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Parish Needs Survey (part 2): the Needs of the Parishes

Abbreviations: GOA – Greek Orthodox Archdiocese; OCA – Orthodox Church in America; Ant – Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese; Serb – Serbian Orthodox Church of USA; Laity – all lay people surveyed; PCP – Parish Council President; ChD – Choir Director; SSC – Sunday School Coordinator.

Q# - refers to the corresponding question number in the survey instrument

IV. The Needs and Challenges:

What the Parishes Are Struggling with and What Type of Assistance They Seek

It was a major goal of the survey to better understand:

- the challenges and obstacles for the further growth and development of the Orthodox parishes in the western US;
- the areas of the church life where parishes need outside assistance.

We examined the differences in needs among parishes of various jurisdictions (GOA, OCA, Antiochian Archdiocese, Serbian Orthodox Church) and among parishes which belong to the various size-categories (under 100, 100-299, 300-499 and 500+ persons affiliated with the parish). We also explored the differences in perceptions of parish problems in case of clergy and parish lay leaders, and among people in various age categories. Finally, we were interested to investigate possible connections between various features of the parishes (discussed in the first part of the report) and different problems that the parishes are facing in daily life.

Answering the question, “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” the respondents have most frequently chosen three items as what their parish most urgently needs to assure a bright future: “more money,” “more youth involvement,” and “more prayer and reflection. (see below table)” They have been mentioned by more than one third of the respondents. Only 12-17% of respondents have reported “we are basically satisfied with this aspect and this is not an issue for our parish.”

On the other hand, a relative majority of our respondents (46-50%) are satisfied with and believe that there is no reason to worry about “more effective pastoral leadership” and about “more agreement and unity among parishioners.” Only 14-16% survey participants feel that these problems represent serious challenge for their parishes.

Four other possible areas of concern (“clearer vision of parish future,” “more effective lay leadership,” “more energy and enthusiastic people,” “more time available for church work”) fell between “most needed” and “basically satisfied with.”

Q4. What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow? (% on each row make up 100%)

Possible needs	This is especially urgent for us	This will be helpful	We are basically satisfied with this aspect and this is not an issue for our parish
More money	39	44	17
More youth involvement	36	52	12
More prayer and reflection	34	51	15
Clearer vision of parish future	25	42	33
More effective lay leadership	22	51	27
More energy and enthusiastic people	19	53	28
More time available for church work	18	72	10
More agreement and unity among parishioners	16	38	46
More effective pastoral leadership	14	36	50

Do all Orthodox jurisdictions equally perceive the need for “more money,” “more youth involvement,” and “more prayer and reflection” as their major problems?

Yes and no. “Yes,” because (with two exceptions) all participating jurisdictions place these challenges as three top-ranking problems in the case of all participating jurisdictions (see table below). One exception was the “Orthodox Church in America” which reports serious concern about the “clearer vision of parish future,” while worrying little about “more prayer and reflection.” The second exception was the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose parishes are struggling much more with the lack of effective lay leadership than the other jurisdictions.

“No,” for two reasons. First, because the need for “more money,” “more youth involvement,” and “more prayer and reflection” received different rank-orders in the parishes of four investigated jurisdictions. In the GOA parishes, the urgent need for “more money” has been mentioned most frequently (43%) being followed by “more prayer and reflection” (38%) and by “more youth involvement” (36%). In the parishes of OCA, the financial needs have been also reported most frequently as “especially urgent” (41%), but the second place is occupied by the issue of “more youth involvement” (35%) which is closely followed by the need for the “clearer vision of parish future” (29%). The parishes of Antiochian Archdiocese are especially concerned with the need for “more prayer and reflection” (mentioned by 35% of respondents), which is followed by “more youth involvement” (33%) and by “more money” (25%). Finally, the Serbian parishes are equally struggling

with the needs of “more youth involvement” and “more effective lay leadership” (reported by 42% respondents as “especially urgent”).

Second, there are obvious differences in frequencies of needs mentioned by various jurisdictions. Serbian Orthodox parishes tend to report “as especially urgent” virtually all possible needs more frequently than the other jurisdictions. On the other hand, the parishes of Antiochian Archdiocese seem to have lesser degree of concern with most of the problem areas than other jurisdictions.

The simple aggregate index of “exposure to various needs” (bottom line of the table below) is calculated as an arithmetic average (mean) from the proportions of the parishes reporting “this is especially urgent” in each of the nine areas of concern and for each participating jurisdiction. It shows how frequently – on average – the parishes of different jurisdictions tend express concern about “urgent problems” in various areas of church life. Hence, on an average and with regard to the nine investigated areas of concerns - there are more Serbian (31%) and Greek parishes (26%) saying “this or that need is especially urgent for us” in comparison with the OCA (21%) and Antiochian parishes (17%).

Q4. % of respondents who said that the needs below are “Especially urgent for us”: differences between jurisdictions

	All	GOA	OCA	Ant	Serb
More money	39	43	41	25	33
More youth involvement	36	36	35	33	42
More prayer and reflection	34	38	12	35	33
Clearer vision of parish future	25	28	29	5	33
More effective lay leadership	22	21	23	15	42
More energy and enthusiastic people	19	20	23	10	25
More time available for church work	18	18	12	20	25
More agreement and unity among parishioners	16	19	6	5	25
More effective pastoral leadership	14	15	6	10	25
Aggregate index of exposure to various needs (*)	25	26	21	17	31

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “especially urgent for us” from the nine areas of needs for each jurisdiction.

We have noticed that a relative majority of respondents believe that their parishes are mostly satisfied with “effective pastoral leadership” and “agreement and unity among parishioners.” This is quite consistent pattern for all participating jurisdictions: the parishes of all four participating jurisdictions selected these two items most frequently as “we are basically satisfied with this aspect and this is not an issue for our parish.” The only exception represents Serbian parishes which are more satisfied with the “vision of parish future” than with the condition of “agreement and unity among parishioners.”

The parishes are much less satisfied with the lay leadership than with the parish clergy. In all investigated jurisdictions only half as many respondents reported “we are basically satisfied” with “effectiveness of lay leadership” than with “effective pastoral leadership.”

Similarly to the aggregate index of “exposure to various needs,” one can calculate an “aggregate index of satisfaction” - that is an arithmetic average (mean) from the proportions of the parishes reporting “We are satisfied with this aspect and this is not an issue for our parish” in each of the nine potential areas of concern and for each participating jurisdiction. This index gives a general idea what is an average proportion of parishes in each participating jurisdiction that are not worried about nine investigated potential area of concern in church life. In other words, this criteria is useful for the general evaluation of which jurisdictions are more and which are less satisfied with their current situations.

The “aggregate index of satisfaction” calculated for every jurisdiction in the bottom line of the table confirms the earlier observation: the Serbian and Greek parishes are less satisfied (their indexes of satisfaction are 27% and 24%) with various areas of church life, while the parishes of OCA and Antiochian Archdiocese are more happy with their daily lives (indexes of satisfaction 31% and 34%).

Q4. % of respondents who said that the needs below are not urgent for their parishes because “We are basically satisfied with this aspect and this is not an issue for our parish” : differences between jurisdictions

	All	GOA	OCA	Ant	Serb
More effective pastoral leadership	50	41	65	60	75
More agreement and unity among parishioners	46	42	47	71	33
Clearer vision of parish future	33	26	41	50	42
More energy and enthusiastic people	28	26	35	45	8
More effective lay leadership	27	27	29	25	33
More money	17	17	12	15	25
More prayer and reflection	15	11	29	15	17
More youth involvement	12	13	6	22	0
More time available for church work	10	12	12	0	10
Aggregate index of satisfaction (*)	26	24	31	34	27

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “basically satisfied and not an issue for our parish” from the nine areas of needs for each jurisdiction.

One should note that clergy and parish lay leaders have very (!) similar views about “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” (see table below). True, there were significantly more lay respondents concerned with issue of effectiveness of lay leadership (21%) than there were clergy worried about “more effective pastoral leadership” (2%). Yet, this fact is easy to explain. In each surveyed parish there was only one senior priest who completed the questionnaire in comparison with three lay leaders. In other words, priests technically were asked to report if they are concerned with the effectiveness of their own work, while each of lay respondents could refer to and criticize a broader circle of people in the category of “lay leadership.”

Predictably, there were also more priests concerned with the need for “more prayer and reflection” (44% in comparison with 27% among laity) and more lay people who believe that issue of “more money” is “especially urgent” (45% in comparison with 30% among clergy).

But in an overall picture, priests and parish lay leaders have similar ideas about current weaknesses of their parishes.

Q4. % of respondents who said that the needs below are “Especially urgent for us”: clergy and laity

	All	Clergy	Laity
More money	39	30	45
More youth involvement	36	35	36
More prayer and reflection	34	44	27
Clearer vision of parish future	25	25	25
More effective lay leadership	22	24	21
More energy and enthusiastic people	19	20	19
More time available for church work	18	17	19
More agreement and unity among parishioners	16	18	14
More effective pastoral leadership	14	2	21
Aggregate index of “exposure to various problems” (*)	25	24	25

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “especially urgent for us” from the nine areas of needs for clergy and laity respondents.

In comparison to the small differences in “lay vs. clergy” perceptions, there are more disagreements between people in various age-groups (see table below). Only in two areas of potential needs, the “youngsters” (under 45), the “matures” (45-64), and the “seniors” have demonstrated similar attitudes.

All age categories are worried about having “more money.” To the contrary, the issue of “more agreement and unity among parishioners” does not attract much attention.

As for differences, in each age-category there is a distinct rank-order of what is perceived as more versus less urgent. The “youngsters” (under 45) are focused on the issues of “money” (46% believe this is “especially urgent for us”) and “youth involvement” (28%) and “effective lay leadership” (27%). For the “matures” (45-64) the problem of “youth involvement” apparently is the most important one (43% think that this is “especially urgent for us”) being followed by “more prayer and reflection” (39%) and by “more money” (35%). As for “seniors” (65+), the problem of “more money” attracts their attention in particular (42% reported that this is “especially urgent for us”). The second ranking problem bothering senior parishioners is a “clearer vision of parish future” (39%), which is followed by the need for “more prayer and reflection” (32%).

Predictably, “seniors” have little worry about the need of “more time available for church work” (only 10% think that this is especially urgent), while the working “youngsters” and “matures” are more likely to report the urgent need for “more time available for the church work” (22% and 19% respectively).

As for “youngsters,” they pay less attention to the need for “more prayer and reflection” than both “matures” and “seniors.” What deserves more exploration is the fact that this is the “seniors” who seriously worried about “clearer vision of the parish future” (39% among 65+, in comparison with 22% among 45-64 years old, and 20% among people under 45).

Examining needs for “more effective pastoral leadership” and “more effective lay leadership,” in order to avoid biases we separated the answers of clergy (asking them about effectiveness of lay leadership) and laity (asking them about effectiveness of pastoral leadership). One can see then, older lay respondents are more concerned with the effectiveness of pastoral leadership. Almost one third of “seniors” believe that the problem of “more effective pastoral leadership” is “especially urgent for us” in comparison with only 24% among “matures” and only 5% among “youngsters.”

Q4. % of respondents who said that the needs below are “Especially urgent for us”: differences in perceptions between generations

	All	Under 45	45-64	65 and older
More money	39	46	35	42
More youth involvement	36	28	43	30
More prayer and reflection	34	25	39	32
Clearer vision of parish future	25	20	22	39
More effective lay leadership: clergy’s responses only	24	25	36	0
More effective lay leadership: lay responses only	21	28	16	26
More effective pastoral leadership: lay respondents only	21	6	24	32
More effective pastoral leadership: clergy’s responses only	2	5	0	0
More energy and enthusiastic people	19	16	19	23
More time available for church work	18	22	19	10
More agreement and unity among parishioners	16	16	14	19
Aggregate index of exposure to various problems (*)	25	23	25	26

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “especially urgent for us” from the nine areas of needs for each age-category.

Is there anything special about needs of the parishes of various sizes? The answer is “yes,” and, especially when one compares the smallest parishes with less than 100 persons affiliated and the largest church communities which number more than 500 persons.

The data in two tables below show that the smallest parishes are significantly more worried about “more money,” “more time available for church work,” and “more energy and enthusiastic people.” This is easy to

explain: in comparison to the larger churches, the smallest parishes struggle with their limited financial and demographic potentials. At the same time, the smallest parishes are more satisfied than the other churches with “agreement and unity among parishioners” and with “effectiveness of lay leadership.” The need for “having more prayer and reflection” is also not perceived as urgent in the smallest churches.

As for the largest (500+ persons affiliated) churches, they are exposed to the problems of “agreement and unity among parishioners” and of “effectiveness of lay leadership.” It is also the largest churches where there is a strong feeling of need for “more prayer and reflection.” At the same time, the biggest parishes are less worried than the other churches with the issues of having “more energy and enthusiastic people,” “more money,” “more time available for church work,” and “more youth involvement.”

The aggregate index of “exposure to the various problems” calculated for the parishes in each size category (similarly to how it was done in the case of different jurisdictions), shows that in an overall picture the smaller parishes tend to be more exposed to the various needs challenging their chances to strengthen and to grow.

Q4. % of respondents who said that the needs below are “Especially urgent for us”: differences between parishes of the various sizes

Total number of persons in a parish (including children and non-regular, occasional attendees)	All	Under 100	100 - 299	300 – 499	500 +
More money	39	62	33	41	36
More youth involvement	36	40	39	50	24
More prayer and reflection	34	19	43	26	37
Clearer vision of parish future	25	27	27	33	19
More effective lay leadership	22	31	23	7	28
More energy and enthusiastic people	19	31	23	18	10
More time available for church work	18	33	23	11	10
More agreement and unity among parishioners	16	6	15	15	23
More effective pastoral leadership	14	19	11	27	8
Aggregate index of “exposure to various problems” (*)	25	30	26	25	22

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “especially urgent for us” from the nine areas of needs for the parishes in each size-category.

Q4. % of respondents who said that the needs below are not urgent for their parishes because “We are basically satisfied with this aspect and this is not an issue for our parish”: differences between parishes of the various sizes

Total number of persons in a parish (including children and non-regular, occasional attendees)	ALL	Under 100	100 - 299	300 – 499	500 +
More effective pastoral leadership	50	44	56	50	47
More agreement and unity among parishioners	46	62	52	48	33
Clearer vision of parish future	33	40	33	33	32
More energy and enthusiastic people	28	25	24	26	36
More effective lay leadership	27	50	28	26	20
More money	17	12	15	7	28
More time available for church work	10	20	8	7	13
More prayer and reflection	15	31	15	11	10
More youth involvement	12	13	12	13	13

Are there any relationship between various features which describe the parishes “quite well,” “somewhat,” or “slightly/not at all” (see the first part of the report) and the nine examined areas of concerns?

In order to respond to this question we have used simple cross-tabulations and other statistical measures (Spearman and Kendall coefficients) of correlation. In the table below, each “X” on the intersection of any row and column means that there is a statistically significant **negative correlation** (e.g. inverse relationship) between various self-definitions and nine areas of potential concern. For example, an “X” at the intersection of row #1 and column #1 indicates that parishes which say that the statement “our parish is like a close knit family” describes them “quite well,” tend to have fewer problems with having “a clearer vision of parish future.” Vice versa, the parishes which reported that the statement “our parish is like a close knit family” describes them “slightly or not at all” have much greater chances of struggling with having “a clearer vision of the parish future.”

Statistically significant relations between nine areas of potential concerns in church life and parish various self-definitions.

	1. VisFut	2. Agrm	3. LayLdr	4. PstLdr	5. EnrEnt	6. Money	7. Time	8. Prayer	9. Youth
1. Our parish is like a close-knit family	"X"	"X"	"X"	"X"					
2. Our parish is active and alive	"X"	"X"	"X"	"X"	"X"				"X"
3. Our parish is working for social justice			"X"		"X"		"X"	"X"	
4. Our parish is trying to increase its social ethnic and cultural diversity	"X"								
5. Local community is well informed about activities in our parish	"X"		"X"		"X"				
6. Our parish welcomes changes and new ways of doing worship					"X"				
7. Our parish has a strong Greek/Slavic/Middle Eastern/Serbian heritage that we are trying to preserve									
8. New people are easily incorporated into the life of our parish	"X"	"X"		"X"	"X"			"X"	
9. We have various well organized social programs and activities	"X"	"X"	"X"		"X"		"X"	"X"	"X"
10. We do not have problem finding people to volunteer work in the parish				"X"	"X"		"X"	"X"	

Areas of concerns in church life: "What is most needed for a parish to strengthen and to grow?"

1. Clearer vision of parish future
2. More agreement and unity among parishioners
3. More effective lay leadership
4. More effective pastoral leadership
5. More energy and enthusiastic people
6. More money
7. More time available for church work
8. More prayer and reflection
9. More youth involvement

Several observations deserve particular attention.

First, there is only one area of potential concerns which is entirely unrelated to how parishes describe themselves: the need for "more money." Put differently, the parishes which feel like close-knit families and those which don't, the parishes which feel "active and alive" and those which don't, the parishes which are working for social justice and those which aren't, etc. can equally struggle seriously with the need for "more money" or, to the contrary, feel financially comfortable.

Second, various self-definitions serve as predictors for different number of the areas of potential concerns. For example, the fact of having (or not having) "various well organized programs and activities" is related to seven out of nine areas of potential concern. The statement "our parish is active and alive" has an impact on six out of nine areas of potential concern. There is only one statement that has no correlation with any of nine areas of potential concern: "Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve." In other words, both

“ethnically based” and “All-American” parishes have equal chances to be exposed to any of nine areas of potential concerns.

We also examined possible relations between nine areas of concern and relative “modernism” or “conservatism” of various parishes using the answers on the question “In general, how would you describe your parish’s approaches to church life in comparison with “typical” Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian Orthodox parishes?” (see part one of the report). No correlation has been found between answers on this question and any of nine areas of potential concern. In other words (and similarly to the case of being “ethnically based” or “All-American” parish), both relatively “modern” and relatively “conservative” Orthodox parishes have equal chances to struggle with any of nine areas of potential concerns.

“To what extent does your parish need assistance in each of the following areas?” was one of the key questions in our survey. In comparison with the previous question - “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” - this question is a more straightforward one. It gives a better picture of what clergy and lay leaders from various jurisdictions would actually “pick and choose” for their parishes if they will be given such an opportunity.

The respondents were provided with the list of fifteen possible areas of needed assistance and could choose between the answers that they needed assistance “to a great extent,” “to some extent,” and “to a very small extent.”

The top five most frequently chosen areas in which parishes need assistance to a great extent were: “evangelism and outreach into wider local community,” “theological education of adult parish members,” “financial assistance,” “enhancing group specific ministries (programs for senior citizens, family counseling, etc.), and “leadership development for laity.” The general distribution of responses is in a chart below.

Q9. To what extent does your parish need assistance in each of the following areas? (% on each row make up 100%)

Areas of needed assistance	To a great extent	To some extent	To a very small extent
Evangelism and outreach into wider local community	42	43	15
Theological education of the adult parish members	36	46	18
Financial assistance	35	33	32
Enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.	34	47	19
Leadership development for laity	33	56	11
Working with youth	29	57	14
Developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan	25	47	28
Mission and mission interpretation	24	52	24
Enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality.	23	48	29
Leadership development for clergy	20	49	31
Ecumenical involvement with other Christian churches	19	45	36
Information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level	17	57	26
Dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership	17	38	45
Conflict resolution within the parish	16	32	52
Dealing with changes in parish life	16	51	34

The data in this table are consistent with the answers to the question discussed earlier: “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” As noticed, among frequently chosen areas of “to a great extent” needed assistance were “financial assistance” (chosen by 35% respondents), and “working with youth” (29%). They correspond with two major areas of potential concerns: “more money,” and “more youth involvement.”

Another frequently chosen area of assistance needed “to a great extent” was “theological education of the adult parish members” (selected by 36% respondents). Further analysis indicated also that there is a very strong correlation between respondents who selected this item and those who said earlier that “more prayer and reflection” is “especially urgent” for our parish in order to strengthen and to grow.

At the same time, a smaller proportion (23%) of respondents said that their parishes needed assistance “to a great extent” in “enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality.” The combination of these two facts suggests that the general aspiration for “more prayer and reflection” means first of all a strong feeling that worship should be more meaningful for the parishioners (which could be achieved through the theological education of the parish members) rather than desire to change/improve the actual patterns of liturgical life in a parish.

Predictably, a strong correlation has been found between respondents who reported that “more effective lay leadership” is “especially urgent” for their parishes in order to strengthen and to grow and the respondents who have selected “leadership development for laity” as an area in which parish needs an assistance “to a great extent.” However, numerically there were much more respondents who indicated that “leadership development for laity” is an area in which their parish needs assistance “to a great extent” (33%) than the proportion of those who believed that “more effective lay leadership” is especially urgent for a parish in order to strengthen and to grow (22%). Hence, it seems that the actual need to improve the lay leadership in the parishes is even greater than appeared originally.

Perhaps, the most important finding from the question “To what extent does your parish need assistance in each of the following areas?” is the fact that “Evangelism and outreach into wider local community” has been chosen by 42% of respondents as the area in which parish needs an assistance “to a great extent.” This is the highest proportion in comparison with all other items on the list of possible areas of needed assistance.

Are Orthodox parishes seriously concerned with the goal to achieve more visibility in their local communities? Do they consider more proactive work in the American mission field as one of their top priorities? Do they feel the lack of social connection with the mainstream of American society and American religious life? More research is needed to answer accurately these questions. At this point, the survey tells us simply that there is a significant request for assistance with “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” on the part of the Orthodox parishes.

Data from the other parts of the survey allow us to ascertain the other typical characteristics of the parishes that look for help in the area of evangelization and outreach.

First, these are more likely the churches which describe themselves as “more modern, allowing for more differences in interpreting Church teaching” in comparison with the typical parishes in their respective jurisdictions. 56% of respondents who defined their parishes as “more modern” have indicated that “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” is an area in which their parish needs assistance “to a great extent.” At the same time, only 43% of respondents from the parishes which are “typical, similar to other” and only 37% of persons from more “traditional, stricter in interpreting Church teaching” parishes did so. This is an important finding, because - so far – no relations have been found between the position of a parish with regard to the issue of “modernism – traditionalism” and any other characteristic of the parish life.

Second, the parishes with a higher demand for assistance in area of “evangelism and outreach” are more likely to be churches which say that the statements “new people are easy incorporated into the life of our parish” and the “local community is well informed about activities in our parish” describe them **“slightly or not at all.”** Moreover, the statistically measured correlation is quite strong. It seem, that these parishes – either deliberately or instinctively – are eager to overcome their drawbacks caused by the fact that they have problems integrating new members and becoming better integrated themselves into the local communities.

Finally, with regard to the nine examined areas of potential concern, the request for assistance in the sphere of evangelization and outreach is more frequently expressed by the parishes which also reported that “clearer vision of parish future” and “more prayer and reflection” are “especially urgent for us” in order to strengthen and to grow.

Four items are on the opposite end of “low priorities” for assistance: only 16-17% respondents have chosen “conflict resolution within the parish,” “information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level,” “dealing with changes in parish life,” and “dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership” as the areas where their parishes need help “to a great extent.”

Small concern with the “conflict resolution within the parish” corresponds with the earlier finding that parishes do not consider the need for greater “agreement and unity among parishioners” to be crucial for their strengthening and growth.

The remaining three items on the list of low priorities for assistance are “information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level,” “dealing with changes in parish life,” “dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership.” They provoke a number of questions which require more research to be answered.

Do parishes have enough comprehensive information about what is going on in their jurisdictions on the national level and in the national/diocesan headquarters? Or, are they simply not concerned with this matter being entirely focused on their internal problems and local issues?

Do parishes manage changes in their lives reasonably well? Or, are parishes generally oblivious to these changes? Or are there not many changes at all to deal with?

Do parishes find ways to integrate new members of various cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds? Or is there not much diversity in membership to think about?

Do parishes manage to handle changes in the church life and do they find ways to integrate new members of various cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds? Or, are there not many changes to deal with and not much diversity in the membership to think about?

Are four Orthodox jurisdictions participating in the survey similar in choosing the areas in which they seek assistance “to a great extent?” The chart below shows the data for the parishes of GOA, OCA, Antiochian Archdiocese and Serbian Orthodox Church. We have also calculated for each jurisdiction an “aggregate index of needed assistance” – that is an arithmetic average (mean) from the proportions of the respondents reporting “our parish needs assistance to a great extent” in each of the fifteen possible areas of assistance and for each participating jurisdiction. The “aggregate index of needed assistance” gives an idea about how frequently the parishes from various jurisdictions tend to say that they need assistance in various areas of church life.

Q9. % of respondents who said that their parishes need “to a great extent” assistance in the following areas: differences between jurisdictions

	All	GOA	OCA	Ant	Serb
Evangelism and outreach into wider local community	42	44	41	24	58
Theological education of the adult parish members	36	43	6	19	64
Financial assistance	35	38	35	19	42
Enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.	34	42	12	14	42
Leadership development for laity	33	41	6	14	42
Working with youths	29	30	29	21	42
Developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan	25	26	12	14	58
Mission and mission interpretation	24	29	6	14	33
Enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality.	23	29	6	5	33
Leadership development for clergy	20	24	12	9	25
Ecumenical involvement with other Christian churches	19	24	12	5	17
Information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level	17	19	6	10	25
Dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership	17	21	6	0	33
Conflict resolution within the parish	16	18	23	5	8
Dealing with changes in parish life	16	16	23	5	25
Aggregate index of needed assistance (*)	26	30	16	12	36

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “need assistance to a great extent” from the fifteen areas of needed assistance and for each jurisdiction.

Remarkably, the “great need” for assistance in the area of “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” came as a top priority and it has been expressed most frequently in all jurisdictions with the exception of Serbian Orthodox Church (where it is second ranking area of needed assistance).

Similarly, the great need for assistance in the sphere of “theological education of the adult parish members” has also been among those most frequently expressed in all jurisdictions with the exception of OCA (ranking # 1 in Serbian, #2 – in Greek, and #3 – in Antiochian parishes).

Hence, all major American Orthodox Churches seem to be focused on and seek help in dealing with “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” and with “theological education of the adult parish members.”

Besides these two most universal items, there are also obvious jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction distinctions.

The GOA parishes seek help first of all in the areas of:

- enhancing group specific ministries (programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.);
- leadership development for laity;
- financial assistance.

The OCA parishes seek help first of all in the areas of:

- financial assistance;
- working with youth;
- conflict resolution within parish;
- dealing with changes in parish life.

The Antiochian parishes seek help first of all in the areas of:

- working with youth;
- financial assistance.

The Serbian Orthodox parishes seek help first of all in the areas of:

- developing and implementing vision/strategic plan;
- enhancing group specific ministries;
- working with youths;
- leadership development for laity.

Finally, the aggregate indices of needed assistance also vary significantly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Generally, these variations are consistent with the aggregate indices of exposure to various problems discussed earlier. It is the parishes of Serbian Orthodox Church and of GOA (which demonstrated high indices of

exposure to various problems) where the aggregate indices of needed assistance are especially high: 36% and 30% respectively. On the other hand, in the OCA and especially Antiochian parishes the aggregate indices of needed assistance are much lower: 16% and 12% respectively.

Does this mean that, for instance, the parishes of OCA are doing twice as well as GOA parishes? Probably not. But the differences in the aggregate indices of needed assistance tell us that the Serbian and Greek parishes FEEL a much stronger need for help in various areas of the church life than Antiochian or OCA parishes.

In comparison with their similar responses to the question “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?”, clergy and laity demonstrate certain differences in opinions about the spheres of parish life in which help is needed “to a great extent.”

Q9. % of respondents who said that their parishes need “to a great extent” assistance in the following areas: clergy and laity responses

	All	Clergy	Laity
Evangelism and outreach into wider local community	42	46	39
Theological education of the adult parish members	36	48	29
Financial assistance	35	26	41
Enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.	34	41	29
Leadership development for laity	33	43	27
Working with youths	29	31	28
Developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan	25	24	26
Mission and mission interpretation	24	24	24
Enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality.	23	17	27
Leadership development for clergy	20	19	21
Ecumenical involvement with other Christian churches	19	13	22
Information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level	17	19	15
Dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership	17	15	19
Conflict resolution within the parish	16	21	13
Dealing with changes in parish life	16	9	20
Aggregate index of needed assistance (*)	26	26	25

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “need assistance to a great extent” from the fifteen areas of needed assistance for clergy and laity.

Almost half of clergy (48%) feel great need for assistance in “theological education of the adult parish members” in comparison with only 29% among parish lay leaders. This fact conveys two messages. First, it tells that clergy believe that their parishioners do not have an adequate knowledge of Orthodox Christianity.

Second, it means also that many parish priests do not feel themselves capable of providing or of organizing theological education of their parishioners.

The other serious concern on the part of the clergy is “leadership development for laity.” 43% of parish priests feel a strong need for help in this matter (third ranking priority) in comparison with only 27% in case of lay respondents.

The item “leadership development for clergy” also deserves attention. In comparison with the “leadership development for laity,” there were much fewer clergy (19%) and lay respondents (21%) who believe that parish needs assistance in this sphere “to a great extent.” However, it also means that almost one fifth of parish priests believe that they themselves have serious problems with the leadership skills and need urgently help in this area.

As for lay leaders, 41% of them reported that “financial assistance” is the area in which parishes need assistance first and foremost. In this regard, clergy seem either to have more optimistic views on, or they have little involvement in the parish finances. The “financial assistance” has only sixth ranking priority among areas of needed assistance in responses of parish priests (mentioned by 29% respondents).

The item on which clergy and laity agree and which came as a second ranking area of needed assistance in priests and laity responses was “evangelism and outreach into wider local community.” 46% of clergy and 39% of laity reported “great need” for assistance in this sphere.

Besides “evangelism and outreach into wider local community,” both parish priests and lay leaders feel that “enhancing group specific ministries” (fourth ranking priority) and “working with youths” (fifth ranking priority) are the areas in which assistance is especially needed.

Similar to many questions in the survey, the differences in opinion about the areas of needed assistance among various age-groups (see table below) seem to be stronger than the differences between laity and clergy. In most cases, the generation-to-generation distinctions correspond with the answers on the previous question – “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” – provided by the respondents younger than 45, 45-64, and older than 64.

Q9. % of respondents who said that their parishes need “to a great extent” assistance in the following areas: generation differences in perceptions.

	All	Under 45	45-64	65 and older
Leadership development for laity: clergy’s responses only	43	35	54	33
Evangelism and outreach into wider local community	42	40	45	34
Theological education of the adult parish members	36	27	41	37
Financial assistance	35	35	35	37
Enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.	34	27	33	42
Working with youths	29	23	32	31
Leadership development for laity: laity’s responses only	26	22	28	26
Developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan	25	16	27	31
Mission and mission interpretation	24	16	32	16
Enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality.	23	8	30	23
Leadership development for clergy: laity’s responses only	22	6	26	28
Leadership development for clergy: clergy’s responses only	19	15	23	18
Ecumenical involvement with other Christian churches	19	19	17	23
Information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level	17	17	14	23
Dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership	17	6	27	10
Conflict resolution within the parish	16	22	14	13
Dealing with changes in parish life	16	5	21	16
Aggregate index of needed assistance (*)	26	20	28	26

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “need assistance to a great extent” from the fifteen areas of needed assistance for each age-category.

To begin with, the “youngsters” generally feel less of a need for outside assistance (aggregate index of needed assistance 20%) than the “matures” (28%) or the “seniors” (26%). Two issues – “evangelism and outreach into the wider local community” and “financial assistance” – are two major areas in which parishes need assistance “to a great extent” from the perspective of respondents younger than 45. In addition, more than one third of “youngsters” clergy (35%) are seriously concerned with the “leadership development for laity.”

Similar to “youngsters,” the “matures” are worried about “evangelism and outreach into wider local community.” 45% of them feel that their parishes need a great deal of assistance in this area. Also similarly to “youngsters clergy,” a significant proportion of “mature” priests (54%) feel strong need for help in “leadership development for laity.” However, a distinct feature of the “matures” is their concern with “theological education of the adult parish members.” 41% of respondents in the age of 45-64 reported that their parishes need assistance in this area “to great extent” – a proportion which is higher in comparison with both “youngsters” and “seniors.”

The respondents older than 65 are worried about “financial assistance” (35%) and about “theological education of the parish adult members” (35%). What makes “seniors” very distinct from the two other groups is the fact that “enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.” is perceived as the most urgent issue. 42% of “seniors” reported great need for assistance in this sphere (27% of “youngsters” and 33% of “matures”). Also while among “youngsters” and among “matures” the “evangelism and outreach” and “leadership development for clergy” attracted most of the attention, these items represent a relatively low priority in the case of the respondents older than 65.

One more age-related pattern needs to be mentioned. The older respondents are, the stronger they feel need for assistance in “developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan” (16% among “youngsters,” 27% among “matures,” 31% among “seniors”). This pattern confirms an earlier observation: the “seniors” is the age-category with a strong feeling that “clearer vision of parish future” is an especially urgent issue for a parish in order to strengthen and to grow.

The size of the membership has direct impact on many aspects of parish life. No wonder, the respondents from the churches in the various size-categories answered differently the question about areas where parishes need assistance “to a great extent” (see table below).

Q9. % of respondents who said that their parishes need “to a great extent” assistance in the following areas: differences between parishes of the various sizes

Total number of persons in a parish (including children and non-regular, occasional attendees)	All	Under 100	100 - 299	300 - 499	500 +
Evangelism and outreach into wider local community	42	41	39	48	41
Theological education of the adult parish members	36	20	26	59	44
Financial assistance	35	44	31	37	37
Enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.	34	25	26	46	36
Leadership development for laity	33	19	22	33	51
Working with youth	29	27	29	38	22
Developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan	25	29	30	26	20
Mission and mission interpretation	24	19	17	37	28
Enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality.	23	31	17	30	24
Leadership development for clergy	20	31	15	22	24
Ecumenical involvement with other Christian churches	19	12	17	27	18
Information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level	17	12	15	18	20
Dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership	17	6	13	15	28
Conflict resolution within the parish	16	12	13	11	18
Dealing with changes in parish life	16	25	13	11	18
Aggregate index of needed assistance (*)	26	24	22	31	29

(*) – calculated as an arithmetic average of the “need assistance to a great extent” from the fifteen areas of needed assistance for parish size category.

First, one can conclude from the aggregate index of needed assistance that larger parishes (300-499, 500+ persons affiliated) tend to request assistance generally more frequently than the smaller ones.

Second, the areas of needed assistance are different in the case of the smaller and larger churches.

In smaller parishes, “financial assistance” and “evangelism and outreach into the wider local community” represent two major areas of concerns. Among other frequently mentioned areas of needed help are: “developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan,” “leadership development for clergy” (for the smallest parishes of less than 100 persons affiliated), “enhancing worship, preaching, spirituality” (also for the smallest parishes), and working with the “youth” (for the smaller mid-size parishes of 100-299 persons affiliated).

As far as larger (300-499, 500+ persons affiliated) parishes go, they are also focused on the problem of “evangelism and outreach into the wider local community.” However, larger churches are less concerned with “financial assistance,” but express more frequently a need for help in “theological education of the adult parish members” and in “enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.”

Finally, it is only the largest churches of 500+ persons affiliated, where the “leadership development for laity” appears to be a major problem. 51% of respondents from these parishes reported that they need help to a great extent in “leadership development for laity” in comparison with 33% in case of parishes with 300-499 persons, 22% in case of parishes with 100-299 persons and only 19% in case of parishes with less than 100 persons.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- In responses to the question **“WHAT IS MOST NEEDED FOR YOUR PARISH TO STRENGTHEN AND TO GROW?”** the three most frequently chosen answers were: “more money,” “more youth involvement,” and “more prayer and reflection.” Further, these needs have been mentioned among top-ranking problems by all Orthodox jurisdictions participating in the survey.
- On the opposite end, a relative majority of respondents are satisfied with and believe that there is no reason to worry about “more effective pastoral leadership” and about “more agreement and unity among parishioners.” This pattern is also quite consistent for all jurisdictions participating in the survey.

- **In various Orthodox jurisdictions various needs have different priorities by the degree of urgency. In GOA parishes, the top two concerns are “more money” and “more prayer and reflection.” In OCA parishes – “more money” and “more youth involvement.” In parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese – “more prayer and reflection” and “more youth involvement.” In Serbian Orthodox parishes – “more youth involvement” and “more effective lay leadership.”**
- **Parishes of all Orthodox jurisdictions are much less satisfied with the lay leadership than with the parish clergy. In all investigated jurisdictions only half as many respondents reported “we are basically satisfied” with “effectiveness of lay leadership” than this was in the case of question about “effective pastoral leadership.”**
- **The parishes of some jurisdictions generally tend to complain about various “urgent needs” more frequently than those of others. The average proportion of parishes reporting “this or that need is especially urgent for us” are higher in the cases of Serbian Orthodox Church and GOA and lower among OCA and Antiochian parishes.**
- **We have constructed an “aggregate index of satisfaction.” It shows an average proportion of parishes which are satisfied and not worried about various potential area of concern in a church life. The finding was that Serbian and Greek parishes are less and the parishes of OCA and Antiochian Archdiocese are more satisfied with their current situations.**
- **Orthodox clergy and parish lay leaders expressed similar views about “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow (although priests are more concerned with the need for “more prayer and reflection,” while lay people with “more money”).**
- **People in various age-groups have different opinions on what is “especially urgent” for a parish in order “to strengthen and to grow.” The “youngsters” (under 45) are particularly concerned with the need for “more money” and “more youth involvement.” The “matures” (45-64) are worried about “more youth involvement” and “more prayer and reflection.” The “seniors” (65+) are focused on “more money” and “clearer vision of parish future.” Also in comparison with “youngsters” and “matures,” there are many more “seniors” who feel that the problem of “more effective pastoral leadership” is “especially urgent for us.”**
- **The size of a parish has a strong influence on what is perceived as an “especially urgent need.” The smallest parishes (under 100 persons) are concerned with needs for “more money,” “more time available for church work,” and “more energy and enthusiastic people.” The largest (500+ persons affiliated) parishes are more susceptible to the problems of “agreement and unity among parishioners” and of “effectiveness of the lay leadership.” It is also the largest churches where there is a strong need for “more prayer and reflection.”**

- In an overall picture the smaller parishes tend to be more frequently exposed to the various needs challenging their chances to strengthen and to grow than the bigger ones.
- There is **NO RELATION** between the statement “Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve” and any of the investigated areas of potential concerns in the life of a parish. **Both** “ethnically based” and “All-American” parishes have equal chances to be affected by any of the areas of potential concern that were investigated. Put differently, whether a parish perceives itself as “ethnic” or as “All American” is not a determining factor in selecting particular areas of concern.
- Similarly, there is **NO CONNECTION** between answers on the question “In general, how would you describe your parish’s approaches to church life in comparison with “typical” Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian Orthodox parishes?” and any of areas of potential concerns that were investigated. Both relatively “modern/liberal” and relatively “traditional/conservative” parishes have equal chances to struggle with any of areas of potential concerns.
- Responding to the question “**TO WHAT EXTENT DOES YOUR PARISH NEED ASSISTANCE IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?**” the respondents were give fifteen possible answers reflecting fifteen various areas of needed assistance. The five most frequently chosen areas in which parishes need assistance to a great extent were: “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” (42% of respondents), “theological education of the adult parish members” (36%), “financial assistance” (35%), “enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior citizen, family counseling, etc.” (34%), and “leadership development for laity” (33%).
- On the opposite end, the areas of least likely requested assistance are: “conflict resolution within the parish,” “information and communication about various issues in the other Greek/OCA/Antiochian/Serbian parishes on the national level,” “dealing with changes in parish life,” and “dealing with increasing diversity in parish membership.”
- The “great need” for assistance in the area of “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” came as a top priority in all Orthodox jurisdictions with the exception of the Serbian Orthodox Church (where it is second ranking area of needed assistance after “theological education of the adult parish members”).
- The parishes that report a “great need” for assistance in “evangelism and outreach into wider local community” are more likely those which also describe themselves as “more modern, allowing for more differences in interpreting Church teaching” and those reporting that “clearer vision of parish future” and “more prayer and reflection” are “especially urgent for us” in order to strengthen and to grow.

- The general aspiration for “more prayer and reflection” means first of all a strong feeling that worship should be more meaningful for the parishioners (which can be achieved through the better “theological education of the adult parish members) rather than a desire to change/improve the actual patterns of liturgical life in a parish.
- We have calculated an “aggregate index of needed assistance” which shows how frequently in general the parishes from various jurisdictions tend to say that they need assistance in various areas of church life. In the parishes of Serbian Orthodox Church and GOA the need for assistance is more than twice likely expressed (aggregate indexes of needed assistance 36% and 30% respectively) than in the case of OCA and Antiochian parishes (16% and 12% respectively).
- Each participating jurisdiction has particular combination of the areas of needed assistance. Greek parishes are concerned with “enhancing group specific ministries,” and “leadership development for laity.” OCA churches requests “financial assistance” and help in “working with youth,” and in “conflict resolution within parish.” Parishes of Antiochian Archdiocese seek help in “working with youths” and also ask for “financial assistance.” “Developing and implementing vision/strategic plan” came very high on the list of the areas of needed assistance in Serbian Orthodox parishes being followed by “enhancing group specific ministries.”
- Clergy and parish lay leaders are different in their choice of one single area where assistance is MOST NEEDED. 41% of lay leaders believed that “financial assistance” is the area in which parishes need assistance first and foremost. Almost half of clergy (48%) feel great need for assistance in “Theological education of the adult parish members” Does this mean that so many parish priests do not feel themselves capable of providing theological education for their parishioners?
- However, clergy and lay leaders agree on urgency of issue “evangelism and outreach into wider community” which is the second frequently chosen area of needed assistance both among priests and laity.
- 19% of priests have chosen “leadership development for clergy” as an area in which their parishes need assistance to a “great extent.” Does this mean that almost one fifth of parish clergy have serious problems in leading their parishes and need an urgent help in development leadership skills?
- People in various age groups have different views on the areas where assistance for a parish is most needed.
- “Youngsters” (under 45) generally express the feeling of a need for assistance less frequent than the “matures” (45-64) and “seniors” (65+). “Evangelism and outreach into the wider local

community” and “financial assistance” – are areas in which parishes need assistance “to a great extent” from the perspective of respondents younger than 45.

- **Similar to “youngsters,” 45% of “matures” are worried about “evangelism and outreach into wider local community.” However, “matures” are distinct in their particular concern with “theological education of the adult parish members.” 41% of them reported that their parishes need assistance in this area “to great extent” – a proportion which is higher in comparison with both “youngsters” and “seniors.”**
- **“Seniors” are distinct from “youngsters” and “matures” by the fact that “enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.” is perceived among them as the most urgent issue where assistance is most needed. While among “youngsters” and among “matures” the “evangelism and outreach” attracted most of the attention, this represents a relatively low priority in the case of the respondents older than 65.**
- **The older respondents are, the stronger they feel need for assistance in “developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan.”**
- **In small parishes, the “financial assistance,” “evangelism and outreach into the wider local community,” and “developing and implementing a vision/strategic plan” represent major areas of concerns where assistance is most frequently needed.**
- **The large parishes are also focused on the problem of “evangelism and outreach into the wider local community.” However, they are less concerned with “financial assistance,” but express frequently a need for help in “theological education of the adult parish members” and in “enhancing group specific ministries: programs for senior members, family counseling, etc.” In the largest churches (500+ persons affiliated) the “leadership development for laity” appears to be a major problem.**