

# Fast Questions and Fast Answers about Being an Orthodox Parish Priest in America

By Alexei Krindatch ([akrindatch@aol.com](mailto:akrindatch@aol.com), [www.orthodoxreality.org](http://www.orthodoxreality.org))

National Coordinator, Second Census of Orthodox Christian Churches (2020 US Religion Census)

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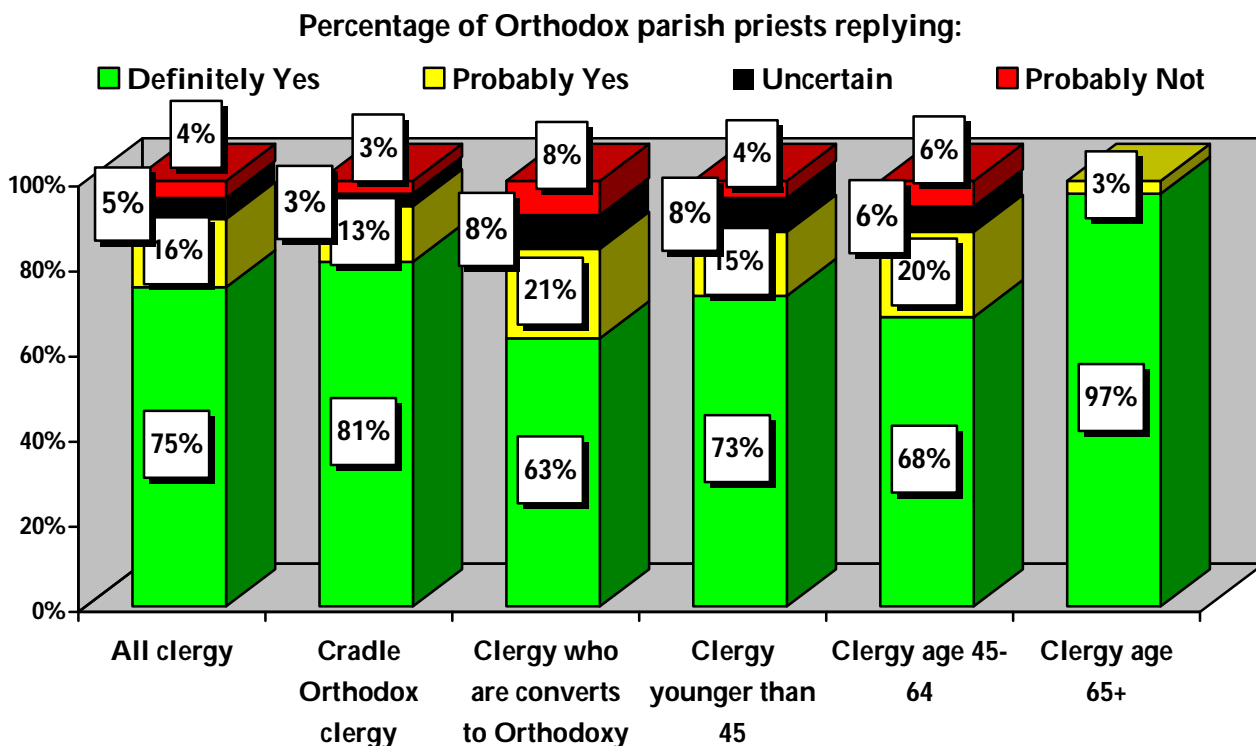
**Question 1. What are the major sources of information used in this report?**

Most of the facts discussed on the following pages came from the 2007 national study, [“Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America,”](#) in which 441 American Orthodox parish clergy participated.<sup>1</sup> The full report can be viewed and downloaded [HERE](#).

**Question 2. Overall, are American Orthodox parish clergy satisfied with their vocational life choices OR do they regret their decisions to become a priest?**

The short answer to this question is: a vast majority of American Orthodox parish clergy would enter the priesthood again if they were to make their choices anew. Answering the question, “If you had your choice again, would you enter the priesthood?” three quarters of the priests participating in “Evolving Visions of Orthodox Priesthood in America” study answered “definitely yes” and 16% replied “probably yes.” Only 4% of clergy responded “probably not.” See Fig. 1.

**Fig. 1 “If you had your choice again, would you enter the priesthood?”**

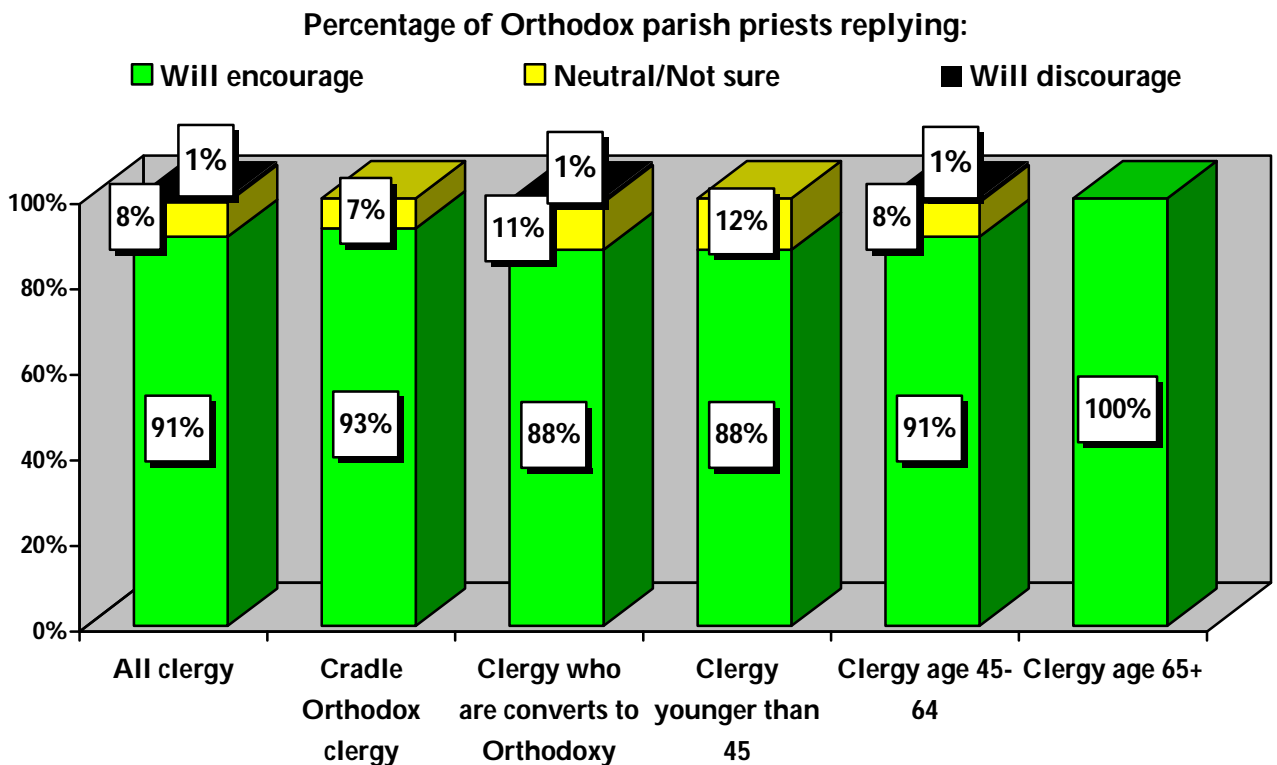


<sup>1</sup> Krindatch A. 2007. *Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America*. Berkeley, California: Patriarch Athenagoras Institute. Full report available at: <http://orthodoxreality.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EvolvingVisionsFullReport.pdf>

Fig. 1 shows that feelings about the priestly vocation differ slightly between cradle Orthodox and convert clergy, and among priests in various age categories. Overall, both older (over 65 years) and cradle Orthodox priests are more convinced that they made the right choice to be a clergyman. In contrast, a higher percentage of younger priests and convert clergy are somewhat less sure of their decisions to have been ordained: answering the question, “If you had your choice again, would you enter the priesthood?” they were more likely say “probably yes” or “uncertain” instead of “definitely yes.” Yet the message from Fig. 1 is clear: only a tiny proportion of the clergy regret their life choices to become priests.

Further, Fig. 2 shows that nine out of ten priests would encourage young men who are considering priesthood as their vocation. Only 1% of the clergy would discourage such a life choice made by a young person. Again, older (over 65 years) and cradle Orthodox priests feel more enthusiastic about urging young men to enter the priesthood, while younger and convert clergy are slightly more likely to answer “Neutral/Not sure” when responding to the question, “Would you rather encourage or rather discourage young men who are considering the priesthood as their vocation?” Despite these slight variations, however, no more than 1% of priests in any demographic category would discourage young men considering priesthood as their vocation.

**Fig. 2 “Would you rather encourage or rather discourage young men who are considering priesthood as their vocation?”**



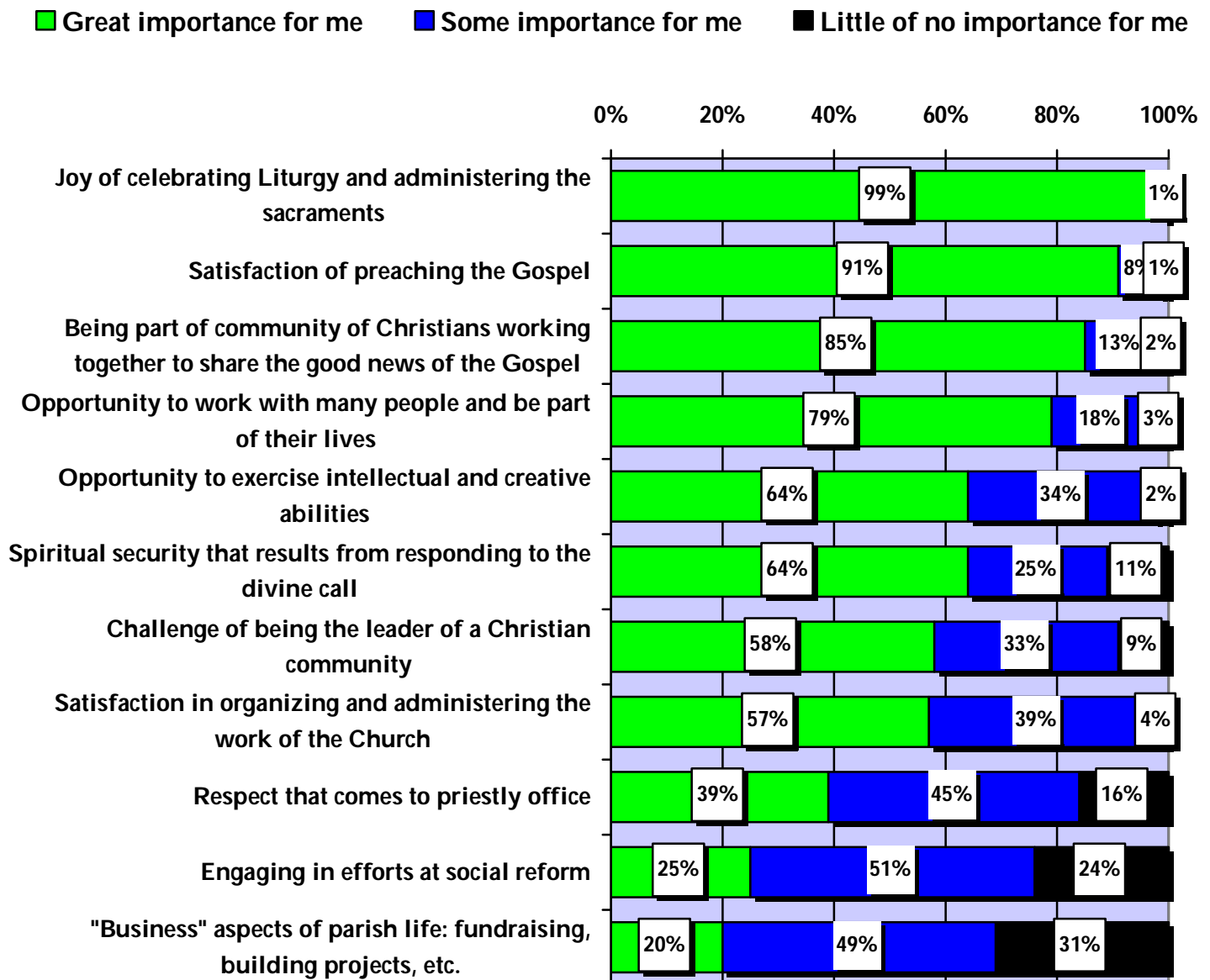
**Question 3. What do Orthodox priests most cherish in their ministerial work? What are the major sources of their professional satisfaction?**

The study, "Evolving Visions of Orthodox Priesthood in America," asked the question: "There are many sources of satisfaction and joy in the life and work of a priest. Please indicate how important each of the following is as a source of satisfaction to you." The clergy were given 11 aspects of pastoral work to consider and they could assess each of these aspects as "great importance for me," "some importance for me," and "little or no importance for me." See Fig. 3.

**Fig. 3 Importance of Various Sources of Satisfaction in the Work of an Orthodox Priest**

**"There are many sources of satisfaction and joy in the life and work of a priest. Please indicate how important each of the following is as a source of satisfaction to you."**

% of clergy replying



The four top choices of what is a “very important” source of satisfaction for Orthodox priests in America are: “Joy of celebrating the Liturgy and administering the Sacraments” (selected by 99% clergy as “very important” source of satisfaction), “Satisfaction of preaching the Gospel” (91%), “Being part of a community of Christians who are working together to share the good news of the Gospel” (85%), and “Opportunity to work with many people and be a part of their lives” (79%).

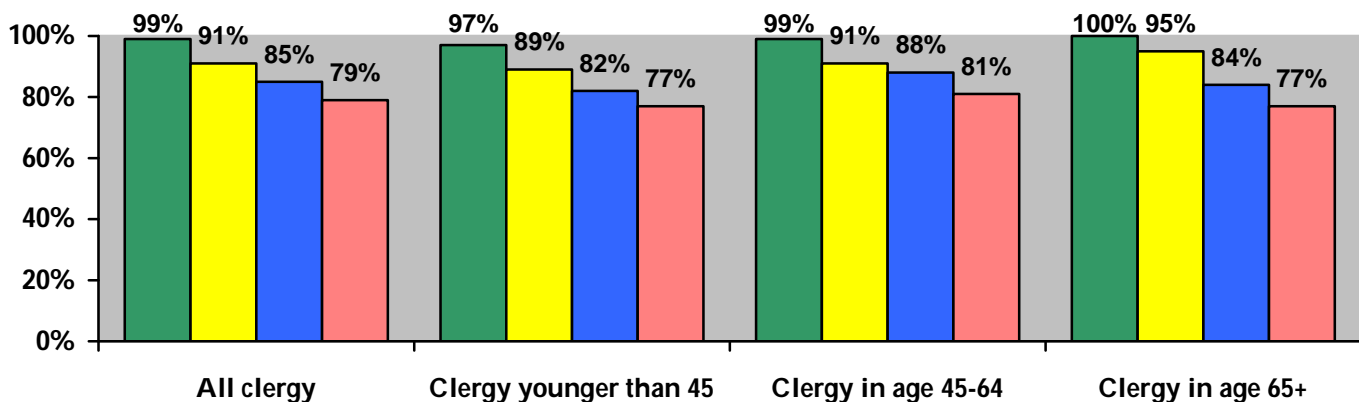
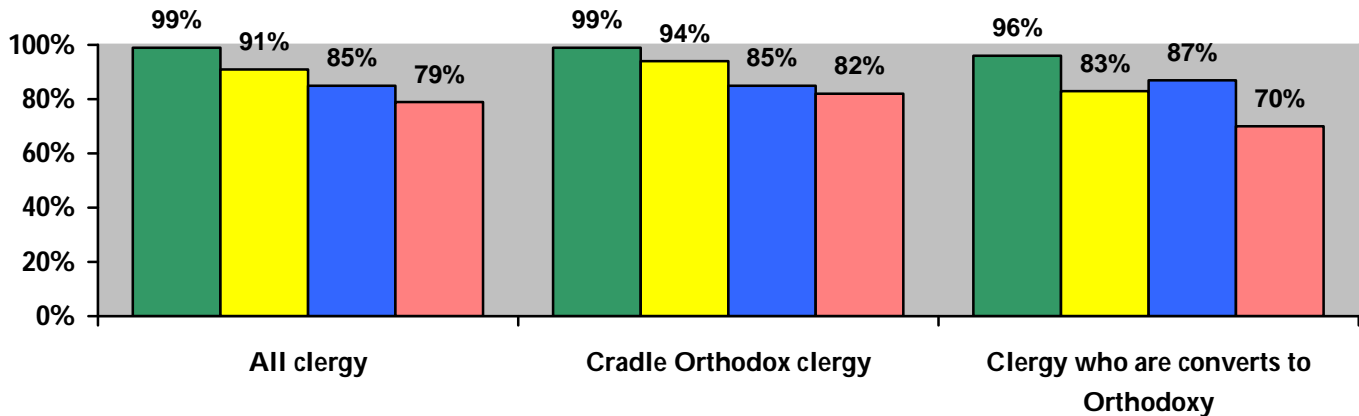
It should be noted that cradle Orthodox and convert clergy, and priests in various age categories all agree on the same four top choices of what is very important for them as sources of satisfaction in ministerial work. See Fig. 4.

**Fig. 4 Four Most Important Sources of Satisfaction in the Work of American Orthodox Clergy:**

**“There are many sources of satisfaction and joy in the life and work of a priest. Please indicate how important each of the following is as a source of satisfaction to you.”**

**% of clergy who reported that the following is “very important” for them as source of satisfaction**

- Celebrating Liturgy and administering sacraments
- Preaching Gospel
- Being part of community of Christians working together to share good news of Gospel
- Opportunity to work with many people and be part of their lives



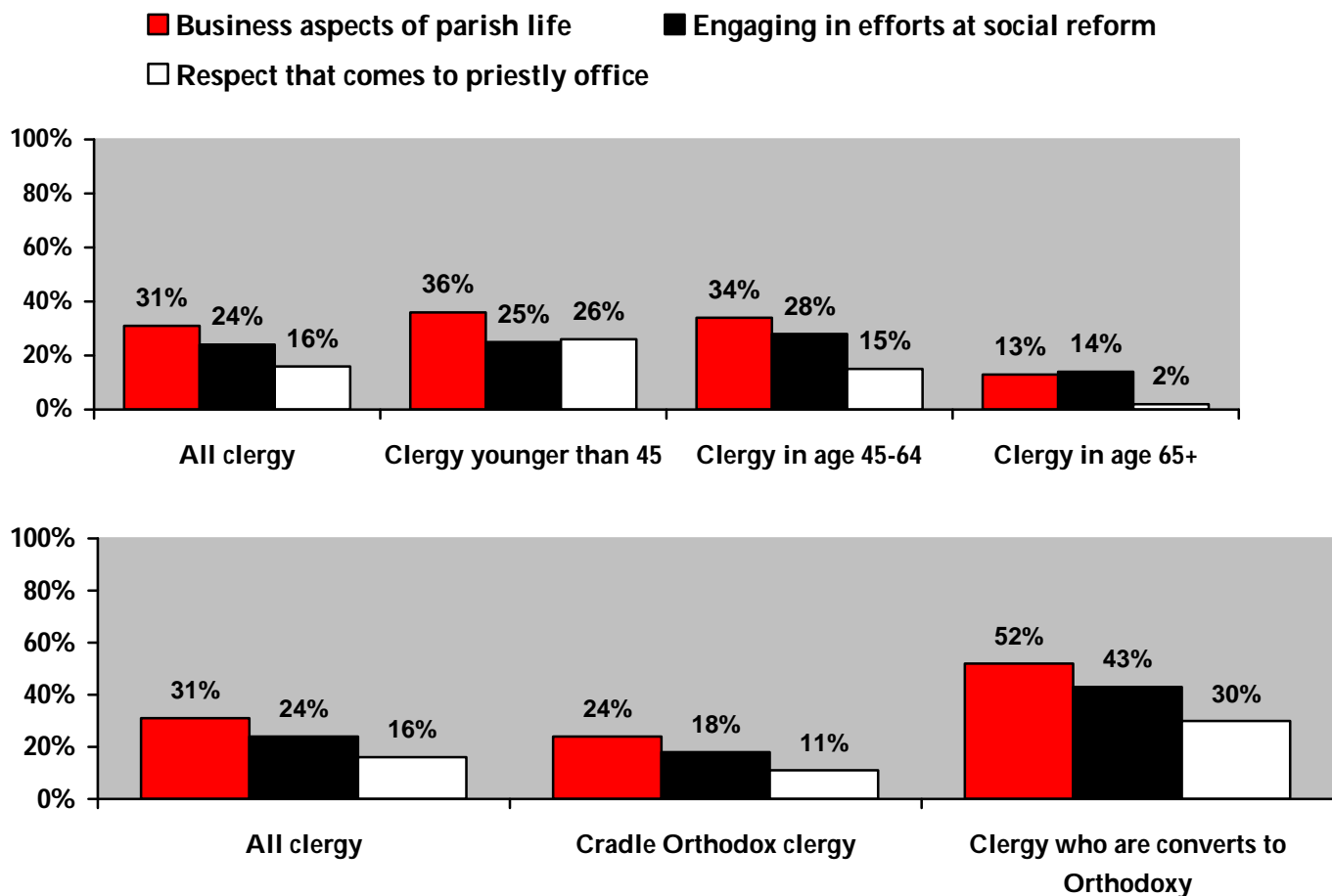
Further, these same four choices not only scored the highest percentages of “very important” responses, but they were also ranked in the same order by all categories of clergy with only one small exception: the convert clergy ranked “Being part of a community of Christians who are working together to share the good news of the Gospel” higher than “Satisfaction of preaching the Gospel.”

Furthermore, the cradle Orthodox clergy, the clergy who are converts to Orthodoxy, and priests in various age categories all also held the same opinions about what the **least** significant sources of satisfaction were in their work. : “Business aspects of parish life: fundraising, building projects, etc.” (31% of priests reported “little or no importance” as a source of satisfaction), “Engaging in efforts at social reform” (24%), and “Respect that comes to the priestly office” (16%). See Fig. 5.

**Fig. 5 Three Least Important Sources of Satisfaction in the Work of American Orthodox Clergy:**

**“There are many sources of satisfaction and joy in the life and work of a priest. Please, indicate how important each of the following is as a source of satisfaction to you.”**

**% of clergy who reported that the following is “little or not important” for them as source of satisfaction**



The fact that “Respect that comes to the priestly office” is among the three least satisfying aspects of pastoral work raises an important further question: does this fact tell us that for 16% of priests the issue of social respect is simply not important or does this mean that 16% of priests feel that no respect is actually paid today to the work of a priest? More research is needed to address this challenging question.

One additional observation can be made from Fig. 5, raising an additional question. The three least important sources of satisfaction are the same for cradle Orthodox and convert clergy. At the same time, compared to cradle Orthodox priests, convert clergy seem to be especially skeptical about “business aspects of parish life,” “engaging in efforts at social reform” and “respect that comes to priestly office” as being sources of satisfaction in their priestly vocation. Indeed, a much higher percentage of convert than cradle Orthodox clergy labeled these three sources of satisfaction as “little or not important” to them. Why is this so? At this point we have no data to answer this question.

***Question 4. What are the major challenges of being an Orthodox parish priest in America? What are the difficulties and problems that Orthodox clergy face?***

It was noted in Question 2 that a vast majority of Orthodox clergy - both younger and older priests, and both cradle Orthodox and convert clergy – feel that they made a right life choice to enter priesthood. Nevertheless, from practical experience we know that every parish has some difficulties, and it is the parish priests who must constantly face these challenges.

In the study, “Evolving Vision of Orthodox Priesthood in America,” the clergy were asked: “There are many problems which priests face today. Please indicate how important the following problems are to YOU on a day-to-day basis.” Priests were given 25 possible problems to consider, with the response options: “great problem to me,” “somewhat of a problem to me,” or “little or no problem to me.” Table 1 on the next page shows the percentages of clergy – all clergy combined and separate for cradle Orthodox and convert clergy – who selected the answer “great problem to me” with regard to each possible problem.

Of all possible problems, one was chosen ***by far most frequently***: by the clergy as “great problem to me”: more than one third (37%) of priests reported that “Providing financially for my family” is a great problem for them.

Six further challenges were selected as a “great problem to me” by more than one-fifth of the clergy:

- ❖ Apathy among parishioners (selected by 25% of clergy)
- ❖ Inadequate administrative support: secretaries, Sunday school teachers, etc. (24%)

- ❖ Too much work (23%)
- ❖ The way authority is exercised in the Church (23%)
- ❖ Balancing time and priorities between parish life and my personal family life (23%)
- ❖ Uncertainty about the future of the Church in America (21%)

**Table 1** “There are many problems which priests face today. Please indicate how important the following problems are to YOU on a day-to-day basis.”

**% of cradle Orthodox and convert clergy who said that the following represent a  
“GREAT PROBLEM TO ME.”**

	<b>All clergy</b>	<b>Cradle Orthodox clergy</b>	<b>Clergy converts to Orthodoxy</b>
<b>Providing financially for my family</b>	37	35	42
<b>Apathy among parishioners</b>	25	25	23
<b>Inadequate administrative support: secretaries, Sunday school teachers, candidates for parish board/Council, etc.</b>	24	22	28
<b>Too much work</b>	23	24	22
<b>The way authority is exercised in the Church</b>	24	23	25
<b>Balancing time and priorities between parish life and my personal and/or family life</b>	23	23	21
<b>Uncertainty about the future of the Church in America</b>	21	23	17
<b>Unrealistic expectations and demands of parishioners</b>	15	16	13
<b>Lack of opportunity for personal fulfillment and development</b>	14	14	16
<b>For married priests only: Raising children in the “fishbowl” of parish life</b>	14	14	16
<b>Difficulty of really reaching people today</b>	13	12	17
<b>Social isolation, loneliness of priestly life</b>	12	11	13
<b>Inadequate liturgical support: chanters, choir, altar boys, etc.</b>	11	11	11
<b>Change in the concept of priesthood in modern society</b>	9	10	7
<b>Relationships with the lay leadership of the parish</b>	9	8	10
<b>Disagreements with parishioners about life of the parish</b>	9	9	12
<b>Relationship with the diocesan bishop</b>	9	8	10
<b>Challenges of working with youth</b>	6	6	8
<b>Lack of foreign language skills</b>	6	5	11
<b>Relevance of the work that priests do</b>	6	6	5
<b>Lack of a clear idea what a priest is</b>	4	3	4
<b>Being expected to represent the church teachings and policies that I have difficulty with</b>	4	4	3
<b>Absence of challenge in priestly work</b>	4	3	4
<b>Challenges of working with converts to Orthodoxy</b>	3	3	1
<b>Difficulty in sharing authority</b>	2	2	2

Table 1 shows that there is not much difference between cradle Orthodox and convert clergy in terms of the major problems and challenges that they face. For both categories, the top seven problems listed above are the



same and their rank order is almost the same. The only noticeable (albeit not very strong) differences are that somewhat more convert than cradle Orthodox clergy feel that “providing financially for family” and “inadequate administrative support” are “great problem to me,” while somewhat more cradle Orthodox than converts priests are seriously concerned with “uncertainty about the future of the Church in America.”

Table 2 shows that various generations of priests perceive and assess seven top challenges and difficulties somewhat differently.

**Table 2** “There are many problems which priests face today. Please indicate how important the following problems are to YOU on a day-to-day basis.”

% of clergy in various age categories who reported that the following represent a  
“GREAT PROBLEM TO ME.”

	Clergy younger than 45	Clergy in age 45-64	Clergy in age 65+
Providing financially for my family	41	41	20
Apathy among parishioners	29	25	19
Inadequate administrative support: secretaries, Sunday school teachers, candidates for parish board/Council, etc.	25	26	16
Too much work	29	23	17
The way authority is exercised in the Church	17	26	26
Balancing time and priorities between parish life and my personal and/or family life	35	21	5
Uncertainty about the future of the Church in America	18	21	26
Unrealistic expectations and demands of parishioners	16	17	11
Lack of opportunity for personal fulfillment and development	15	17	7
For married priests only: Raising children in the “fishbowl” of parish life	15	15	12
Difficulty of really reaching people today	12	14	12
Social isolation, loneliness of priestly life	15	13	6
Inadequate liturgical support: chanters, choir, altar boys, etc.	12	12	5
Change in the concept of priesthood in modern society	7	9	12
Relationships with the lay leadership of the parish	7	9	12
Disagreements with parishioners about life of the parish	11	8	11
Relationship with the diocesan bishop	6	10	8
Challenges of working with youth	4	6	8
Lack of foreign language skills	7	6	5
Relevance of the work that priests do	6	6	5
Lack of a clear idea what a priest is	5	3	5
Being expected to represent the church teachings and policies that I have difficulty with	3	4	5
Absence of challenge in priestly work	3	4	4
Challenges of working with converts to Orthodoxy	3	3	1
Difficulty in sharing authority	2	1	4

First, the younger clergy (under 45) are more exposed than the middle-aged (45-64) and, especially, older (65+) priests to the problems of “too much work” and “balancing time and priorities between parish life and personal and/or family life.” This is understandable. The younger priests are in the earlier stages of their pastoral careers, they have less experience than their older fellow clergy, they are more likely to have families with young children (hence, more parenting demands) and, therefore, may feel overwhelmed with the demands of parish work.

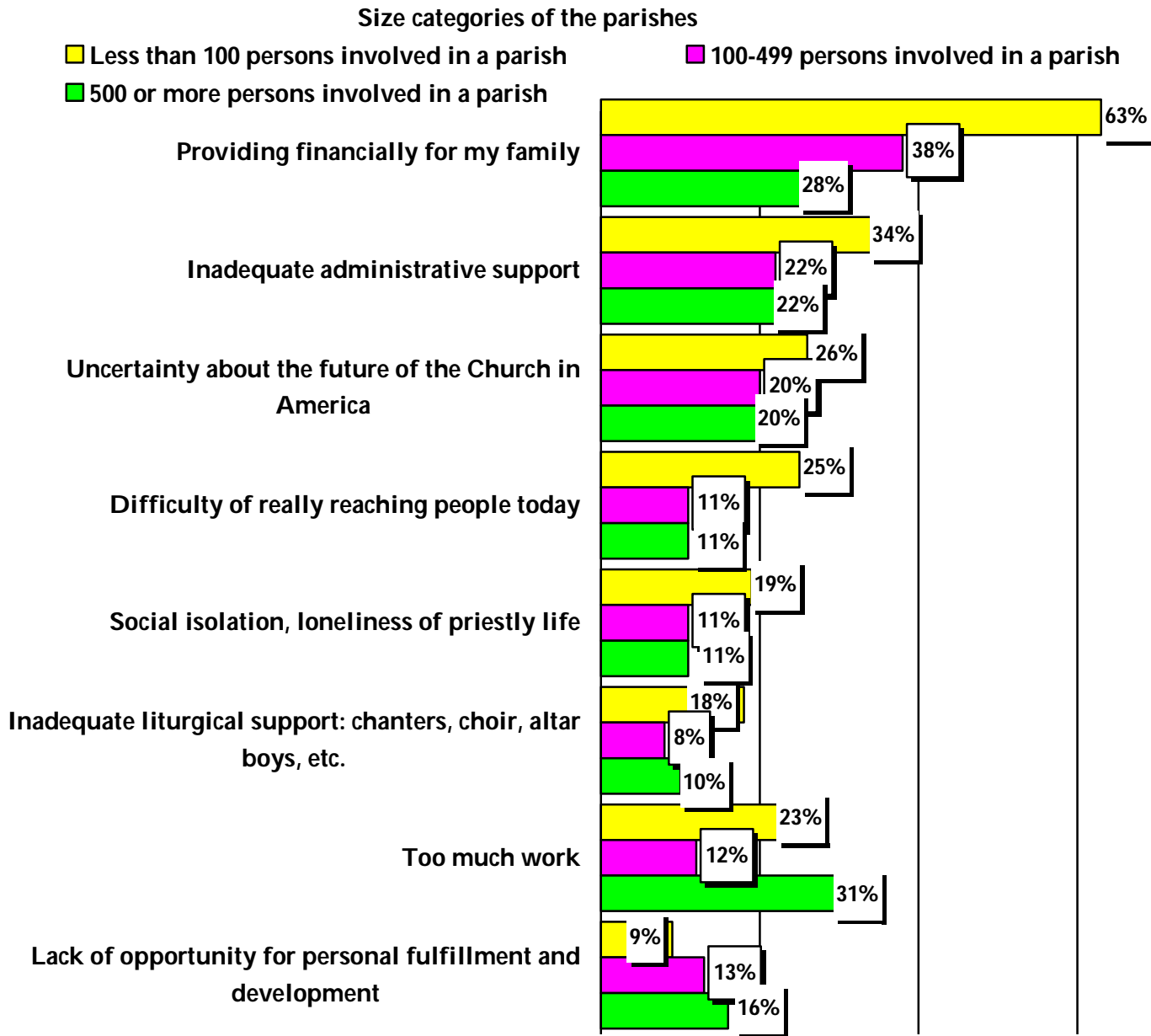
Second, in the overall picture, older clergy seem to be less sensitive to and less affected by most of the top problems and challenges than their younger and middle-aged counterparts. Again, this is understandable. The senior priests have more experience in pastoral work and feel better equipped to manage problems and challenges. They are also much less affected by the problem of “providing financially for my family” which is, again, easy to explain. Indeed, one can surmise that older clergy are more likely “empty nesters” (hence, fewer financial demands) and also more likely to earn higher salaries because of their seniority.

An additional and interesting observation is that older clergy are more concerned than middle-aged and younger priests with the “uncertainty about the future of Church in America.” Why is this so? Because their years of ministerial service tell them that the Church may be in decline? Unfortunately, the survey does not provide the answer to this important question.

Finally, it should be noted that the size of a parish also affects how clergy assess various challenges in their pastoral work. To summarize, more clergymen serving in smaller parishes feel that “providing financially for my family,” “inadequate administrative support,” “inadequate liturgical support,” “social isolation, loneliness of priestly life,” and “difficulty of really reaching people today” are “great problems to me.” In contrast, more priests ministering to large parish communities said that “too much work” and “lack of opportunity for personal fulfillment and development” are “a great problem” to them. See Fig. 6 on the next page.

**Fig. 6** “There are many problems which priests face today. Please indicate how important the following problems are to YOU on a day-to-day basis.”

% of clergy in the parishes of various size categories<sup>2</sup> who reported that the following represent a “GREAT PROBLEM TO ME.”

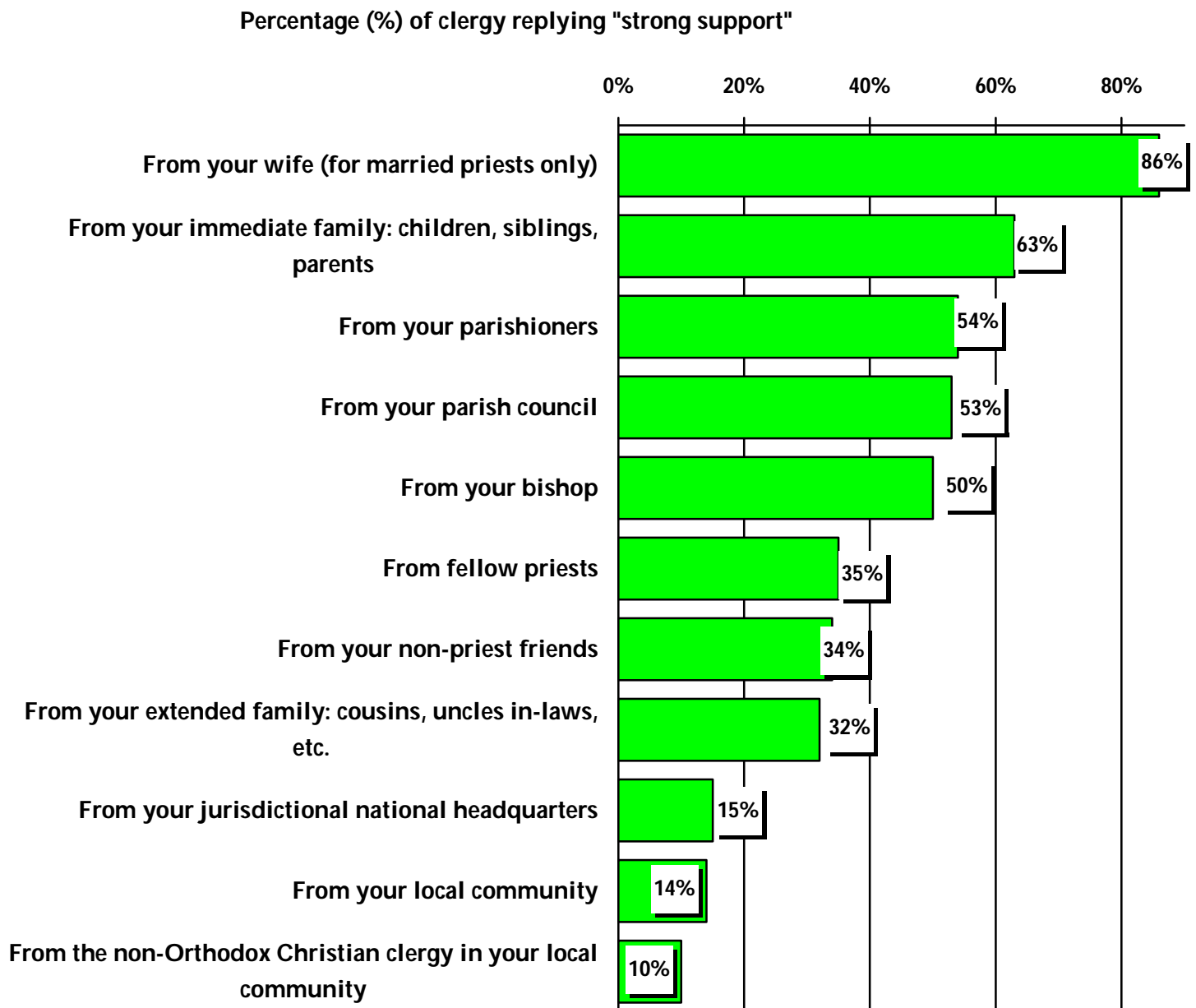


<sup>2</sup> The size categories of the parishes were calculated based on clergy answers to the question “Approximately how many persons total would you say are associated in any way with the life of your parish: counting both adults and children, both regular and occasional attendees?”

**Question 5. What are the major sources of support in the lives of American Orthodox clergy?**

One way or another, all parish priests need some personal support in their daily work – support which could help them to feel more confident in performing a multiplicity of parish duties. In the study, “Evolving Visions of Orthodox Priesthood in America,” the clergy were asked: “In your priestly ministry, how much support do you experience from each of the following?” Priests were given 11 possible sources of support for their consideration and asked to rate these sources in importance as “strong support,” “some support,” and “little or no support.” Fig. 7 shows the percentage of clergy who replied that they experience “strong support” from each of 11 sources.

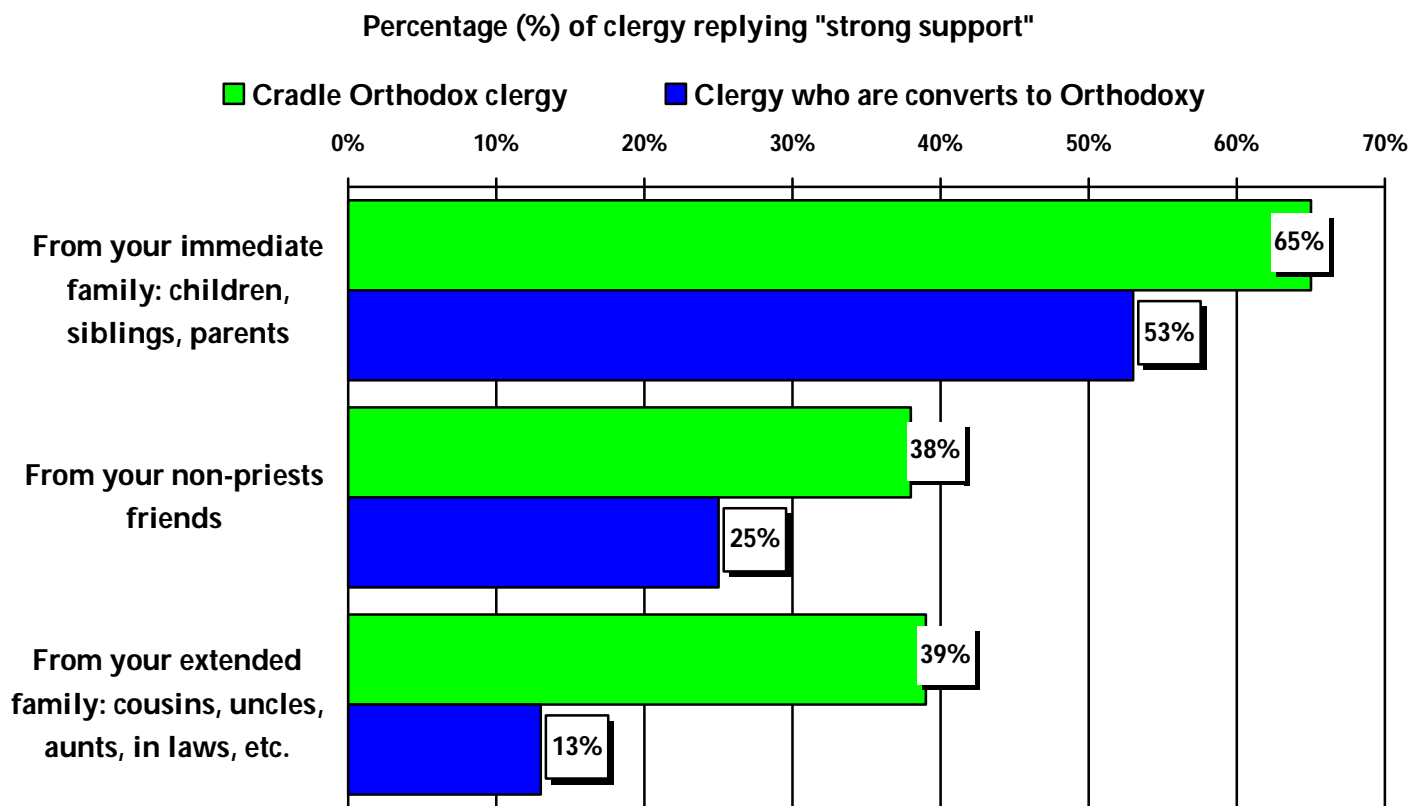
**Fig. 7 “In your priestly ministry, HOW MUCH SUPPORT do you experience from each of the following sources?”**



By far the most significant source of support for Orthodox clergy is their wives. 86% of married priests say that they experience "strong support" from their spouses. Four additional sources were described by more than 50% of the clergy as "strong support:" "immediate family," "parish council," "parishioners," and "bishop."

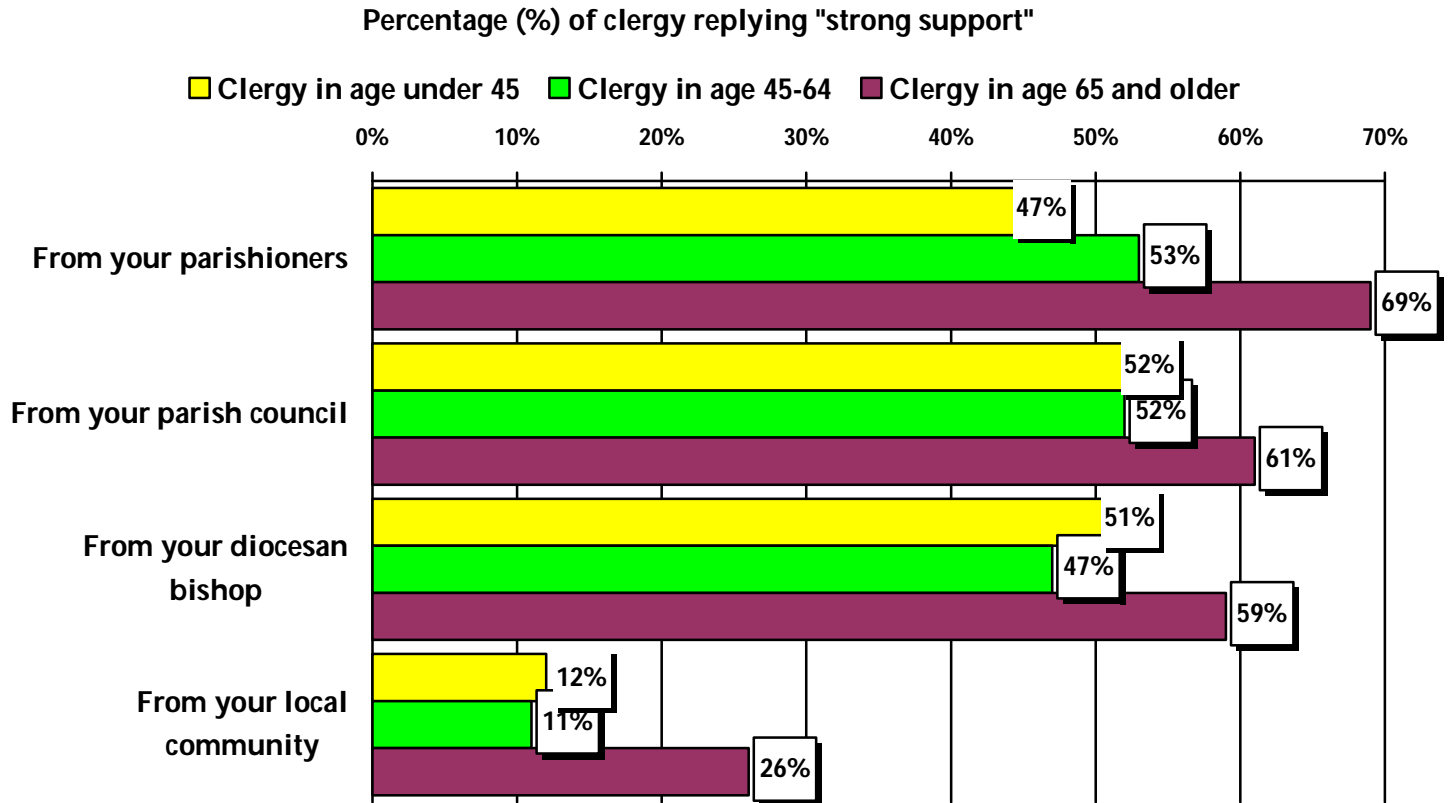
Cradle Orthodox and convert clergy have significantly different feelings about three sources of support. Fig. 8 shows that many more cradle Orthodox than convert priests reported that their "immediate families," "extended families," and "non-priest friends" are "strong support" to them. Why is it so? Is it possible that in the case of some convert clergy, the non-Orthodox members of their immediate and extended families and their non-Orthodox friends do not approve of their conversion and, therefore, are unsupportive of their role as priests?

**Fig. 8** "In your priestly ministry, HOW MUCH SUPPORT do you experience from each of the following sources?"



All age groups of clergy reported similarly strong support coming from their wives, immediate and extended families, fellow priests and non-priest friends. At the same time, compared to younger (under 45) and middle-aged (45-64) clergy, the older (65+) priests feel much stronger support from their parishioners, parish councils, diocesan bishops and their local communities. See Fig. 9. How to explain this? Perhaps the greater tenure and more extensive personal and professional life experiences of senior clergy allow them to be more familiar and interact more effectively with their parishioners, diocesan bishops, and local communities.

**Fig. 9** “In your priestly ministry, HOW MUCH SUPPORT do you experience from each of the following sources?”



**Question 6. What type of changes and improvements would help American Orthodox clergy in their personal lives and their parish ministry?**

The “Evolving Visions of Orthodox Priesthood in America” study asked the question: “Would any of the following be helpful in your priestly ministry?” Clergy were given 11 items for evaluation and could reply for each that it would be “very helpful,” “somewhat helpful,” or “not helpful.” See Fig. 10. By far the greatest number of clergy - eight out of ten - felt that “having more opportunity for personal spiritual development” would be “very helpful” in their ministry. That is, for the overwhelming majority of priests, the demands of their parish and family lives leave little time for their personal spiritual fulfillment.

Four other items were also chosen by more than half of priests as being potentially “very helpful”: “More time available to spend with my family,” “Greater feeling of fraternity among priests,” “Having trained deacons sharing pastoral duties,” and “More opportunity to share concerns and to communicate regularly with priests in other parishes and dioceses.” In other words, priests are longing to have more space for their private family lives, stronger personal ties and communication with fellow clergy, and somebody assisting professionally in their many parish duties.

**Fig. 10** “Would any of the following be helpful in your priestly ministry?”

% of clergy replying

■ Would be very helpful

■ Would be somewhat helpful

■ Not helpful

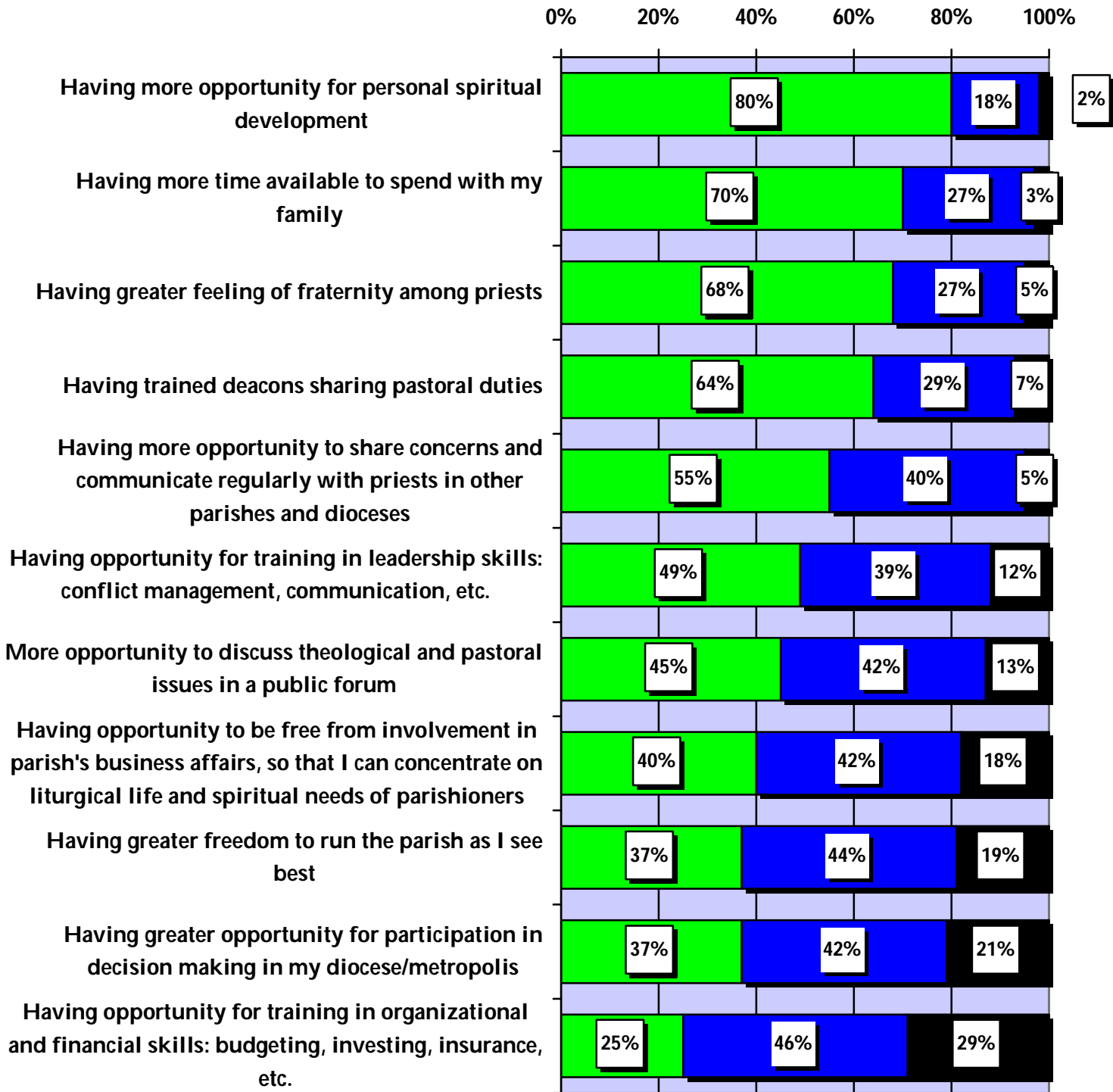


Fig. 11 shows the most noticeable differences in opinions of younger (under 45), middle-aged (45-64) and older (65+) clergy about what would be helpful to them in the parish ministry. Understandably, the younger clergy (under 45) expressed the strongest desire to have more time available for their families. The middle-aged clergy are longing in particular for “more opportunity for personal spiritual development.” The older priests feel an especially great need for stronger personal ties with fellow clergy (“greater feeling of fraternity among priests” and “more opportunity to share concerns and communicate regularly with priests in other parishes and dioceses”). Compared to younger and middle-aged clergy, the older and more experienced priests are less concerned with the need to have training in leadership skills, but, at the same time, they expressed a much stronger desire to be involved in decision-making on the diocesan level and to have greater freedom to run their parishes as they judged best.

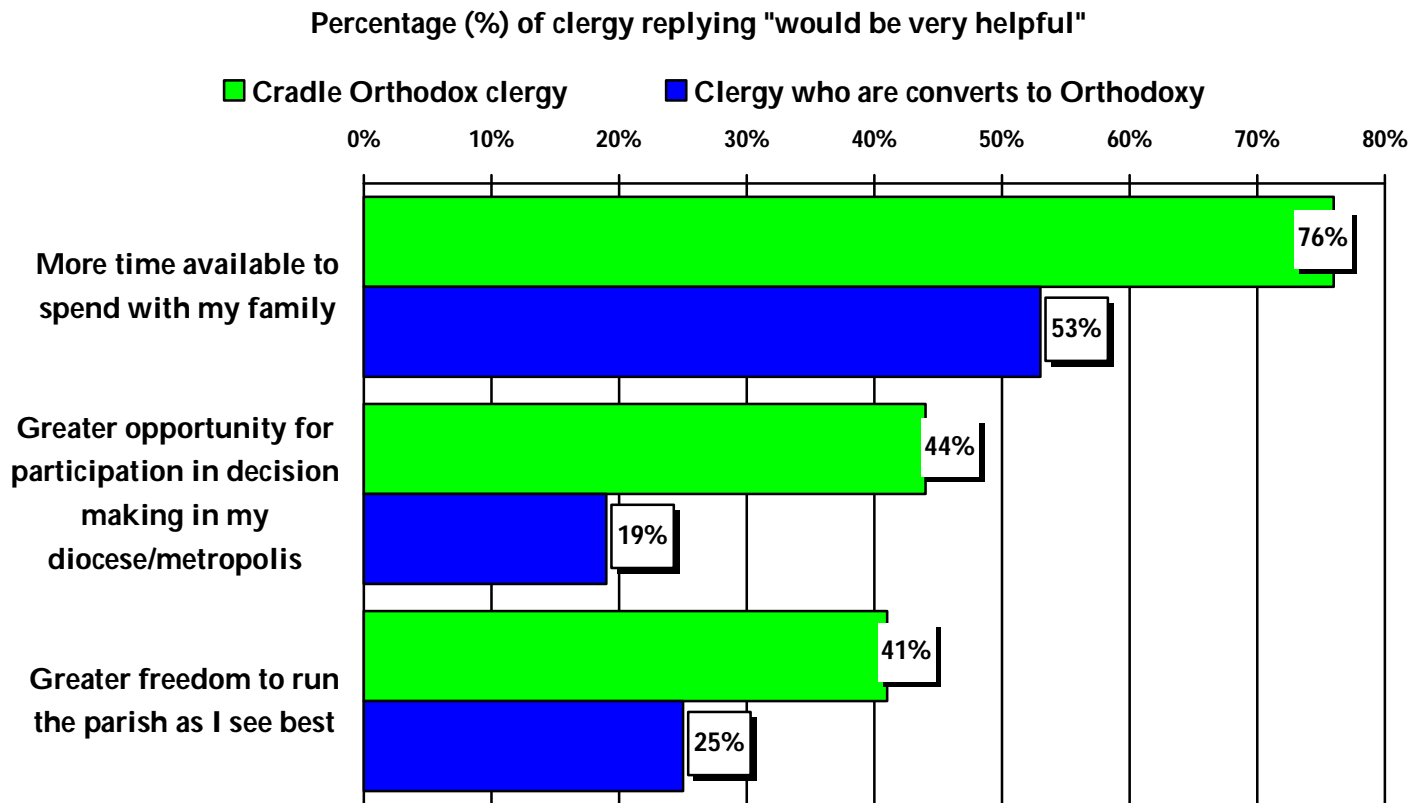
**Fig. 11 “Would any of the following be helpful in your priestly ministry?”**





Fig. 12 shows the three ***most noteworthy*** differences between cradle Orthodox and convert priests in terms of changes that they feel would be helpful in their ministry. Compared to convert clergy, the cradle Orthodox priests expressed a much stronger desire to have more time to spend with their families, greater input on decision-making in their dioceses/metropolises and more freedom to run the parishes as they see best. These findings are somewhat difficult to explain and cannot be attributed to age differences, because the age composition of cradle Orthodox and convert clergy was the same in this study.

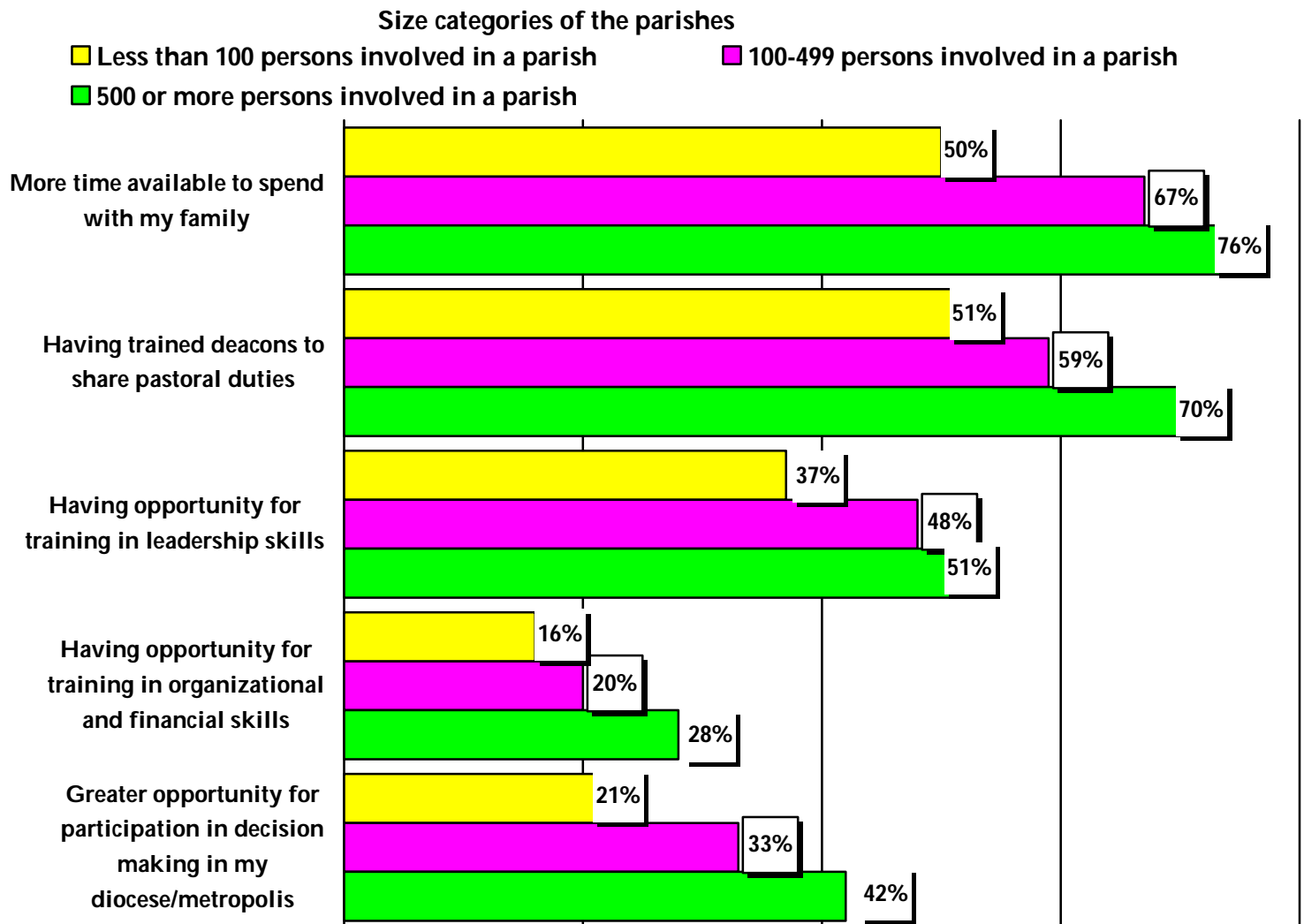
**Fig. 12** “Would any of the following be helpful in your priestly ministry?”



Parish size plays a role in what priests feel would be “very helpful” in their ministry. See Fig. 13.

**Fig. 13 “Would any of the following be helpful in your priestly ministry?”**

**% of clergy in the parishes of various size categories<sup>3</sup> who replied “would be very helpful”**



In comparison with priests in smaller parishes (fewer than 100 persons), significantly more clergy from the mid-size (100-499 persons) or, especially, large (500 and more persons) churches said that “having more time to spend with my family,” “having trained deacons sharing pastoral duties,” “having opportunity for training in leadership skills,” “having opportunity for training in organizational and financial skills,” and “having greater opportunity for participation in decision making in my diocese” would be “very helpful” in their ministry. Indeed, priests serving in the larger churches are more overwhelmed with their duties and, therefore, feel more intensely the lack of family time and the need to have trained deacons who could help them. They are also more likely to think about the benefits of improving their leadership, organizational, and financial

<sup>3</sup> The size categories of the parishes were calculated based on clergy answers to the question “Approximately how many persons total would you say are associated in any way with the life of your parish: counting both adults and children, both regular and occasional attendees?”

skills in order to run their sizeable parish communities more successfully. At the same time, one can assume that the clergy from the largest parishes also command greater authority in the Church (than the priests from the smaller communities) and, consequently, they feel more entitled to be involved in decision-making not only in their own parishes, but also on the diocesan level.

**Question 7. Who has “final say” in American Orthodox parishes: laity or clergy?**

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? In his influential book “Evolving Visions of the Priesthood,”<sup>4</sup> the Roman Catholic scholar, Dean Hoge distinguishes between two models of priesthood and pastoral leadership among American Roman Catholic clergy: the “cultic” and the “servant-leader” models. The “cultic” model places central importance on worship and sees the priest as mainly the provider of sacraments. It implies also that clergy keep a certain distance from everyday social life. In this model, solely by virtue of their ordination, priests are accorded **high status and influence**. Accordingly, in the “cultic” model parishioners put their pastor on a pedestal, as a mediator between themselves and God. Quite differently, the “servant-leader” model views priests as sharing the human condition with all the baptized. It de-emphasizes the priest’s separateness and special status, placing himself in the twin roles of servant and leader within the community of believers. That is, in the servant-leader model, the clergy-laity distinction is much less important than in cultic model. Consequently, 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? More specifically, 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 parishes? The answer to these questions can be found in the 2008 national study of American Orthodox laity, [“The Orthodox Church Today.”](#)<sup>5</sup>

The Orthodox parishioners participating in this study were first asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the general statement: “Most priests don’t expect the laity to be leaders, just followers.” Only 17% of

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<sup>4</sup> Hoge, Dean R., and Jacqueline E. Wenger. 2003. *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the New Century*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press.

<sup>5</sup> Krindatch A. 2008. *The Orthodox Church Today*. Berkeley, California: Patriarch Athenagoras Institute. More than 1000 lay church members representing 103 parishes participated in this study. Full report available at: <http://orthodoxreality.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/OrthChurchTodayFullReport.pdf>

respondents felt that American Orthodox clergy don't expect lay members to take leadership roles in a parish and agreed with this statement, while almost two-thirds (62%) of parishioners replied "disagree" (the remaining 21% having chosen the answer "Neutral/Unsure").

Notably, there was no difference in responses to this statement from church members in various age categories and from the cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy. Hence, overall, the dominant majority of American Orthodox laity **do not feel** that clergy deny lay members the possibility to exercise leadership in the church life.

The study followed up with a more specific question about the priests in the home parishes of the respondents: "Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your priest?" See Table 3. Two 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 the opposite, and the "priest makes most of decisions, parishioners generally follow him." In summary, it seems that in the vast majority of American Orthodox parishes the laity have either significant or even decisive impact on the everyday life of a parish.

**Table 3 "Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your priest?"**

	Percentage (%) of responses
Our priest makes most of decisions, parishioners generally follow him	15
Our priest inspires parishioners to act by themselves, but acts alone if he believes that it is needed	53
Our priest acts mainly on goals that parishioners have settled, although he tries to influence their decisions	23
Parishioners come up with most of initiatives and make most of the decisions about parish's directions and programs	9

How do American Orthodox Churches compare to other Christian denominations in the style of the pastoral leadership of their clergy? The data from 2001 national "US Congregational Life Survey"<sup>6</sup> help to respond to this question. See Table 4.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed information about and data from this study are available on the website of Association of Religion Data Archive: <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/USCLSRA.asp>

**Tab. 4 “Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your pastor, minister or priest?”**

	Respondents from Roman Catholic parishes (%)	Respondents from Mainline Protestant congregations (%)	Respondents from Evangelical Protestant congregations (%)
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

Comparing data in tables 3 and 4, one can see that there is no significant difference between American Orthodox Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations in the percentage of respondents who think that their pastors balance and share harmoniously authority with the laity. At the same time, compared to other American Christian denominations, Orthodox Churches appear to have fewer pastors who take full charge over life of a congregation and more clergy who let parishioners to be the leaders in the congregation’s affairs.

The next question is “How much wisdom and advice do American Orthodox clergy actually borrow from their parish members?” “The Orthodox Church Today” study asked the respondents: “To what extent does your parish priest take into account the ideas of parishioners?” A similar question was asked in the 2001 “US Congregational Life Survey” which explored the opinions of the members of Roman Catholic parishes, as well as Mainline and Evangelical Protestant Congregations. See Fig. 14.

**Fig. 14 “Orthodox Church Today” study: “To what extent does your parish priest take into account the ideas of parishioners?”**

**US Congregational Life Survey: “To what extent does the minister, pastor or priest here take into account the ideas of those who worship here?”**

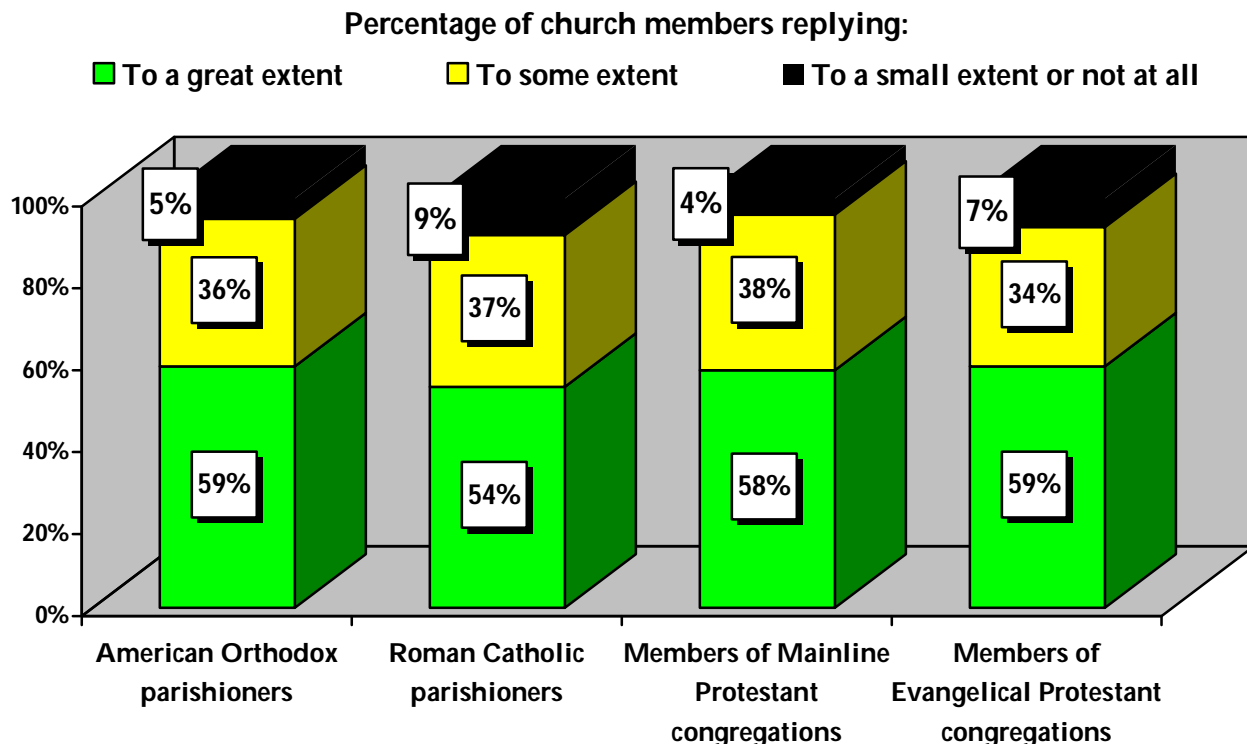


Fig. 14 allows for two major observations. First, the strong majority (59%) of American Orthodox laity believe that their clergy are very receptive and take the ideas of parishioners seriously into account. Very few (5%) respondents feel that their parish clergy pay little or no attention to their ideas. Second, Fig. 14 shows that American Orthodox Churches are very similar to the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations in the percentages of congregations where clergy take into account the ideas of church members either “to a great extent,” “to some extent,” or “to a small extent or not at all.”

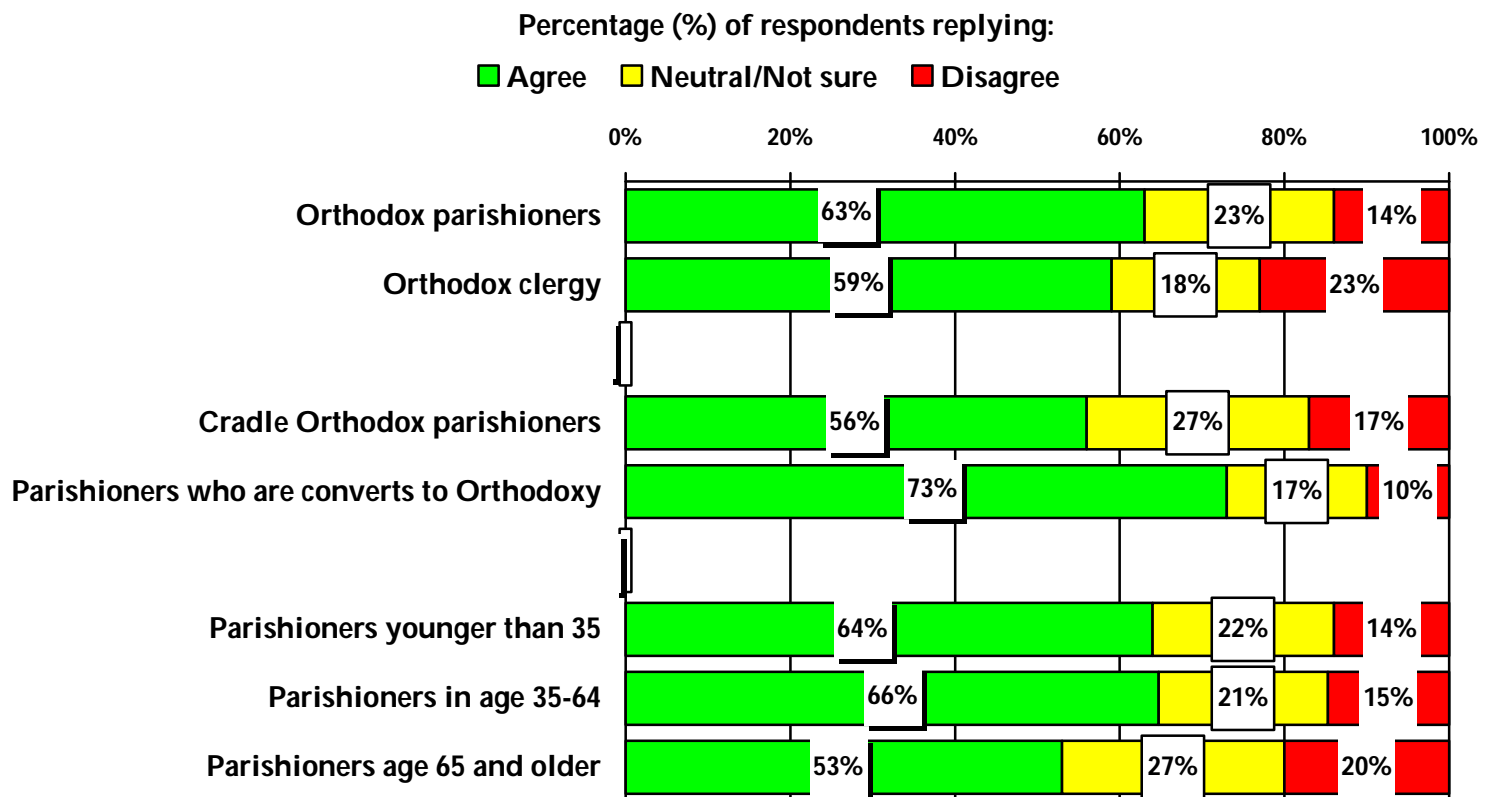
In summary, there is no significant difference between American Orthodox Churches and other Christian denominations in the degree of sharing authority between their clergy and laity.

Hence, the data tell us 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 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 crucial question is: “From the perspective of

parishioners, 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 Orthodox Church Today" study asked parishioners whether they agree or disagree with the statement "In the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish." The same statement was offered for consideration to American Orthodox clergy participating in the national study "Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America" (see the reference to this study in question 1). Fig. 15 shows responses to this statement by Orthodox parishioners versus parish clergy. Fig. 15 also compares the opinions of the cradle Orthodox and convert church members and parishioners in various age categories about who should have "final say" in a parish.

**Fig. 15 Do you agree or disagree with the statement:  
"In the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have final authority in the parish."**



Four main observations can be made. First, overall, a strong majority (63%) of Orthodox laity are willing to obey and recognize the ultimate authority of their priests in the life of a parish. Second, Orthodox clergy and lay parishioners have similar approaches to the question of who should have the final say in a parish. Third, the older parishioners (age 65+) 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 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 35 and 66% among respondents in the age 45-64. Finally, there is a noticeable difference between the cradle Orthodox and convert parishioners: the former 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" in comparison with 73% among the converts to Orthodoxy.

***Question 8. What are the primary duties of an Orthodox parish priest in 21<sup>st</sup> century America from the perspective of the laity?***

The work of Orthodox clergy is a multi-task job. Many priests preside over sizeable parishes with little or no additional staff support. Besides leading worship and administering the sacraments, the daily work of parish clergy cover many other areas: visiting and counseling members, providing religious education, reaching out into local communities, fundraising and administering the daily life of a parish - to name just a few.

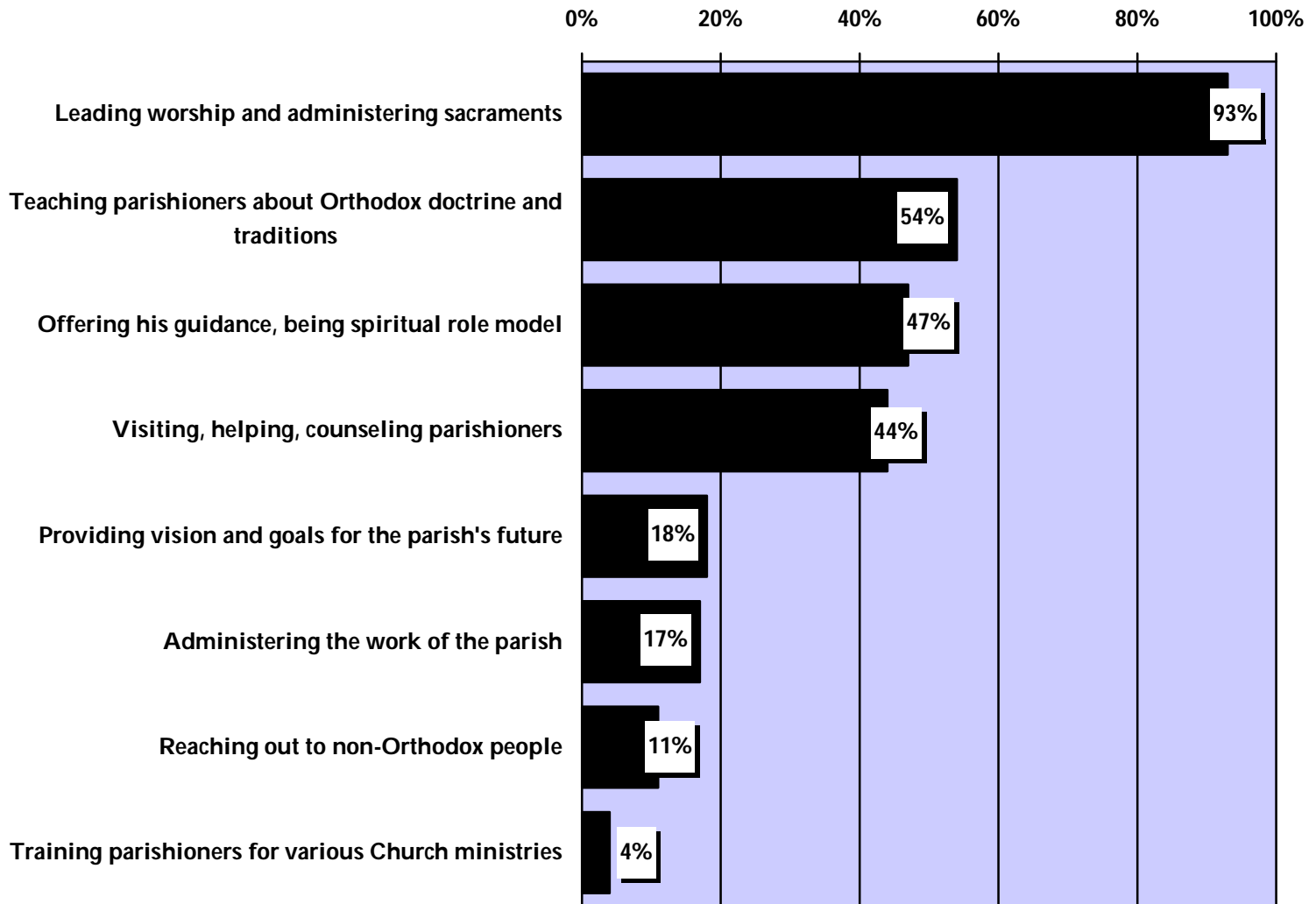
The question is: what are the ***primary duties*** of an Orthodox parish priest in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, from the perspective of their parishioners? In the national study "The Orthodox Church Today," the respondents were given a list of eight items describing different areas of pastoral work and asked: "Out of the following, what do you think are THREE main roles that your priest actually plays in your parish." Fig. 16 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. Almost all (93%) parishioners participating in the study selected "leading worship and administering sacraments" among their three choices. Second, three other areas of the pastoral work have been indicated 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." About half the respondents listed these items among the three main duties of their priests.



**Fig. 16 Main Duties 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 each item among their THREE choices**



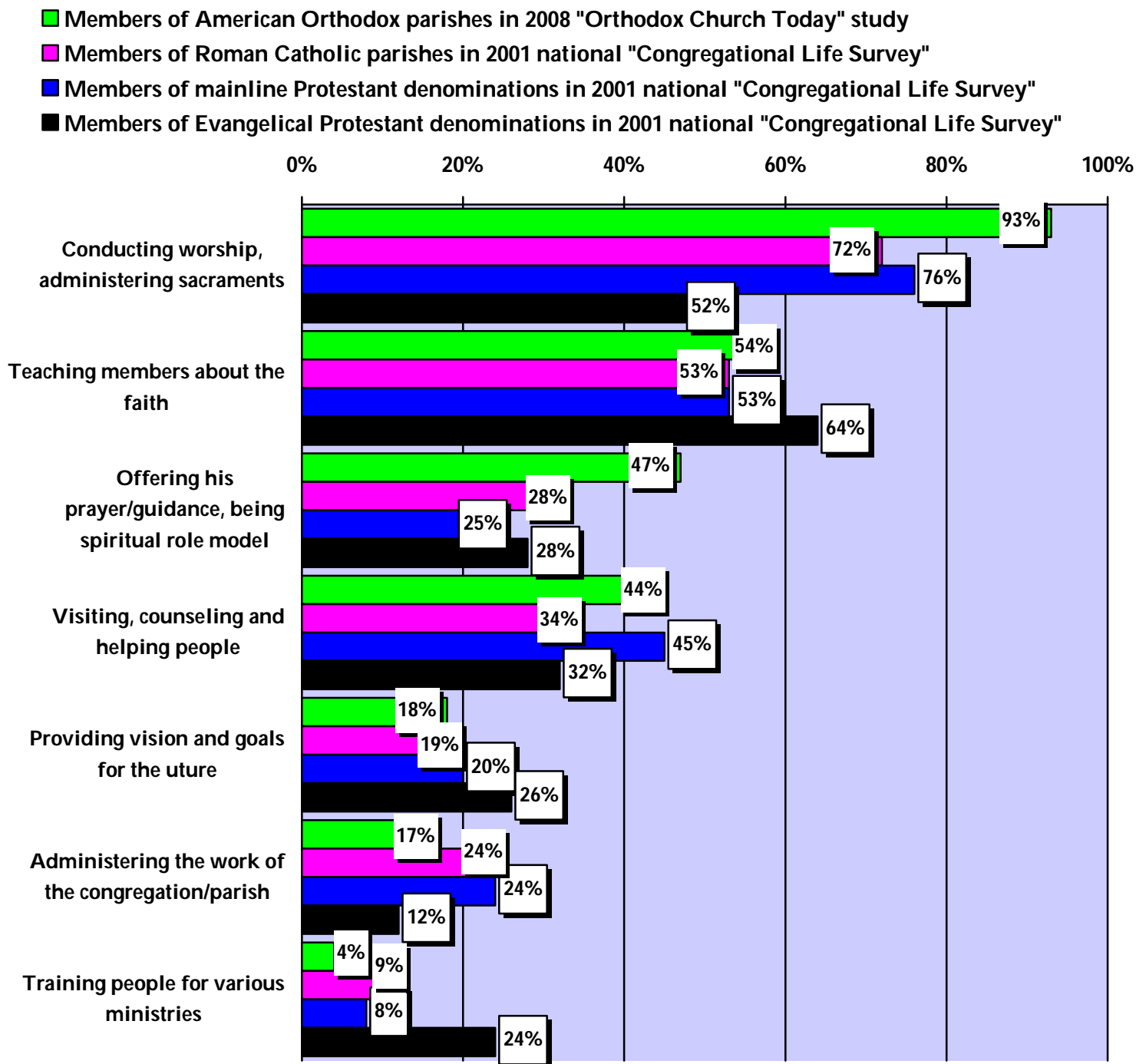
Third, Fig. 16 also tells us which areas of pastoral work are seen by American Orthodox laity as secondary and less important: “providing vision and goals for the parish future,” “administering the work of a parish,” “reaching out to non-Orthodox people,” and “training parishioners for various Church ministries.” It should be noted that various categories of parishioners (parishioners in different age, and the cradle Orthodox and the converts to Orthodoxy) ranked the relative importance of the various duties of their parish priests in the same way.

The questions which at this point remain unanswered are: "Are these four areas of pastoral work at the bottom of Fig. 16 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.

How do American Orthodox Christians, compare to the members of other American Christian denominations with regard 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. 17 on the next page.

**Fig. 17** 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 each item among their THREE choices



One can see two areas of pastoral work which 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%).