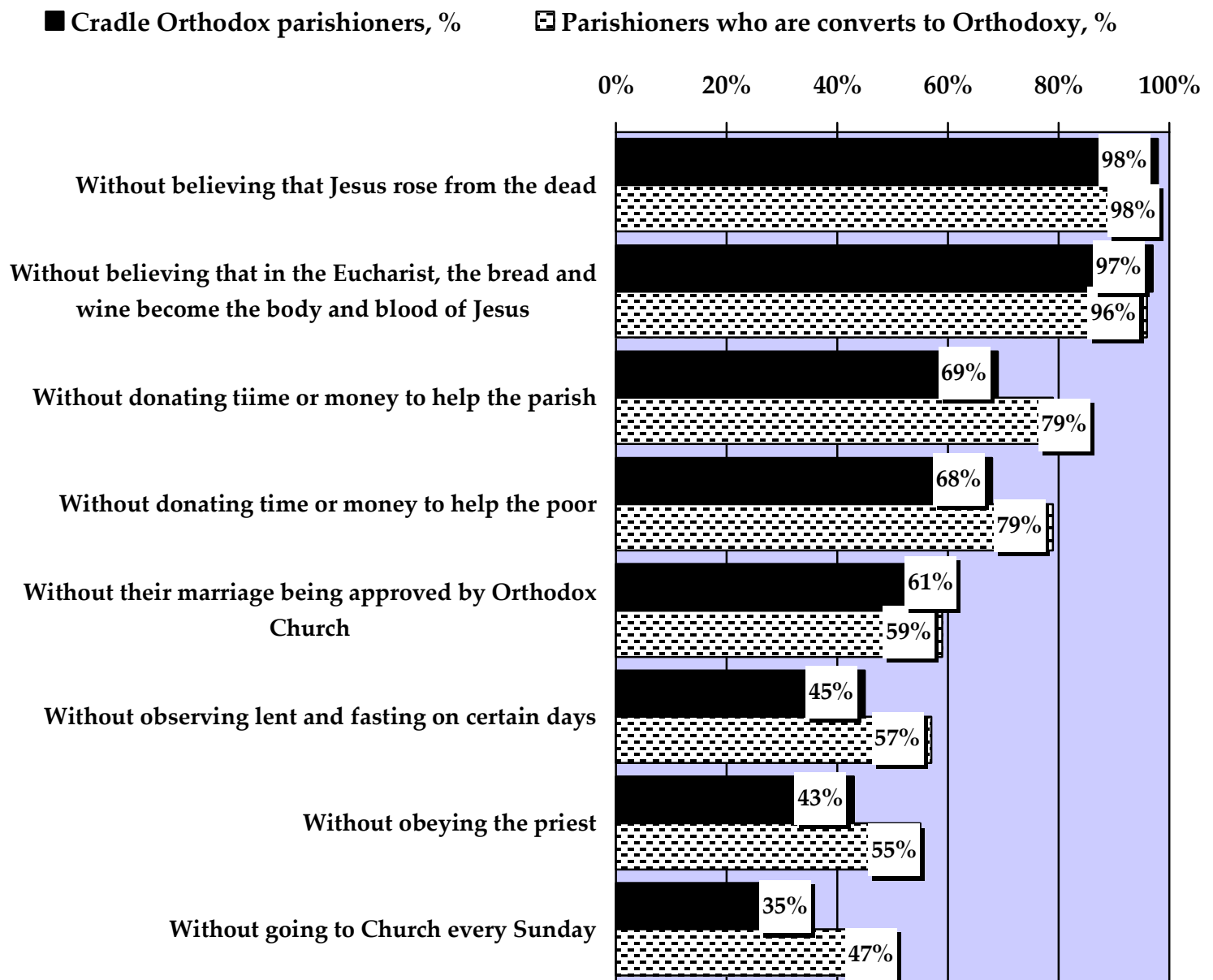


Do cradle Orthodox parishioners and converts to Orthodoxy feel the same way about importance of various Church requirements and practices? See Fig. 78.

**Fig. 78 Religious Upbringing of the Orthodox Laity and Their Attitudes towards Importance of Various Beliefs and Practices for Being “Good Orthodox Christian:”**

“The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian *WITHOUT* performing these actions?”

% of parishioners saying that he/she CANNOT be a good Orthodox Christian without following:



The cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy have the same hierarchy of importance of the various Church requirements and practices (what comes first and what comes last). Also virtually all cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy agree that the beliefs in Jesus' resurrection and in Jesus' actual presence in the Eucharist are fundamental for being Orthodox. At the same time, with regard to the other rules, the cradle Orthodox tend to be less insistent than the converts to Orthodoxy in saying that this or that is essential for being good Orthodox Christians.

Predictably, the personal "micro-theologies" of the American Orthodox laity, their self-definition as being theologically either "conservative," or "traditional," or "moderate" or "liberal" have obvious influence on how they evaluate the importance of various rules and requirements for being good Orthodox Christians. Fig. 79 shows that compared the "moderate" and "liberal" parishioners, significantly more persons describing their approach to the Church life as "conservative" or "traditional" think that "marriage being approved by the Orthodox Church," on "observing lent and fasting," on "obeying the priest" and on "going to Church every Sunday" are fundamental for being Orthodox. At the same time, Fig. 79 indicates that the "conservative," "traditional," "moderate" and "liberal" parishioners have absolutely the same view on what is *relatively* more or relatively less significant for being good Orthodox. Further, there is virtually no difference in proportion of the "conservative," "traditional," "moderate" and "liberal" church members who think that beliefs in Jesus's resurrection and in the fact that "in the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and the blood of Jesus," and that the obligations to donate time and money to help the parish and the poor are central for being good Orthodox Christian.

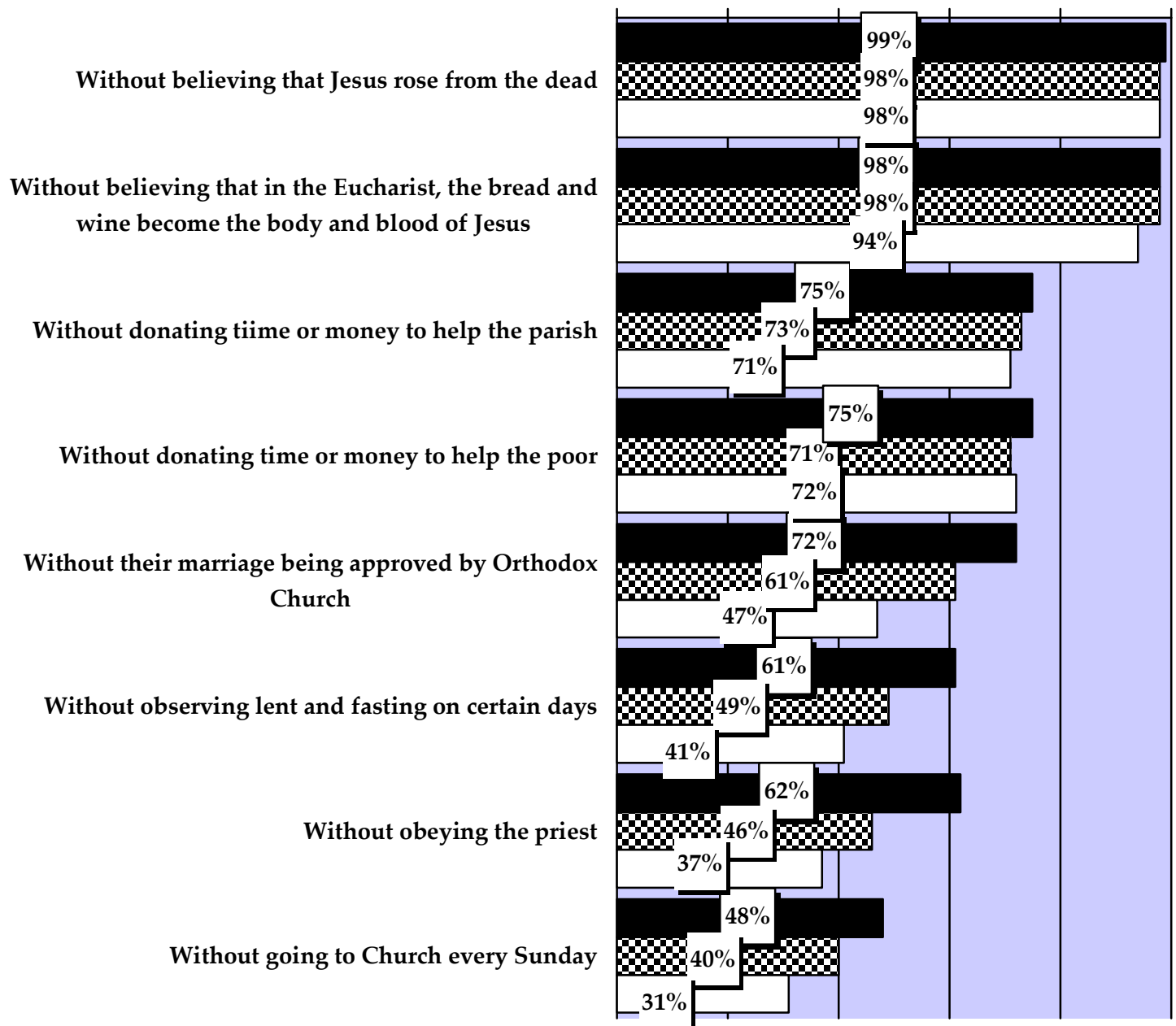
**Fig. 79 Theological Stance of the Orthodox Laity and their Attitudes towards Importance of Various Beliefs and Practices for Being “Good Orthodox Christian:”**

“The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian *WITHOUT* performing these actions?”

% of parishioners saying that he/she CANNOT be a good Orthodox Christian without following:

- "Conservative" parishioners, %
- ▣ "Traditional" parishioners, %
- "Liberal" and "Moderate" parishioners, %

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%



The data presented in Fig. 76-79 allow for two important conclusions. First, the American Orthodox laity are essentially uniform in their vision for the *hierarchy of importance* of the various Church requirements and personal practices for being good Orthodox Christian. In other words, the GOA and OCA members, the college graduates and persons without college education, the younger and older parishioners, the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and the theologically “conservative,” “traditional,” “moderate” and “liberal” persons have absolutely the same opinions on what is more and what is less crucial for being good Orthodox Christian.

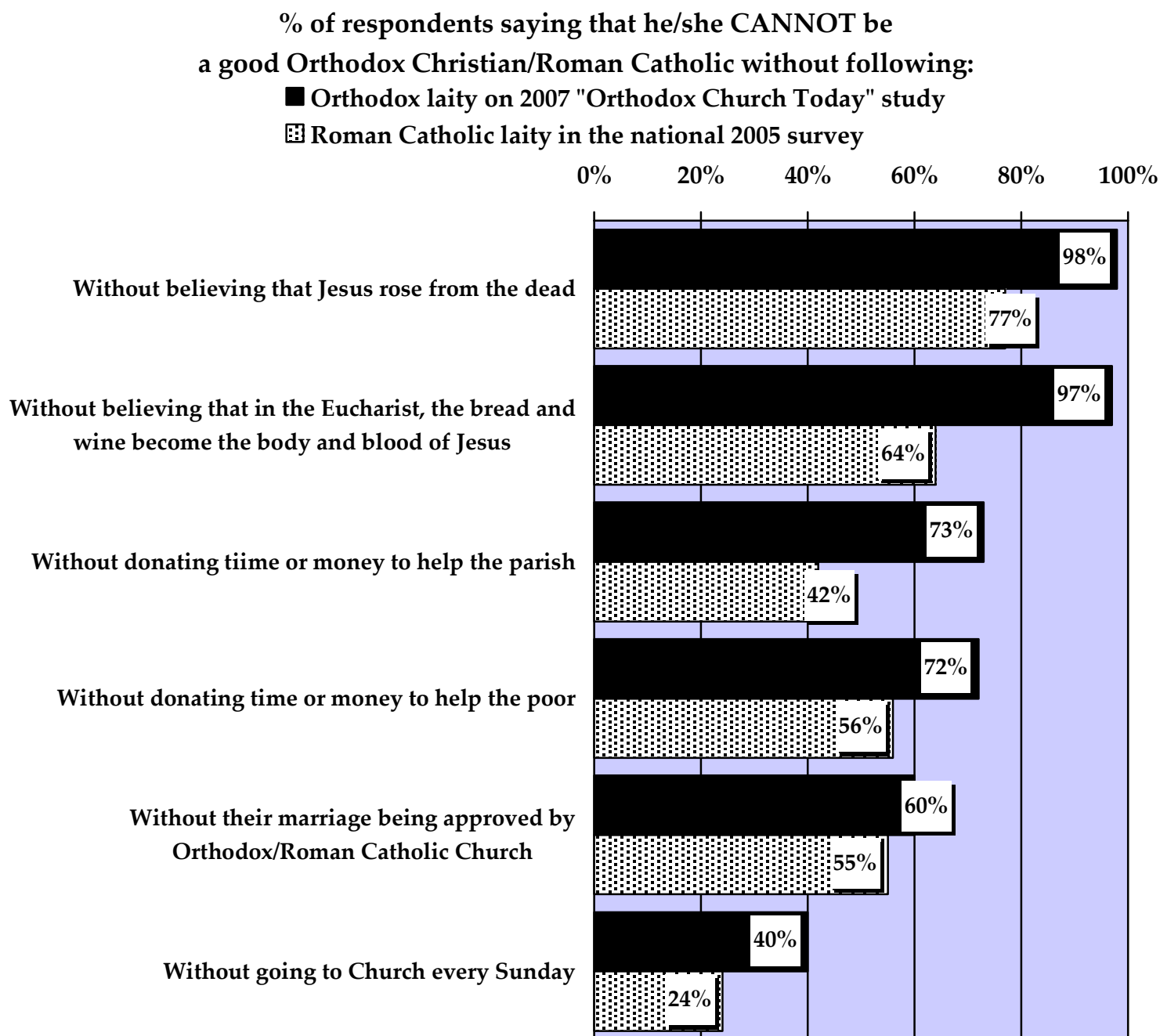
Second, all categories of parishioners are also very similar in the *actual proportion* of persons who think that the four top-ranked requirements (beliefs in Jesus’s resurrection and in the fact that “in the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and the blood of Jesus,” the obligations to donate time and money to help the parish and the poor) are fundamental for being “good Orthodox Christian.”

A similar question about the centrality of the various beliefs and Church requirements was asked in the 2005 national study of the American Roman Catholics. Six out of eight items from our questionnaire were present also in the Roman Catholic survey. How do American Roman Catholics compare to the Orthodox Christians in their understanding of what does it take to be a good Church member? See Fig. 80.

The Roman Catholics and Orthodox agree that the creedal beliefs (Jesus’ resurrection and actual Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist) are more important than anything else for being either a good Catholic or a good Orthodox. The Roman Catholics and Orthodox also hold the same view that the weekly church attendance is the least imperative requirement for being good Orthodox or good Catholic.

At the same time, the members of the Roman Catholic and American Orthodox Churches differ in two ways. First, for the Orthodox, the obligations to donate time and money for their parishes and for the poor are two equally important criteria for being good Orthodox Christian. The Roman Catholics, however, pay significantly greater attention to donating time and money to the poor than to their own parishes. We believe it reflects the fact that the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic teaching places great emphasis on social welfare (which is not the case in the Orthodox Church). Second and most importantly, with regard to all six requirements presented in Fig. 80, the Roman Catholics are much less insistent than the Orthodox about their fundamental significance for being a good Church member. Even in the case of creedal beliefs, 23% of Roman Catholics DO NOT think that believing that Jesus rose from the dead is essential for being good Catholic, and 36% of them DO NOT hold belief in the actual Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist as being fundamental for Catholics. Only 2-3% of Orthodox Christians disregard these core Christian beliefs.

**Fig. 80 Importance of Various Beliefs and Practices for Being “Good Orthodox Christian/Catholic:”**  
**“The following statements deal with what many think it takes to be a good Orthodox Christian/Catholic. Please, indicate if you think a person can be a good Orthodox Christian/Catholic *WITHOUT* performing these actions?”**



**Note:** Source of data for the Roman Catholics (D’Antonio 2007)

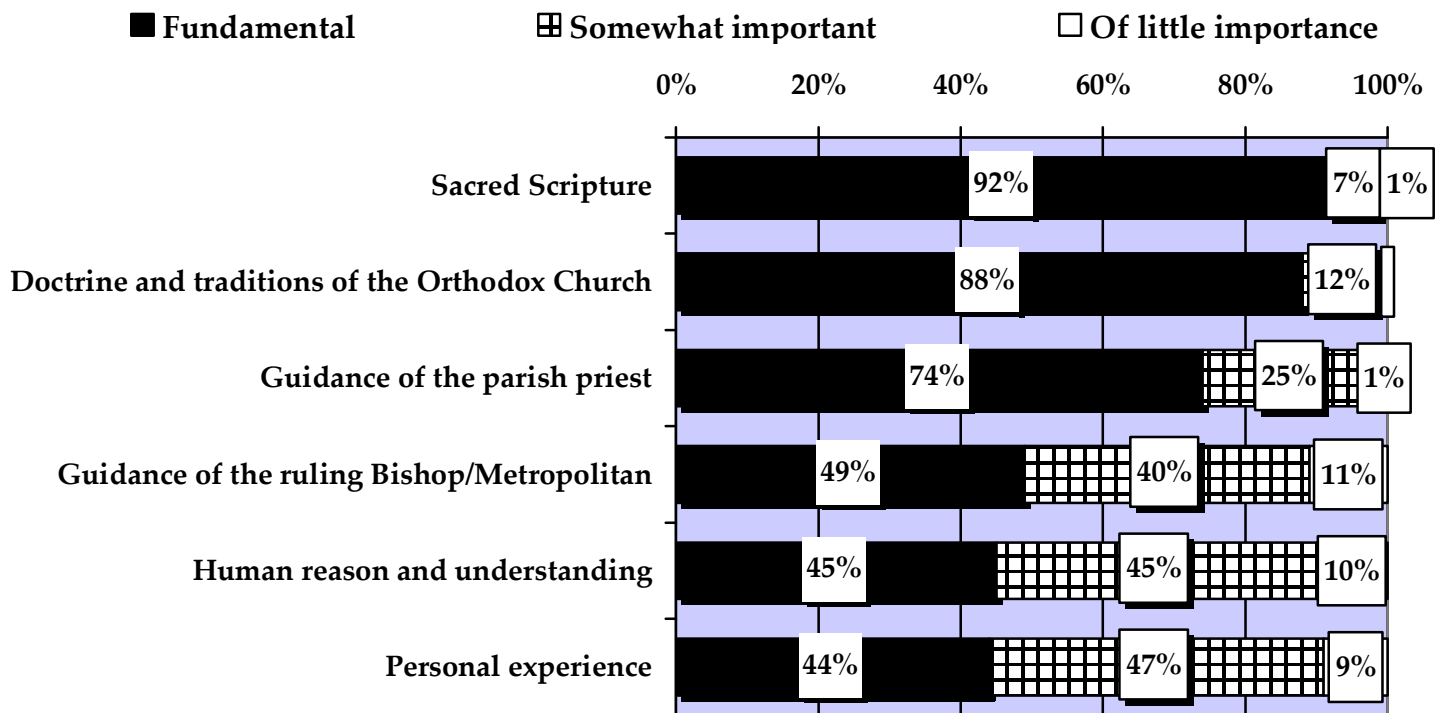
An important goal of this study was to examine how American Orthodox laity perceive and relate to the various types (teaching, administrative, etc.) of authority of the Orthodox Church. Historically, the Orthodox Church is organized as a highly centralized institution with the clear-cut separation of laity and clergy, especially in terms of the certain roles and functions reserved exclusively for the latter. In this context, the authority of the Orthodox clergy has always been based on their special status (“authority of office”) achieved by way of ordination rather than on their personal qualities. Further, in the Orthodox Church, there is also a clear line dividing “ordinary” parish priests and Church hierarchs – the Bishops and Metropolitans. The latter have ultimately “last say” about all Church matters, including their exclusive right to interpret Church teaching.

Hence, the last question in this chapter is: “What type of authority is being accepted today by the American Orthodox Christians?” More specifically: “How significant are to them various Church based sources of authority?”

We asked our respondents “How important to you are the following sources of authority?” We gave them six items to consider: “Sacred Scripture,” “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church,” “Guidance of the parish priest,” “Guidance of the ruling Bishop/Metropolitan,” “Human reason and understanding,” and “Personal experience.” With regard to each, the respondents could say that they are “fundamental,” “somewhat important,” or “of little importance” to them. See Fig. 81 on the next page.

**Fig. 81 Sources of Authority: “How important to you are the following sources of authority?”**

% of respondents saying that the following sources of authority are:



First and clearly, two sources of authority are by far most imperative for Orthodox parishioners: “Sacred Scripture” and “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church.” Nine in ten respondents said that these sources of authority are “fundamental” to them. In other words, the general Christian teaching (“Sacred Scripture”) and more specific doctrinal beliefs and traditions associated with the Orthodox Church are equally important for the American Orthodox faithful and they are more authoritative than anything else. This fact is consistent with the earlier finding that the firm *creedal* beliefs are perceived by American laity as the most important criteria of being good Orthodox Christian.

Second, we found that American parish clergy also enjoy a quite high level of authority: three in four parishioners feel that the guidance of their parish priest is “fundamental” to them as a source of authority. This may seem slightly contradictory to the fact that – as we saw earlier – obeying parish clergy is seen as relatively non-essential for being good Orthodox Christian. However, we discovered in chapter 5 that dominant majority of laity are willing to recognize the ultimate authority of their priests in a parish, and that 9 out of 10 parishioners feel that there is a good match between parish community and their priest. In other words, the laity may not consider obeying parish priest as *criteria* which is crucial for being good Orthodox Christian, but in reality most of them pay great deal of attention to the guidance of their local clergy.



Third, Fig. 81 tells us that “Human reason and understanding” and “Personal experience” are seen by American Orthodox as being *much less* imperative sources of authority than the Christian and Orthodox teachings or the authority of their parish clergy. With regard to this finding, we should make a reservation that our survey did not specify whether the question about sources of authority was only about Church matters or it was also about every-day lives of our respondents. If the respondents interpret the question as only pertinent to the Church issues, it would explain a relatively small proportion (44-45%) of parishioners saying that “Human reason and understanding” and “Personal experience” are for them “fundamental” sources of authority.

Fourth, it came as a surprise that the “Guidance of the ruling Bishop/Metropolitan” is seen by majority of Orthodox parishioners as relatively non-essential source of authority. Only 49% of our respondents said that the guidance of Church hierarchs is “fundamental” to them, while 40% of parishioners choose the answer “somewhat important” and 11% feel that the authority of the bishops is “of little importance.” This finding is in the obvious contradiction with the official Church model and with the high level of power invested into the office of Bishop.

The information gathered from the focus groups administered in 15 GOA and OCA parishes provided some insights into the question of why bishops’ authority seems to be undermined. We asked focus groups participants to ponder two questions:

- How do you see the actual relationship between your parish and your Metropolitan (for GOA) or Bishop (for OCA)?
- If there will be one thing that you can change about Orthodox bishops in America (not necessarily your hierarchy) what this would be?

With regard to the first question, parishioners frequently responded in essence that:

- “We actually don’t know our Bishop;”
- “We see him only one or two times a year” (typically during parish patron saint’s day);
- “He is zero for us: he is indeed nice, but very distant;”
- “He doesn’t help us with various parish’s issues as he should;”
- “They (Bishops) are only concerned with raising funds for themselves and are only interested in our money;”
- “Our parish seems to be a neglected step-child;”
- “Too great distance between hierarchy and lay people.”

The most typical answers about desirable changes about Orthodox bishops in America in general included:

- “When they come to visit, they should spend more time with laity and not with clergy only;”
- “I would like to know more about them (Bishops) as persons;”
- “They should live simple lives and be more humble and ‘down to earth’;”
- “It would be good to have more interactions with our Bishop and to see him more often;”
- “I wish they would be more approachable and mingle more with us;”
- “They should be more ‘pastoral’ and act less as ‘administrators’ and more like ‘shepherds’;”
- “They should be more accountable to people in pews;”
- “More receptive and sensitive to parish needs, especially, to small communities and their problems;”
- “He should show less favoritism for certain parishes and treat equally all parishes;”
- “They should earn respect rather than demand respect;”
- “They should be not so ‘God like’;”
- “They should have more parish based experiences;”
- “They should get to know ordinary parishioners and show their love for them;”
- “They should be less ‘clanish’;”
- “They should practice what they preach.”

We cannot claim that the data gathered in our focus groups are nationally representative in a strict “statistical” sense, but the general trend is clear: from the perspective of the Orthodox laity, the bishops appear to be quite distant to the local parishes, not necessarily aware of their needs and not as “pastoral” and loving as they expected to be.

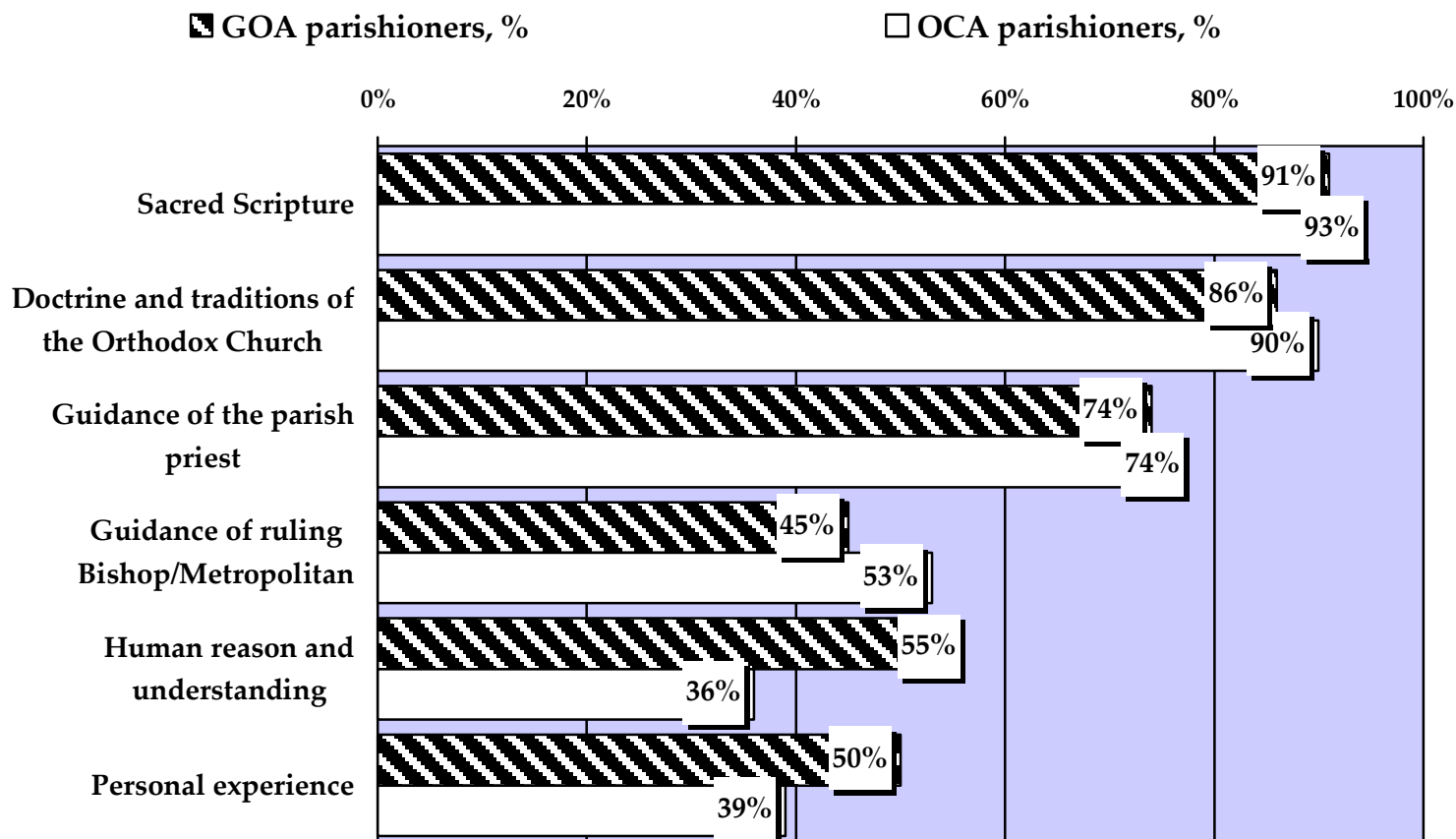
Earlier, in chapter 6, we saw that 57% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Orthodox bishops in America strive to guide the Church wisely and competently,” but this statement does not refer to the involvement of the bishops into the lives of the local parishes or to their relations with the ordinary parishioners. It would be also safe to assume that for the most lay Orthodox, their “Church” is their local parish. They are not particularly concerned with bishops or interested in diocesan affairs. The combination of all above factors can be a good explanation of why the authority of the local parish clergy is of much greater importance for the Orthodox laity than the authority of the Church hierarchs.

Fig. 82 shows that GOA and OCA parishioners are very similar in their evaluation of the three most significant sources of authority: nearly the same proportions of the GOA and OCA laity said that “Sacred Scripture,” “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church” and “Guidance of the parish priest” are “fundamental” as the sources of authority.

**Fig. 82 Importance of Various Sources of Authority:” GOA and OCA Lay Members.**

**“How important to you are the following sources of authority?”**

**% of parishioners saying that the following sources of authority are  
FUNDAMENTAL to them:**



Compared to OCA laity, however, significantly more GOA members view “Human reason and understanding” and “Personal experience” as being also fundamental sources of authority to them. A very likely explanation for this finding is much higher proportion of the converts to Orthodoxy among OCA parishioners (51%) than among GOA laity (29%). Indeed, when we looked at the answers provided by the cradle Orthodox parishioners and by the converts to Orthodoxy, we discovered that “Human reason and understanding” and “Personal experience” are more imperative sources of authority for the cradle Orthodox than for the converts to Orthodoxy.

And this pattern is consistent among GOA and OCA members when looked separately and for the whole sample of the respondents. 52% of the cradle Orthodox parishioners believe that “Personal experience” is a “fundamental” source of authority to them and 53% feel the same way about “Human reason and understanding.” The respective proportions among converts to Orthodoxy are only 33% and 34%. At the same time, compared to the cradle Orthodox, the converts to Orthodoxy ranked slightly higher the importance of “Sacred Scripture” and of “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church.” Further, 55% of the converts to Orthodoxy reported that “Guidance of ruling Bishop/Metropolitan” is “fundamental” to them as compared to only 45% among cradle Orthodox. We conclude that in overall picture various Church based sources of authority are *relatively* more imperative for the converts to Orthodoxy, while cradle Orthodox Christians pay higher attention to following general principles of “Human reason and understanding” and their “Personal experiences.”

What about other differences among various categories of parishioners in how they relate to the various sources of authority? First, there was virtually no difference among persons with or without college education in their vision of importance of authority of “Sacred Scripture” or “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church.” At the same time, the persons with college education are *less willing* to subordinate themselves to the authority of the clergy – both priests and bishops - than parishioners without college degree. When tasked how important to them is the individual authority of their parish clergy and of Church hierarchs, far fewer college educated parishioners said that it is “fundamental” to them. 86% of respondents without college education feel that “Guidance of their parish priest” is “fundamental” source of authority, and 61% of them said the same about “Guidance of the ruling Bishop/Metropolitan.” The respective figures for parishioners who have college degrees are only 70% and 43%.

Second, various generations of American Orthodox laity expressed similar opinions on the importance of all four Church-based sources of authority: “Sacred Scripture,” “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church,” “Guidance of the parish priest” and “Guidance of the ruling Bishop/Metropolitan.” At the same time, the older parishioners (65 and older) have stronger feeling that “Human reason and understanding” and “Personal experience” are also “fundamental” sources of authority than was the case among the younger (under 45) and middle-aged (45-64 years old) church members.

Third, the issue of importance of the various sources of authority was one of the few items in our survey where men and women expressed somewhat different opinions. Both “Guidance of the parish priest” and “Human reason and understanding” are more imperative for women than they are for men. 81% of female respondents said that “Guidance of the parish priest” is “fundamental” to them in comparison with only 68% among male parishioners. Similarly, 51% of women feel that “Human reason and understanding” is “fundamental” source of authority to them, but only 40% of men hold the same view.

Fourth and similarly to many other subjects discussed earlier, the personal theological stance of the Orthodox laity and the way they defined their approach to Church life have strongest impact on their evaluation of the various sources of authority. See Fig. 83 on the next page. All church members, those who described their theological stance and approach to the Church life as “conservative,” “traditional,” “moderate” or “liberal,” have the same opinions about importance of the most important source of authority – the “Sacred Scripture.” A vast majority (89-94%) of all respondents said that this is “fundamental” source of authority. That is, personal “micro-theology” of parishioners has NO impact on their appreciation of the importance of the general Christian teachings.

At the same time, more specific doctrinal beliefs and traditions associated with the Orthodox Church are more imperative for the “conservative” and “traditional” parishioners than for the “moderate” and “liberal” church members. 96% of “conservative” and 91% of “traditional” laity believe that “Doctrine and traditions of the Orthodox Church” are “fundamental” sources of authority in comparison with only 77% among parishioners who described their approach to Church life as “moderate” or “liberal.”

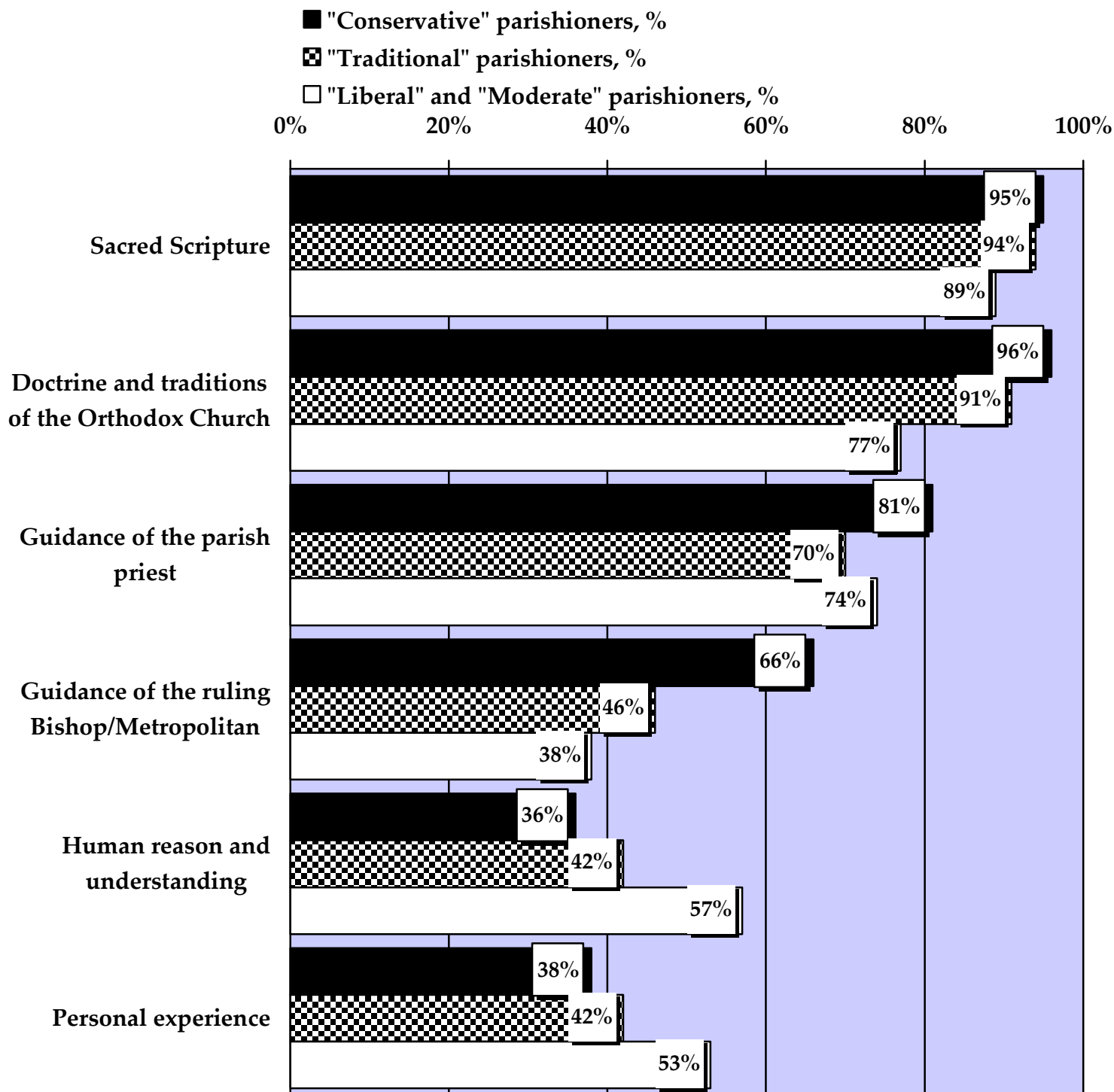
The authority of clergy – both priests and bishops – has greater importance for “conservative” parishioners, while significantly fewer of the “traditional,” “moderate” and “liberal” church members think that the authority “Guidance of the parish priest” and “Guidance of ruling Bishop/Metropolitan” is “fundamental.”

Finally and predictably, the sources of authority NOT associated with Church are much more important for the “moderate and “liberal” laity than for their “conservative” and “traditional” fellow parishioners. An absolute majority (53-57%) of “moderate-liberal” persons said that “Human reason and understanding” and “Personal experiences” are “fundamental” to them as the sources of authority, but only 36-42% of “conservative” and “traditional” respondents hold the same opinion.

**Fig. 83 Theological Stance of the Orthodox Laity and their Opinions about Importance of Various Sources of Authority.**

**“How Important to You Are the Following Sources of Authority?”**

**% of parishioners saying that the following sources of authority are  
FUNDAMENTAL to them:**



## **XII. Major Conclusions.**

The “Orthodox Church Today” was the first nationally representative survey-based study of American Orthodox laity – ordinary church members. Because of the pioneer character of this work, it had certain limitations which need to be acknowledged.

First, it was limited to only two Orthodox jurisdictions (denominations) – the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA) and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). At the same time, the GOA and the OCA combined account for more than half of all American Orthodox Christians and parishes. Therefore, to a significant degree the outcomes of the “Orthodox Church Today” study reflect the “profile” of the American Orthodox community at large.

Second, since this is the first time this type of study has been administered, we do not have longitudinal data. Therefore, at this point, we cannot document the persistency and consistency of the uncovered trends, patterns and phenomena. At the same time, we had abundant information from our earlier study of the American Orthodox clergy and some comparable data from the various studies of the members of the other American Christian Churches. In this report, we tried to blend all available data with the goal to get most comprehensive and accurate picture of American Orthodox laity at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We would like to conclude this study by the brief reiteration of the five major findings.

### **1. Orthodox Identity.**

We found that for most parishioners, “being Orthodox” is quite central and important part of their personal identities. That is, the American Orthodox laity may disagree on various church related matters and they are in fact deeply divided among themselves on certain issues, but they have a strong sense of their religious identity and clear preference for the Orthodox faith and church.

We saw, for example, that nine in ten of our respondents feel that they “cannot imagine being anything but Orthodox.” Similarly, for nine in ten parishioners, passing the Orthodox faith to their children and keeping them in the Orthodox Church is essential. It should also be noted that for an overwhelming majority of parishioners, “Christianity” essentially means “Orthodox Christianity.” Indeed, eight out of ten parishioners think that “there is one best and true interpretation of the meaning of the Christian faith and the Orthodox Church comes closest to teaching it.” Finally, when we compared GOA and OCA members with the US Roman Catholics, we found that in various measures American Orthodox Christians adhere stronger to their Church.

At the same time, the clarity of religious preferences of American Orthodox Christians does not lead them to feelings of religious exclusiveness or to the condemnation of other religions. Very few (7-8%) church members claim that the Orthodox Church has a “monopoly” for the path to salvation and that “only members of the Orthodox Church can be saved.” For the majority of parishioners, commonly accepted norms of morality and social behavior are more important than their personal religious beliefs and practices. The sense of “Orthodox distinctiveness” does not result in the social self-isolation of the American Orthodox community. More than three quarters of our respondents have either half or even a majority of their personal friends outside of the Orthodox Church.

The strong Orthodox identity does not mean that the ordinary people in the pews view their faith and religious obligations the way it is understood by the institutional Church. In other words, the “objective” Orthodox teachings, requirements and practices as described in various official Church documents may or may not be the same as the set of the “subjective” rules which laity hold for themselves in order to *feel* that one is a “good Orthodox Christian.” The reality is that most of Church members make personal choices among various norms of Church life, holding firmly to what they believe is central for their faith and approaching the rest as desirable but not really crucial. In brief, the personally held “creedal” beliefs in Jesus’ resurrection and Jesus’ actual presence in Eucharist are perceived by the Orthodox laity as the most fundamental criteria of being a “good Orthodox Christian.” To the contrary, the regular Church attendance, obeying the priest and observing Great Lent and fasting are seen by majority of parishioners as relatively non-essential for being a “good Orthodox Christian.”

## 2. Generational Differences

We paid particular attention to the differences in opinions and attitudes of the various generations of American Orthodox faithful. The major question was “Are there any *strong* and *consistent* lines of separation dividing generations of “grandparents” (those 65 years and older), “parents” (45-64 years old) and “children” (younger than 45)?” To a large extent, this crucial question was inspired by the numerous recent studies of the US Roman Catholics. It has become commonplace to acknowledge the gap and clear distinctions between pre-Vatican II Catholics (those born in 1940 or earlier), Vatican II Catholics (born 1940-1961) and post Vatican II Catholics (born after 1961). Most recent Catholic studies also divide the last category (post Vatican II Catholics) in two separate groups: generation “X” (born 1961-1980) and generation “Y” (born 1980 and later) (D’Antonio 2007, Hayes 2007). These generations of US Roman Catholics are clearly different in many important ways.



Further, in his influential book “Evolving Visions of Priesthood,” Dean Hoge pointed to a fact that the younger (post Vatican II generation) Roman Catholic priests are in many ways more conservative than the clergy who belong to Vatican II generation and that the attitudes of the younger Catholic priests resemble more those of their “grandparents” – the priests from pre-Vatican II Council generation. However, there is no such trend among US Roman Catholic laity. Hoge arrived to a conclusion that “young laity and young priests are moving in different directions” and that “in the future, the gap can be expected to widen” (Hoge 2003: 133).

Is this pattern true for American Orthodox Christianity? The general answer to this question is “No.” First, in our earlier study of American Orthodox clergy (Krindatch 2006), we found that the generational divides among American Orthodox clergy are *much less* pronounced and cover fewer subjects and areas of Church life than this is the case among US Roman Catholic clergy. Second, the data from the current study lead us to the same conclusion: the generational differences among American Orthodox laity occurred only on certain topics and issues.

For example, the generations of “children,” “parents” and “grandparents” agree on which areas of priestly work are more and which are less important, but they have somewhat different visions for clergy as being either promoter of changes and innovation or bearers of established traditions. Different age-groups also show various preferences for either “cultic” or “servant-leader” model of pastoral leadership. Similarly, generational differences are virtually non-existent on subjects related to “Religious ‘Particularism’ and Ecumenism,” but they are significant in the case of issues dealing with “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church.”

Finally and most importantly, the differences between “grandparents,” “parents” and “children” are not consistent. In some cases, the “children” seem to be more conservative in their attitudes and approaches than their “parents” and “grandparents,” while in other cases the pattern is opposite.

In summary, generational differences are present in American Orthodox community, but they cover only limited number of issues in Church life and are not consistent or strong enough in order to speak about “generational gaps” and “clear lines of separation” between generations of Orthodox faithful. However, we make this conclusion with one important reservation. Unfortunately, we did not have enough data to look specifically at the generation of “Millennials” also known as generation “Y” – young people in their early and mid 20s, born around or after 1980. At the same time, various anecdotal information, the focus-groups and in-depth interviews conducted in the local parishes suggest that the “grandchildren” can vary significantly from the generations of “children,” “parents” and “grandparents” in their sense of “being Orthodox,” in the way they understand Church rules and traditions, as well as in their social attitudes.

### **3. Problems Facing the Church.**

The Orthodox laity, both the members of GOA and OCA, feel that the main problems in the Church today are: “That parents don’t teach their children the faith the way they should,” “That youth and young adults are not as involved in the Church as much as they should be,” and “That parishioners no longer live up to the obligations involved in practicing the Orthodox faith.” In other words, parishioners are most seriously concerned with the question of the next generation of the Orthodox faithful in America (their proper religious upbringing by the parents and their actual involvement into Church life) and with the issue of religious commitment of current Church members.

It should be noted that in their opinions about major challenges facing the Church the American Orthodox Christians are not unique. The data from comparable studies of the Roman Catholic Church indicate that the same three problems are equally urgent for US Roman Catholics.

Our study also examined opinions of parishioners about most important issues that ought to be brought to a public forum and discussed openly in the Church. We found that there is a remarkable agreement between GOA and OCA members, between various generations of parishioners, between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, and between persons with more conservative or more liberal theological positions about two by far most urgent subjects for an open discussion in the Church: “Youth and young adults leaving the Church” and “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church.”

Three further subjects have been also identified by a significant proportion of Orthodox laity as being “very important” for an open Church discussion: “Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level,” “The issue of ‘ethnic’ versus ‘American’ parishes,” and “Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages.”

The anxiety of Church members to raise and to debate openly the issue of “youth leaving the Church” is consistent with their vision of the major problems facing the Church. The fact that “relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church” is also seen as very urgent question indicates that many American Orthodox Christians (despite the high proportion of them being American-born) struggle to reconcile the norms and rules of the Orthodox Church with the realities of the everyday life in mainstream American society.

The strong unanimity of laity on the two subjects which are most urgent for an open Church discussion (“Issue of youth and young adults leaving Orthodox Church” and “Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church”) gives a clear indication for the national Church leadership as to what requires particular attention, consideration and action.

#### **4. The “Shepherds” and the “Flock:” Laity’s Vision of the Orthodox Clergy.**

In this study, we asked Orthodox laypeople numerous questions about parish clergy in general and about their priests, in particular. The most important message is that American Orthodox priests enjoy a quite high level of popularity and confidence among their faithful. For instance, nine in ten parishioners feel that there is a good match between parish community and their priest. More than three quarters of our respondents would encourage their sons to become priests.

Further, it seems that Church members value the leadership qualities of the ordinary parish clergy higher than those of the Church hierarchs – the Bishops and Metropolitans. Indeed, 87% of parishioners believe that “on the whole parish priests do a good job,” but only 57% of them think that “Orthodox bishops in America strive to guide the Church wisely and competently.” When we asked parishioners about importance of the various sources of authority, three in four respondents said that “guidance of their parish priest” is “fundamental” to them as a source of authority, but less than half (49%) of parishioners said the same about their bishops.

We learned that “leading worship and administering sacraments” is seen by the laity as by far most important single area of clergy’ work. The other major duties of the parish priests from the perspective of parishioners include: “teaching parishioners about Orthodox doctrine and traditions,” “offering guidance and being spiritual role model,” and “visiting, helping and counseling parishioners.” On the contrary, such areas of pastoral work as “providing vision and goals for the parish future,” “administering the work of a parish,” “reaching out to non-Orthodox people,” and “training parishioners for various Church ministries” are seen by the people in the pews as secondary and relatively unimportant. In several ways, this “job description” of the American Orthodox clergy is different from what American Roman Catholics and Protestants think about major duties of their pastors.

We also tried to identify the preferences of the American Orthodox laity for either “cultic” or “servant-leader” model of priesthood and pastoral leadership. At this point, a strong majority of parishioners favor more “cultic” rather than “servant-leader” model.

More than three quarters of respondents view their parish clergy as “men set apart” and believe that ordination to the priesthood means an entirely new status which makes them different from the laity. No more than one-fourth of the Church members feel that this special distinct status of clergy is a hindrance in creating true Christian community. Also, a dominant majority of parishioners are willing to recognize the ultimate authority of their priests in a parish and think that “in the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish.”

However, this preference of the American Orthodox Christians for the “cultic” model of priesthood should not be overestimated. In reality, in a majority of parishes (53%) there is a balance between priest’s and laity input on decision making so that “priest inspires parishioners to act by themselves, but acts alone if he believes it is needed.” In almost one-third (32%) of parishes, the lay members are largely in charge of decision-making. And in only 15% of parishes the situation is opposite and “priest makes most of decisions, parishioners generally follow him.” When we looked at the data from the other studies, we found that proportions of Orthodox parishes where clergy either take full charge over life of a congregation or, to the contrary, cooperate closely with members are very similar to the US Protestant denominations and to the Roman Catholic Church.

Furthermore, the self-declared readiness of the people in the pews to obey their pastors should also not be overemphasized. Although three-quarters of parishioners said that guidance of their parish priests is “fundamental” to them as a source of authority, more than half of them also think that one still can be considered a “good Orthodox Christian” without obeying his or her parish priest.

Are the general attitudes and approaches of ordinary parishioners towards various norms and areas of Church life reflective those of their priests? The general answer to this crucial question is “Yes.” We found that the “shepherds” and their “flock” have similar vision for most subjects and questions related to the “Status of Priesthood,” “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church,” “Changes and Innovations in the Church,” and “Religious ‘Particularism’ and Ecumenism.”

However, there is one particular issue on which clergy and laity clearly disagree - the process of selection of the parish priests. Almost half (45%) of parishioners think that the Orthodox parishes should have the right to choose their priests by themselves, but less than one-quarter (22%) of parish clergy would favor this idea.

## 5. The Power of “Micro-theology.”

Not all Orthodox Christians are equally “Orthodox.” In fact, our study provided numerous evidences that the gaps between the “left” and the “right” wings in American Orthodoxy, and between “conservative-traditional” and “moderate-liberal” Church camps are very wide.

As Orthodox theologian Aristotle Papanikolau has pointed out, the inability to adapt to American cultural pluralism has led to an *increasing fragmentation* of American Orthodox Christian community. That is “within the Orthodox churches in America you have diverse interpretations and appropriations of the traditions that lead to diverse theologies that span the spectrum of the extremes of the so-called ‘Culture Wars’” (Papanikolau, 2008). The “Orthodox Church Today” study examined this thesis by looking at the theologically based divisions among church members. In order to do so, we used the concept of the *four types orthopraxy* proposed by Anton Vrame (Vrame 2008). These four types of religiously motivated behavior (“conservative,” “traditional,” “moderate” and “liberal”) are based on the *degree* of willingness of Orthodox individuals and communities to accept changes and innovations in the Church, and to adapt to life in a culturally and religiously pluralistic American society.

Four findings are of particular importance and provide good insight into question of “why” and “how” various Orthodox parishes organize their lives in the very distinct ways.

First, the relative majority (41%) of church members prefer to be in the safe “middle” and describe their personal theological position and general approach to church life as being “traditional.” Yet, quite sizeable factions of Orthodox laity identify themselves with either “conservative” (28%) or “moderate-liberal” (31%) Church camps. That is, the American Orthodox laity, the GOA and OCA members are deeply divided among themselves in their personal “micro-theologies.”

Second, the conservative-liberal “profile” of American Orthodox laity resembles that of their parish clergy. That is, the “shepherds” and their “flock,” the priests and their parishioners have fairly similar proportions of persons who think of themselves as being either “conservative,” or “traditional,” or “moderate-liberal.”

Third, there is *no* relationship between individual theological stance and general approach to Church life of American Orthodox Christians, on the one hand, and their age, religious upbringing, or “denominational culture,” on the other hand. That is, younger and older Church members, cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, GOA and OCA clergy and parishioners are equally likely to be found in either “liberal-moderate” or “traditional” or “conservative” Church camps.

Fourth, we found that the greatest differences in the approach of American Orthodox clergy and laity to the various aspects of Church life are based **not** on distinctions between various Orthodox jurisdictions (denominations), and not on variations between different age-groups, or between cradle-Orthodox Christians and converts to Orthodoxy, but on their individually chosen “micro-theological” stance. That is, the self-identification of the priests and parishioners as being either “liberal” or “moderate” or “traditional” or “conservative” serves as the strongest predictor for their attitudes towards wide range of issues related to “Status of Priesthood,” “Democracy and Pluralism in the Church,” “Changes and Innovations in the Church,” and “Religious ‘Particularism’ and Ecumenism.”

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