

Fast Questions and Fast Answers about Changes in the Life of the Orthodox Church

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Here are the questions that are answered on the following pages:

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Question 1. Why is this subject – the changes in the life of the Orthodox Church – important?

Adherence to established rules and “ways of doing things” is often seen as a hallmark of Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, the Orthodox Church is intentional about preserving her traditions (especially, liturgical) and emphasizes continuity in her life. In a rapidly changing secular culture, many people see this as the major strength of the Orthodox Church, and they are drawn to Orthodox Christianity exactly for that reason. Under certain circumstances, however, the refusal to change and adapt to new realities can pose a major challenge to the Church’s future. Today, there are two difficult questions that the Church needs to answer:

- How to keep a proper balance between established Orthodox traditions and dynamically changing social realities?
- How to adapt universal Orthodox traditions and rules to the various local circumstances in which the individual Orthodox parish communities function?

In the American religious and cultural context, these questions are especially urgent for three reasons. First, in the past, a strong ethnic identity and a sense of close-knit community - both culturally and religiously distinct from the wider American society - allowed Orthodox parishes to maintain established patterns of church life and to expect unquestioning obedience from their faithful adherents. Today, with the weakening of “ethnically Orthodox” values and sentiments, the Orthodox jurisdictions in America can no longer count on the unconditional loyalty of their members. The 2008 national study of American Orthodox laity, “The Orthodox Church Today,” confirmed this fact. It found that – from the perspective of ordinary parishioners – one of the two most important issues that should be brought to a public forum and discussed openly in the Church is the “relationship between mainstream American culture and the traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church,”¹ (the second being “youth and young adults leaving the Church”).

Second, a strong hierarchical authority and a centralized church administration are fundamental for the Orthodox Church. For a number of historical reasons, however, the factor of “congregationalism” (i.e., the significant local autonomy of a parish from its diocese) has always been present in American Orthodox parishes to a much greater extent than in the “Old Lands of Orthodoxy.” This “congregationalism” has its roots in the ways many parishes in America were founded. Generally, most of them were (and are still) not created by the hierarchy of the Church. Rather, it is typically a founding group of lay people who organize a community, then approach a bishop and petition for reception into a particular jurisdiction. As a result,

¹ Krindatch A (2008). The Orthodox Church Today. Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, Berkeley, California. The full study report is available at www.orthodoxreality.org

according to Fr. Thomas Hopko, "Orthodox parishes and dioceses in North America today are *voluntary associations* of like-minded Orthodox Christians organized for purposes *determined by their members*." The reality is, Fr. Hopko continues, that "a parish belongs to the diocese of its choice, most often *on its own terms*. In some cases in North America, parishes considering themselves Orthodox have not belonged to any diocese at all, or have belonged only nominally to insure a minimal measure of legitimacy for their ecclesiastical status."² In addition, in many parts of the US, the relative autonomy of the parishes is further augmented by significant geographic distances and by the scant communication between them and their diocesan centers. Overall, in the US, individual parishes have relative flexibility and freedom in making decisions about their lives and about either embracing certain innovations or avoiding any changes in the Church.

Third, theologically, all Orthodox Church jurisdictions in the US see themselves as part of one universal Orthodox Church. The reality, however, is that the Orthodox community has been unable to speak with one voice vis-à-vis American society at large. Orthodoxy in America has always had multiple faces due to internal divisions along ethnic lines. The growing presence of converts from other religious traditions among both Orthodox laity and clergy has made the local expressions of Orthodox Christianity in America even more of a mosaic. Further, as Aristotle Papanikolaou points out, the inability to adapt to the situation of American cultural pluralism has led to further fragmentation of American Orthodoxy. That is, "indeterminacies, internal strains, and conflicts are evident in Orthodoxy in America in the sheer diverse number of interpretations of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian through the eclectic appropriations of traditional Orthodox Christian beliefs, rituals, and symbols by those who choose to maintain some affiliation with Orthodox identity. Indeed, within the Orthodox parishes in America you have diverse interpretations and appropriations of the traditions that lead to diverse theologies that span the spectrum of the extremes of the so-called 'Culture Wars.'"³

This mini-report will present the data from several national studies conducted over the past decade that reflect the thoughts and opinions of our clergy and lay church members about changes and innovations in the Orthodox Church and about the importance of open discussion on various matters related to the life of the Church.

² Hopko T (2003) The Orthodox Parish in America. In: Vrame A (ed) The Orthodox Parish in America, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, p. 3.

³ Papanikolaou A (2003) The One Becomes the Many: Orthodox Christianity and American Pluralism. Paper presented at the seminar "Orthodox Christianity and American Public Life: The Challenges and Opportunities of Religious Pluralism in the 21st Century" sponsored by the Institute of Religion and World Affairs at Boston University, Boston, 15 November 2003.

Question 2. Overall, what do Orthodox parishioners think about changes and innovations in the life of the Church?

The findings from the 2008 national study of American Orthodox laity titled "The Orthodox Church Today"⁴ help to answer this question. In this study, respondents were asked: "Of the following, which **one** best describes your opinion of the present and future directions for the Orthodox Church in the US?" The respondents were given a choice of four statements indicating either their preference for maintaining the adopted patterns of church life or, to the contrary, their desire for change and innovation:

- ❖ "I feel that we are too strongly 'tied' to our past. We need to rethink where we are now and decide about new directions"
- ❖ "The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this"
- ❖ "We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so"
- ❖ "We need to get back to the way we did things in the past."

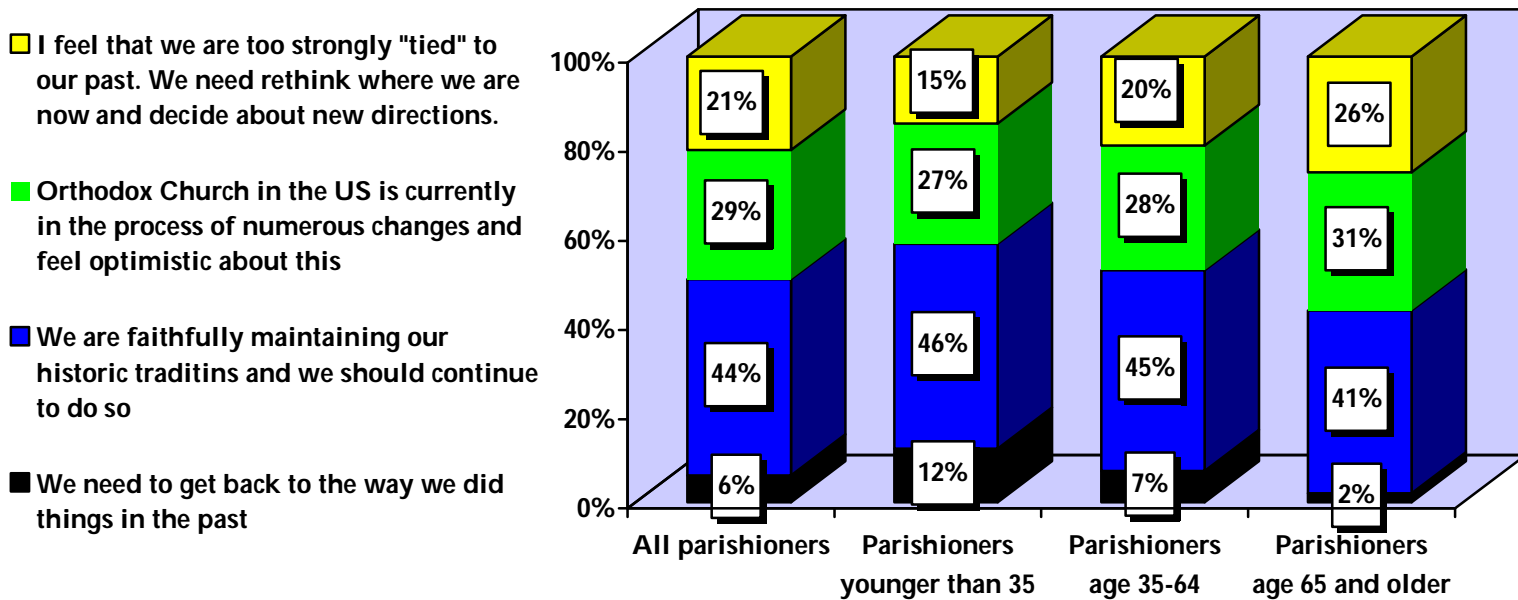
Fig. 1 shows that answering this question American Orthodox laity were divided equally in two groups. Half of the parishioners approve or even encourage change in the Church by saying, "The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this" (29%) or "I feel that we are too strongly 'tied' to our past. We need rethink where we are now and decide about new directions" (21%). Another half of the respondents, however, praise tradition and stability in Church life and feel that, "We need to get back to the way we did things in the past" (6%) or, "We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so" (44%).

At the same time, Fig. 1 also shows that senior parishioners (age 65 and older) are more likely to accept changes in Church life. An absolute majority of them (57%) believe that either, "The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this" (31%) or, "I feel that we are too strongly 'tied' to our past. We need rethink where we are now and decide about new directions" (26%). In contrast, a dominant majority (58%) of younger Church members (under 35) reject changes in the Church. Twelve percent of them feel that, "We need to get back to the way we did things in the past," and 46% chose the answer, "We are faithfully maintaining our historic traditions and we should continue to do so."

⁴ 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: www.orthodoxreality.org

Fig. 1 Laity Vision for the Church’s Future: Opinions of Various Age Groups

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



Question 3. What are desirable changes and improvements in the lives of American Orthodox parishes that the Church members would be willing to “pay for”?

As strange as this question may sound, but there is an answer to it. This answer came from the 2015 national study, "Exploring Orthodox Generosity: Giving in US Orthodox Parishes."⁵ The survey asked Orthodox parishioners: "Are there any desirable changes in church life under which you would consider **donating more money** to your parish?" The respondents were given a list of 18 hypothetical changes and improvements to consider that could possibly increase their giving. With regard to each item on this list, respondents could choose among three answers: a) Yes, would give more (definitely or maybe); b) I am satisfied with this area: no need for improvement; c) (Not satisfied, but) would not give more. See Fig. 2.

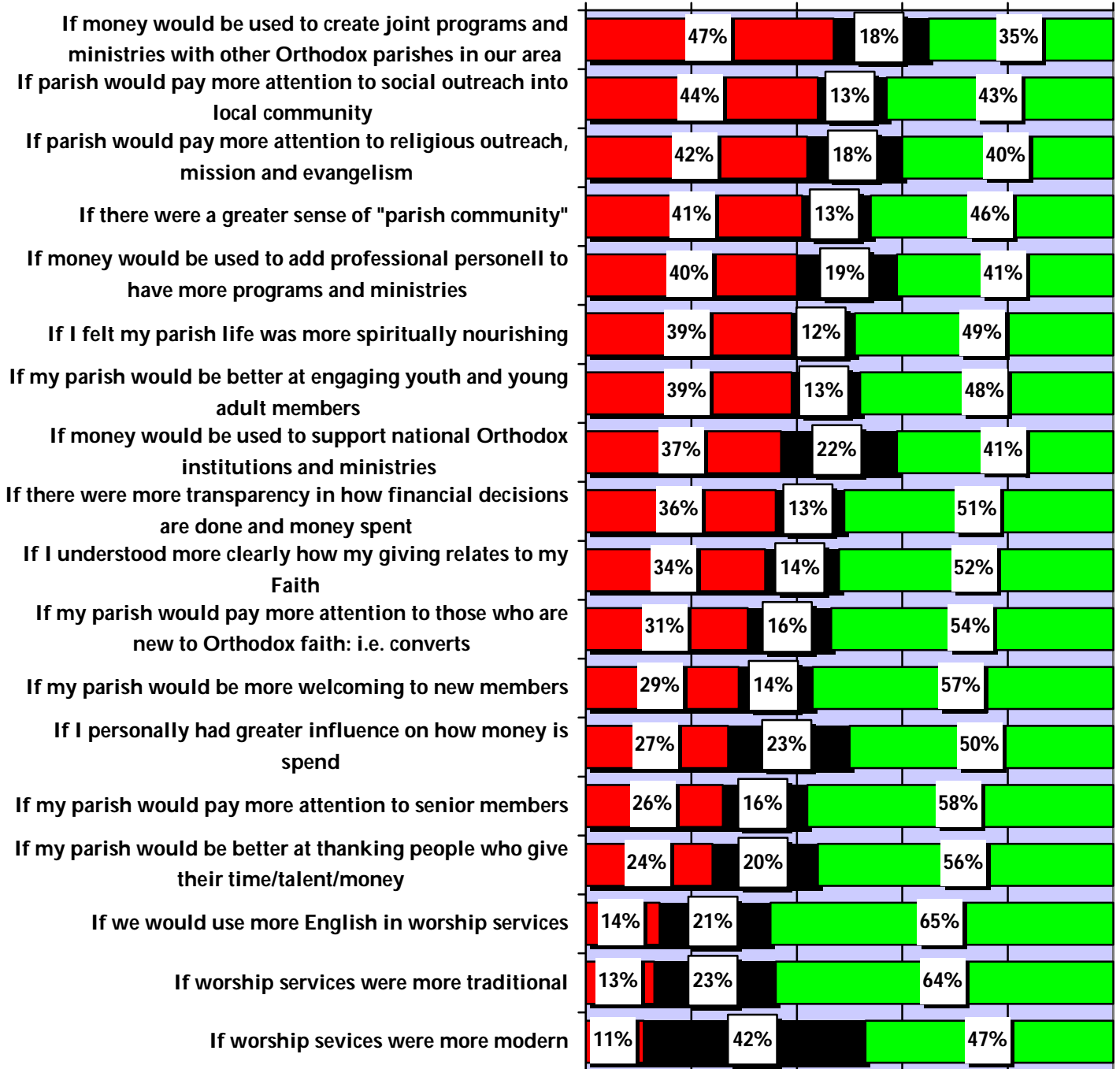
⁵ The study was conducted by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA. 2,825 lay church members representing all US Orthodox Churches participated in this study. The size of the sample and representation of various Orthodox jurisdictions and US geographic regions makes this study the largest survey-based study of the Orthodox Christian Churches ever conducted in America. The full study report is available at: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/docs/research/OrthodoxGenerosity.pdf>

Fig. 2 "Are there any desirable changes or circumstances under which you would consider donating more money to your parish?"

% of respondents saying:")

- Yes, would give more (definitely or may be)
- No, would not give more
- I am satisfied with this area. No need for improvement here

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



Three key conclusions can be drawn from Fig. 2. First, the three most desirable changes that would encourage greater giving are all related to the same issue: the problem of excessive "insularity" of the parishes and their weak engagement with the "outside community." Indeed, the top three desirable improvements from the perspective of parishioners are:

- ❖ Parish's life being more connected with the lives of other Orthodox parishes ("more joint programs with other Orthodox parishes");
- ❖ Parish's life being more connected to the wider local community ("more attention to social outreach into the local community");
- ❖ Stronger emphasis on Orthodox evangelism and mission in America ("more attention to religious outreach, mission, and evangelism");

Less than half of church members are presently satisfied with these three areas in the lives of their parishes, and more than 40% of parishioners reported that they would give more if their parishes would pay more attention to cooperation with the neighboring Orthodox parishes, and to social and religious outreach into the local community.

Second, the fourth, fifth and sixth most desirable changes for which church members are willing "to pay" are related to creating more vibrant and attractive parishes. That is, parishioners are longing for a "greater sense of parish community" and a parish life that would be "more spiritually nourishing" and would offer its members more abundant and fulfilling experiences beyond worship services ("having more programs and ministries"). Again, less than half of church members are presently satisfied with these three aspects of their parishes.

Third, despite sometimes being "hot button issues" in discussions about American Orthodox Church life, the questions of language used in the church or changes in the style of worship (having more "modern" or more "traditional" worship services) do not appear to be crucially important for the vast majority of church members. At least, they are not willing "to give more" for possible adjustments in these areas.

Fig. 2 reflects the average situation for all respondents combined. Are there any desirable changes and adjustments in parish life that would be especially important (and, therefore, likely to inspire greater giving) for particular demographic categories of parishioners?

When comparing **cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy**, the most noticeable difference is in their feelings about the need to improve financial transparency and accountability in the parishes and to have greater personal control over church finances. Compared to converts to Orthodoxy, cradle Orthodox parishioners are significantly less satisfied with “transparency in how financial decisions in the parish are done and money spent” (60% of converts are satisfied with this area versus only 44% among cradle Orthodox parishioners) and with their personal influence on “how money are spent” (58% and 44%). Consistent with this, more cradle Orthodox than converts want improvements in this domain and reported that they would give more if “there was more transparency in how financial decisions in parish are done and money spent” (42% of cradle Orthodox versus 27% of converts) and if “I personally had greater influence on how money is spent” (33% and 19%). This difference between cradle Orthodox and convert parishioners is difficult to explain, but it is statistically very sound and, therefore, worth noticing.

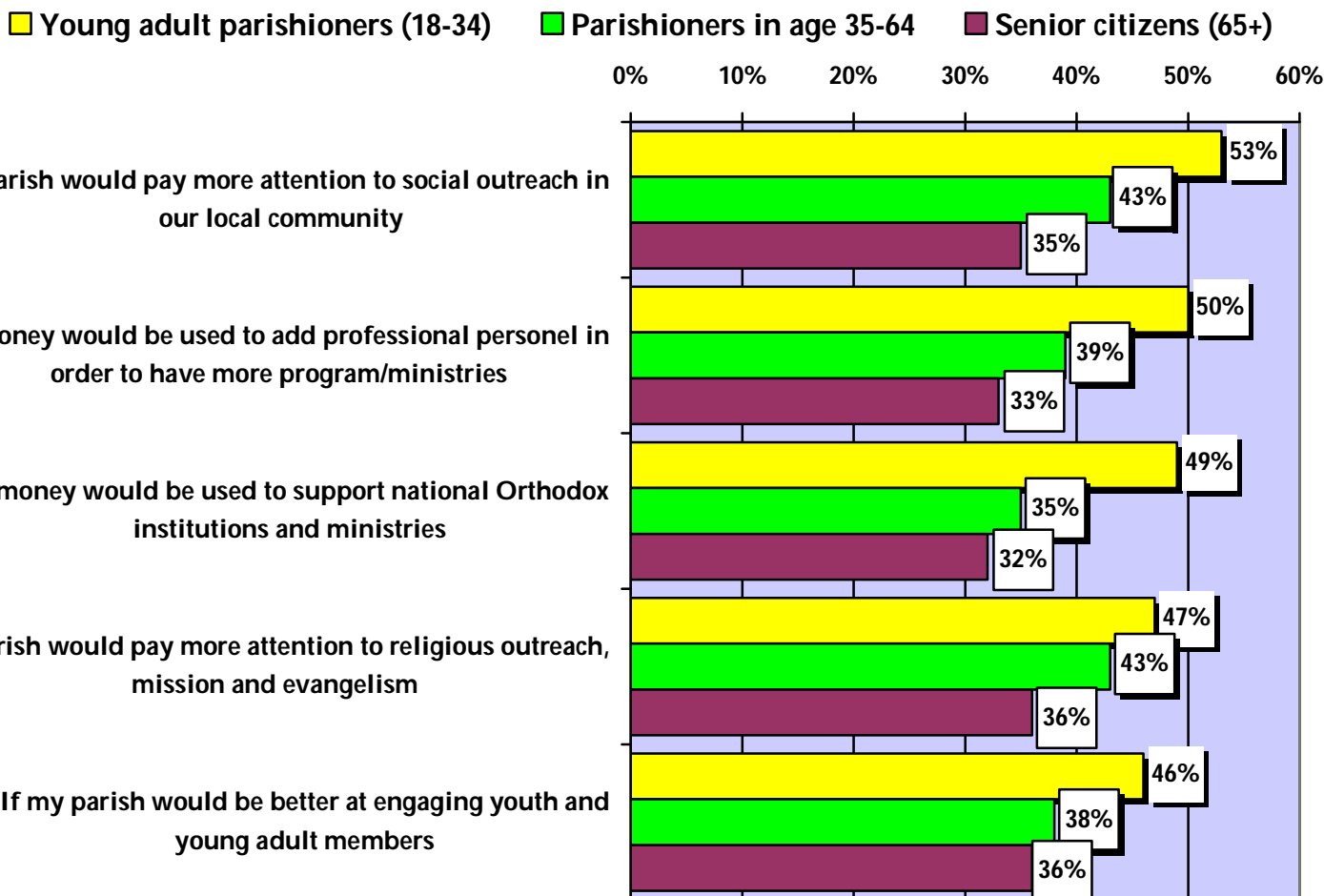
When comparing **various age groups**, the major difference between younger and older parishioners is in their feelings about the need for improvement in five areas of parish life:

- ✓ Social outreach into the local community
- ✓ Availability of professional personnel in a parish to run more programs and ministries
- ✓ Parish support for national Orthodox ministries and programs such as seminaries, missionary and humanitarian work, etc.
- ✓ Religious outreach, mission, and evangelism
- ✓ Engagement of youth and young adult church members

In all these areas, young adult church members (age 18-34) are much less satisfied with the present situation than middle-aged parishioners (age 35-64) and senior citizens (age 65+). Accordingly, younger church members are much more willing than their older fellow parishioners “to give more” if their parishes would improve the current situation in these five areas. See Fig. 3. In essence, compared to older parishioners, younger church members feel a greater need for stronger emphasis on the external work of an Orthodox parish (social outreach; religious outreach, mission and evangelism; support of national ministries and programs) and, generally, for having a greater variety of programs and ministries in their local church community.

Fig. 3 "Are there any desirable changes or circumstances under which you would consider donating more money to your parish?"

% of respondents in each age group saying that they "would give more (definitely or may be) if:



In addition to multiple-choice question with eighteen options to consider, the participants of the "Exploring Orthodox Generosity" study were also asked an open-ended question: "Are there any other circumstances under which you might consider donating more money to your parish? Please, tell us." Remarkably, out of 2,825 study participants, nearly 1,700 replied and shared their thoughts about changes and improvements in the Church life that may increase their giving. While there was a great diversity in individual answers, seven consistent patterns in responses emerged, indicating seven areas in Church life that the respondents thought would be important to improve. **In order of frequency of mention, many study participants indicated that they would give more to their parishes:**

- ❖ If LESS money were spent on the parish's ongoing "operations" and/or unnecessary "improvements" (more icons, bigger building, additional property purchased) and MORE on creating meaningful ministries that have impact on both the parish and the wider community;

- ❖ If there were greater trust in local and diocesan church leadership: that is, if the leadership would not be monopolized and finances misused by a small "corrupt" group of people;
- ❖ If the money would be used for social outreach into the local community;
- ❖ If the overall "culture of generosity" in a parish were improved, so that everyone would give more - not just a few highly generous members;
- ❖ If the parish would use the money to help parishioners who are in different types of need;
- ❖ If contributions would be used to support various international missions or sister parishes abroad;
- ❖ If the money would be used for greater inter-Orthodox cooperation.

Question 4. From the perspective of ordinary parishioners, which changes and adjustments would make Orthodox parishes stronger and more vibrant?

In the 2008 national study "The Orthodox Church Today,"⁶ Orthodox parishioners were asked the question: "What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?" The respondents were given eleven items to consider, describing various possible improvements in the life of a parish and – with regard to each – they could reply: "this is very urgent for us," "this would be helpful," "we are satisfied with this." See Fig. 4 on the next page.

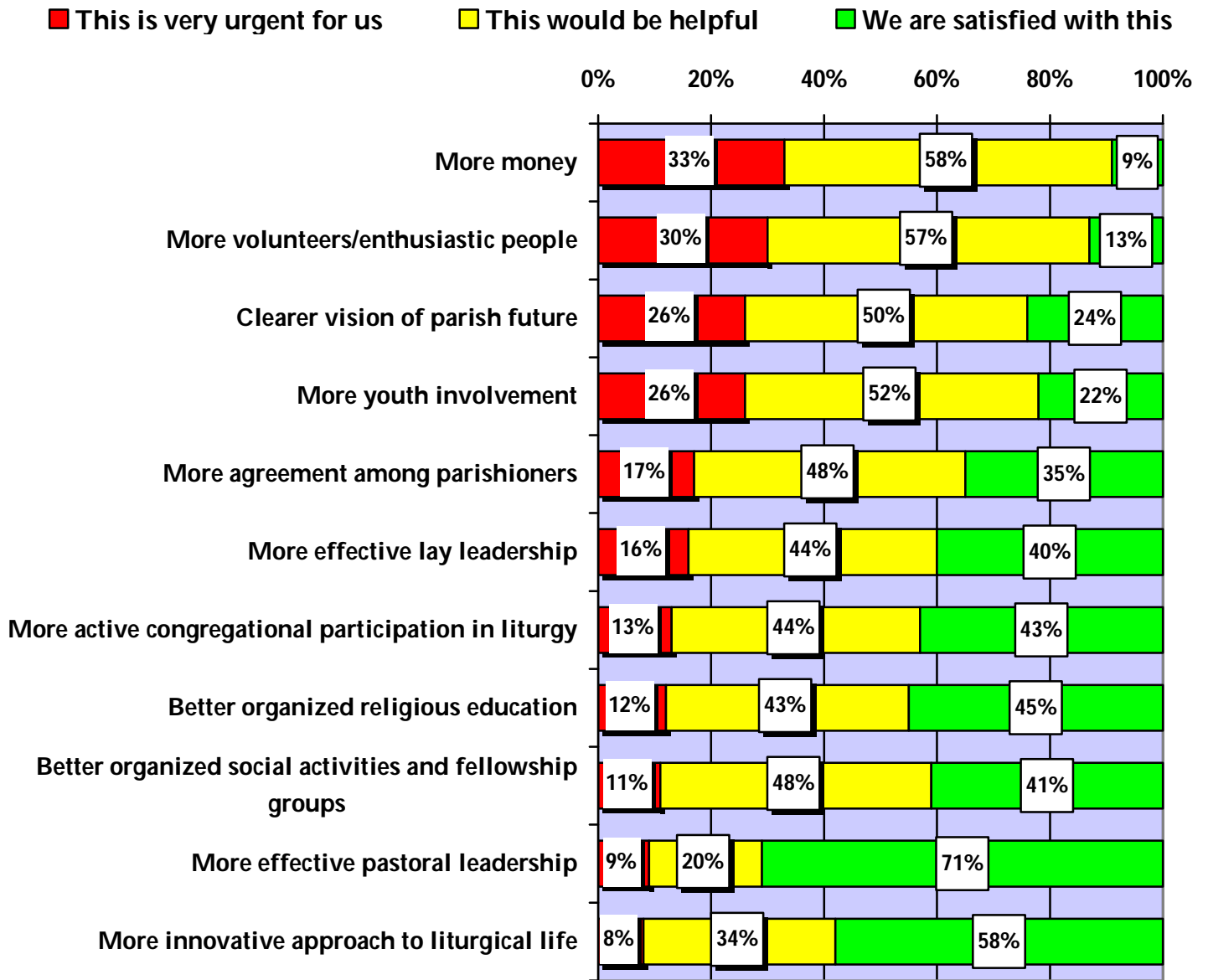
Fig. 4 shows that the respondents most frequently indicate two desirable improvements which - from their perspective - are urgently needed in order to assure a bright future for their parishes: "more money" (34% reported that this is "very urgent" for us) and "more volunteers and enthusiastic people" (30%). No more than 13% of parishioners said that they are "satisfied" with these two aspects of their parish life. Two further desirable improvements are mentioned by more than one quarter of the respondents as "very urgent for us:" "clearer vision of parish future" (26%) and "more youth involvement" (26%). Only 22% of parishioners are satisfied with the youth involvement in their churches and only 24% feel that their parish has a clear vision for its future.

On the "positive" side, it appears that an overwhelming majority of church members (71%) are quite satisfied with the quality of pastoral leadership in their parishes. Only one in eleven respondents feels that "more effective pastoral leadership" is "very urgent" for their churches in order to strengthen and to grow.

⁶ Conducted by the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, Berkeley, CA. More than 1,000 lay church members from 103 Orthodox parishes participated in this study. The full study report is available at: www.orthodoxreality.org

Fig. 4 Desirable improvements in a parish: “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?”

% of respondents saying that:



It should be noted that there was remarkable agreement among cradle Orthodox and convert parishioners and among parishioners in different age categories in their opinions about the urgency of the various improvements in the life of a parish. In other words, the answers to the question, “What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?” provided by the cradle Orthodox and converts, and by the younger and older parishioners, were very similar.

Question 5. From the perspective of American Orthodox clergy, which issues related to the life of the Church need to be openly discussed?

The answer to this question came from the national study, "Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America."⁷ One of the questions in this study asked parish priests: "Numerous issues relating to the priesthood are being discussed and may have impact on your life as a priest. How important would an **open discussion** be in the Church in the following areas?" The clergy were given a list of 19 possible subjects for discussion with the response options: "very important to be discussed," "somewhat important to be discussed," "not important to be discussed." See Fig. 5.

One subject clearly stands out by being selected by the vast majority (78%) of clergy as "very important to be openly discussed": the "issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox Church." Further, all categories of clergy - cradle Orthodox and convert clergy, younger and older priests - were unanimous in their opinions about the importance of an open discussion on this issue.

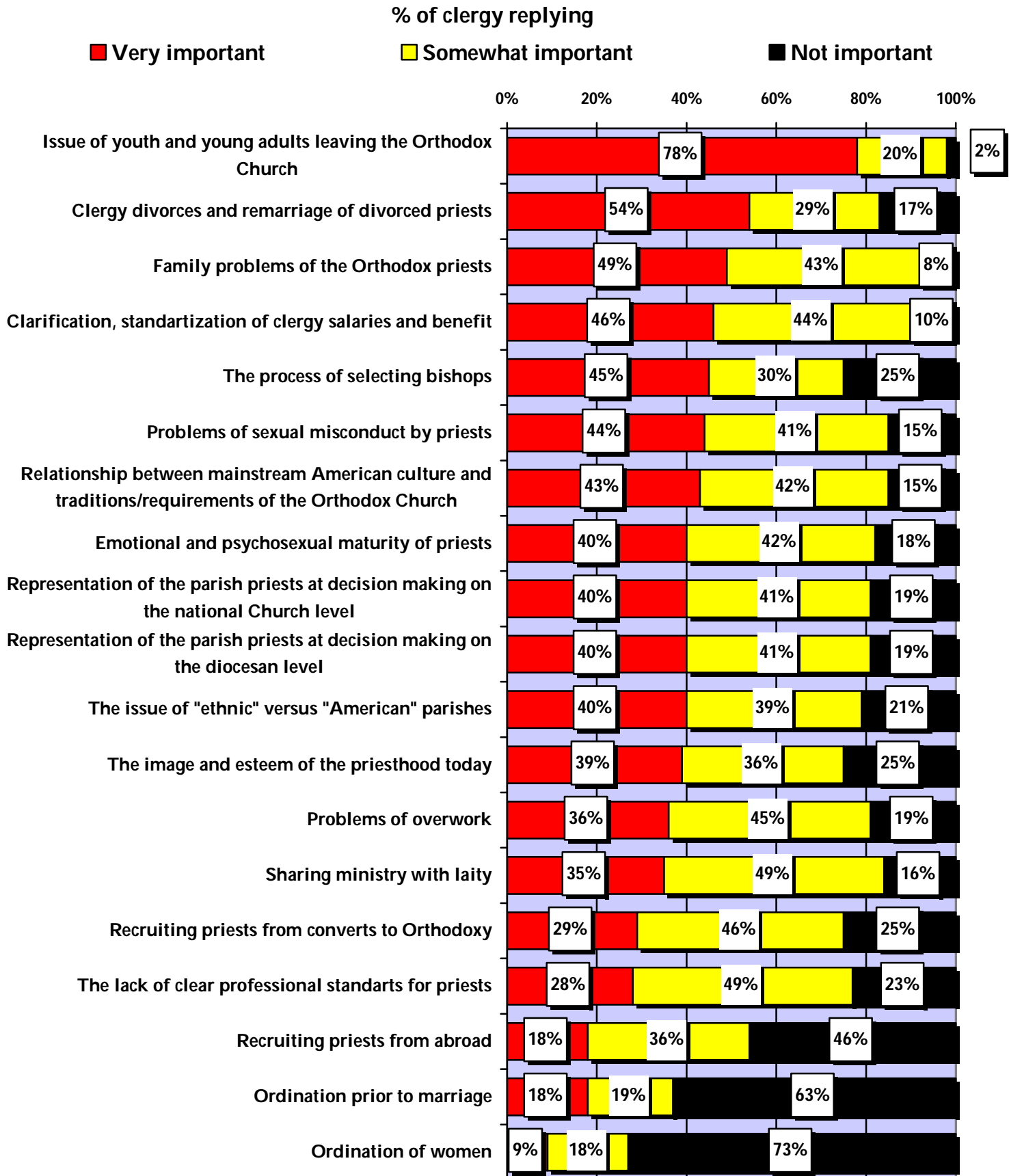
The next in importance for open discussion, from the clergy's perspective, are a number of issues related to priests' personal - family and financial - well-being: "clergy divorces and remarriage of divorced priests," "family problems of the Orthodox priests," "clarification, standardization of clergy salaries and benefits."

Three more subjects were identified by a significant number - more than 40% - of clergy as "very important to be discussed": "the process of selecting bishops," "problems of sexual misconduct by the priests," and "relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox church."

On the opposite extreme are two themes which were discarded by the dominant majority of Orthodox parish clergy as irrelevant for them and unimportant for discussion: "ordination of women" and "ordination prior to marriage."

⁷ 441 American Orthodox parish clergy participated in this study. The full report is available at: www.orthodoxreality.org

Fig. 5 Importance of Open Discussion on Various Church Related Issues
 “How important would an *open discussion* be in the Church in the following areas?”



This overall picture of what Orthodox priests think about the importance of open discussion on various matters is more nuanced when one looks at different groups of clergy. That is, younger and older clergy and convert and cradle Orthodox priests have somewhat different feelings about what should and what should not be brought into the public forum for discussion.

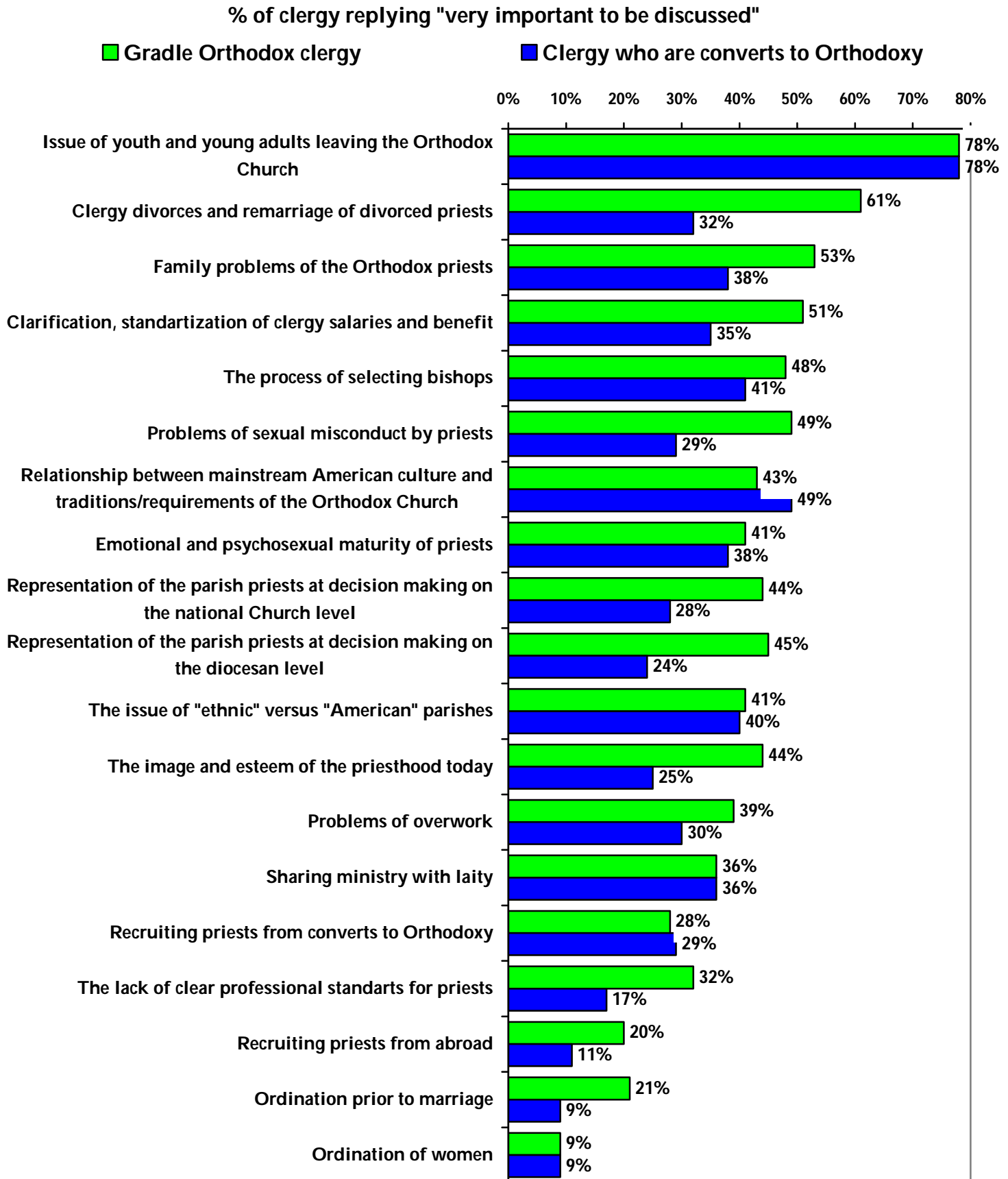
Fig. 6 compares the opinions of cradle Orthodox and convert clergy about the open discussion of various issues.

The single most important conclusion is that cradle Orthodox and convert priests have quite similar views on the importance of open discussion of questions which are related to the life of Church in general. Indeed, similar percentages of cradle Orthodox and convert clergy selected the answer, "very important to be discussed" on such subjects as: "issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox Church," "process of selecting of bishops," "relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church," "the issue of 'ethnic' versus 'American' parishes," "sharing ministry with laity," "recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy," "ordination of women."

At the same time, the major difference between cradle Orthodox and convert clergy is that the former are much more interested in open discussion of subjects related specifically to the Orthodox priesthood. Indeed, a significantly greater percentage of cradle Orthodox than convert clergy thought that it would be "very important" to discuss such matters as: "clergy divorces and remarriage of divorced priests," "family problems of the Orthodox priests," "clarification and standardization of clergy salaries and benefits," "problems of sexual misconduct by the priests," "representation of the parish priests at decision making on the diocesan and national levels," "the image and esteem of the priesthood today," "the lack of clear professional standards for priests," "ordination prior to marriage." This finding is somewhat puzzling and it raises the question: "Why are the cradle Orthodox clergy much more eager and the convert priests more reluctant to have an open discussion on a variety of issues related to the Orthodox priesthood in America?"

Fig. 6 Cradle Orthodox Versus Convert Clergy: Importance of Open Discussion on Various Issues

“How important would an *open discussion* be in the Church in the following areas?”

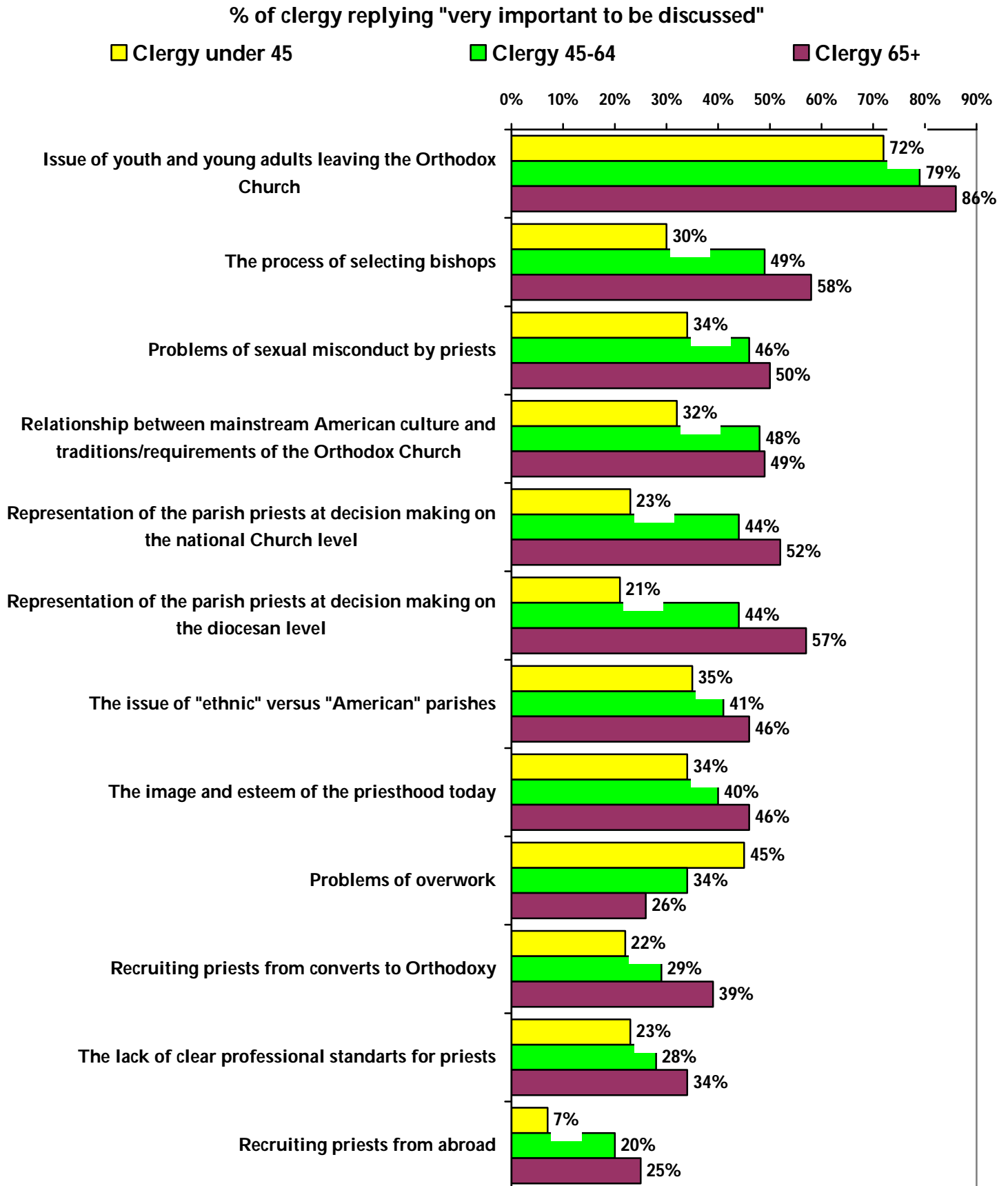


The age of clergymen also has an influence on what the priests believe is “very important to be discussed.” Fig. 7 shows the most noteworthy differences in opinions between younger (under 45), middle-aged (45-64), and older (65+) clergy. Included in Fig. 7 are the subjects for discussion about which there was a difference of at least 10 percentage points between the younger and older clergy who selected “very important to be discussed.”

Fig. 7 shows that, overall, older priests feel a stronger urgency than younger clergy to bring into open discussion various issues related to the priesthood and Church life in general. Indeed, older clergy have chosen the following subjects more frequently than middle-aged priests, and middle-aged priests – in turn – have chosen more frequently than younger clergy, as “very important to be discussed”: “issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox church,” “relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church,” “the process of selecting bishops,” “the issue of “ethnic” versus “American” parishes,” “the image and esteem of the priesthood today,” “representation of the parish priests at decision making on the national Church level,” “recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy,” “representation of the parish priests at decision making on the diocesan level,” “the lack of clear professional standards for priests,” “recruiting priests from abroad.”

Fig. 7 Age of Clergy and Their Opinions about Importance of Open Discussion on Various Issues

“How important would an *open discussion* be in the Church in the following areas?”



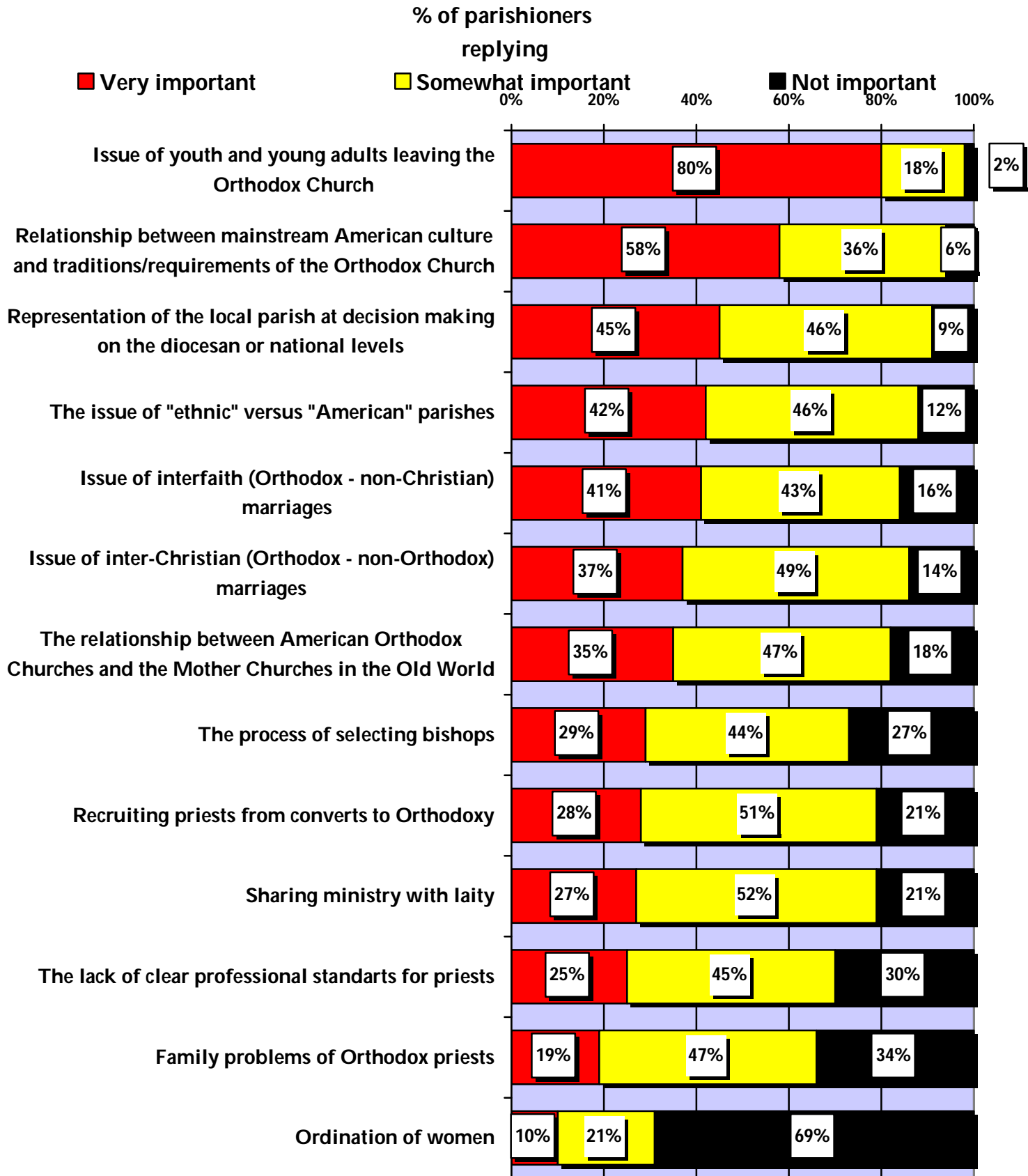
Question 6. From the perspective of American Orthodox laity, which issues related to the life of the Church need to be openly discussed?

In the 2008 national study, "The Orthodox Church Today," Orthodox parishioners were asked the question: "Numerous issues relating to the Church life are being discussed today and may also have impact on your parish. How important would an **OPEN DISCUSSION** be in the Church in the following areas?" The respondents were given a list of 13 possible subjects for discussion and they could respond, "very important to be discussed," "somewhat important to be discussed," "not important to be discussed or do not want it to be discussed." See Fig. 8 on the next page.

Fig. 8 indicates one subject that is seen by the vast majority of laity (80%) as "very important to be openly discussed:" the "issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox Church." The second in importance, selected by the absolute majority (58%) of parishioners as "very important to be discussed," is the "relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church." It should be noted that all categories of laity – cradle Orthodox and converts, and younger and older parishioners – were unanimous in their opinions that these two subjects are the most important for open discussion.

Cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy, younger and older parishioners alike, were also quite uniform in their reluctance to bring the issue of "ordination of women" into open discussion. 69% of the respondents (72% among men and 65% among women) said that the question of "Ordination of women" is "not important to be discussed."

Fig. 8 Opinions of Orthodox Laity about Importance of Open Discussion on Various Church Related Issues: “How important would an *open discussion* be in the Church in the following areas?”



Besides the subjects of “youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox Church” and the “relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church,” three further themes were identified by more than 40% of lay church members as being “very important” for an open discussion: “representation of the local parish in decision-making on the diocesan or national level,” “the issue of ‘ethnic’ versus ‘American’ parishes,” and “the issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages.”

With regard to the last item - “the issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages” - the Orthodox Church recognizes marriages only between Christians. In simple terms, if an Orthodox Christian desires to remain a Church member in good standing, he/she cannot marry a Jew, Muslim, Hindu or simply a person who is not religious (i.e., not baptized in the name of Holy Trinity) person. If a member of the Orthodox Church marries a non-Christian person, technically he or she excommunicates him/herself from the Church and is denied Church sacraments. And this is a very painful subject for those Church members who find their loyalty being torn apart between their religion and their love for a non-Christian person. The high percentage (41%) of respondents thinking that this subject is “very important to be discussed” means that this problem and challenge are seen as urgent among a significant number of our Church members.

Are there any noticeable differences between cradle Orthodox and converts to Orthodoxy in their opinions about the importance of open discussion on the various issues facing the Church? The answer to this question is: “Generally no, except one subject.” Cradle Orthodox parishioners are more eager to bring to the public forum two issues which are related to the same subject of intermarried families: “issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages” (selected by 47% of cradle Orthodox respondents as “very important” to be discussed in comparison with 34% among converts to Orthodoxy) and “issue of inter-Christian (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages” (42% and 31%). Why are converts to Orthodoxy less interested (or more reluctant) to openly discuss the matter of religiously mixed marriages? Is it because they are more intentional about their Orthodox faith and are firmer - than cradle Orthodox - believers that a family should be fully united in religious beliefs and practices?

Fig. 9 shows the most salient differences in the opinions of younger (18-34), middle-aged (35-64) and older (65+) parishioners about which matters should be openly discussed in the Church.

Fig. 9 Age of Parishioners and Their Opinions about Importance of Discussion on Various Issues

“How important would an *open discussion* be in the Church in the following areas?”

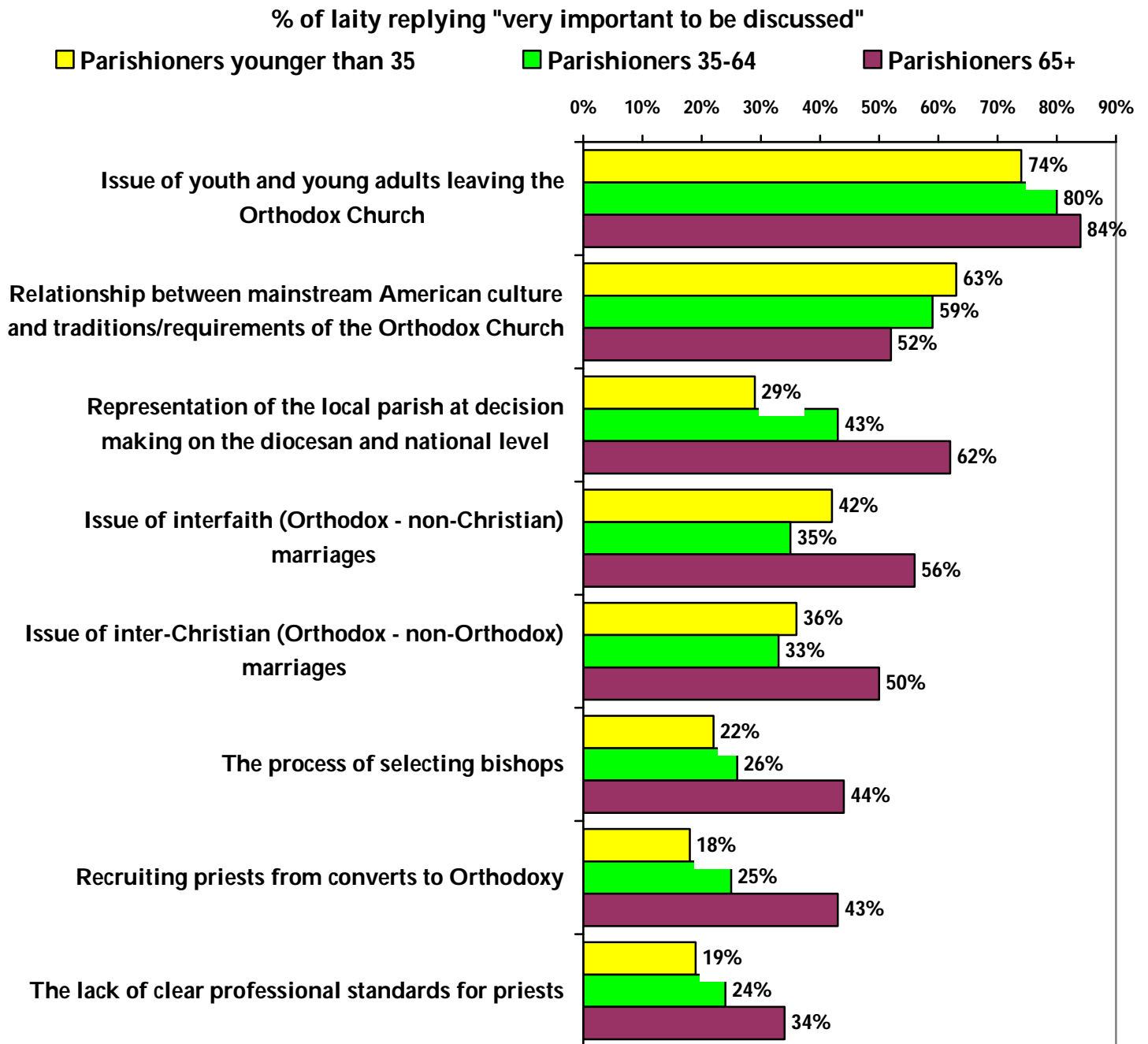


Fig. 9 shows that there is one question which is of greater concern and urgency for younger than older church members: the relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and the requirements of the Orthodox Church. Overall, however, compared with middle-aged and, especially, younger church members, many more senior parishioners want an open discussion on a variety of subjects: “issue of youth and young adults leaving the Church,” “representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan or national level,” “the issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages,” “the issue of inter-Christian (Orthodox

– non-Orthodox) marriages,” “the process of selecting bishops,” “recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy,” and “the lack of clear professional standards for priests.”

Why are senior church members much more eager to have an open debate on a wide range of issues? Perhaps they feel that their life experiences “entitle” them to address these matters and to bring them forward for public discussion in the Church? Or are they simply generally more involved in and focused on the life of the Church than are the middle-aged and younger church parishioners?

The previous question (question 5) discussed the data from the 2006 national study, “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America.” In this study, Orthodox parish priests were asked a similar question about the topics that need to be openly discussed in the Church. The list of possible subjects for discussion given to the priests was different from those in the 2008 study of the laity, but a number of items were the same. To what extent do the opinions of parishioners on what topics ought to be urgently discussed coincide with the views of the parish clergy? See Fig. 10.

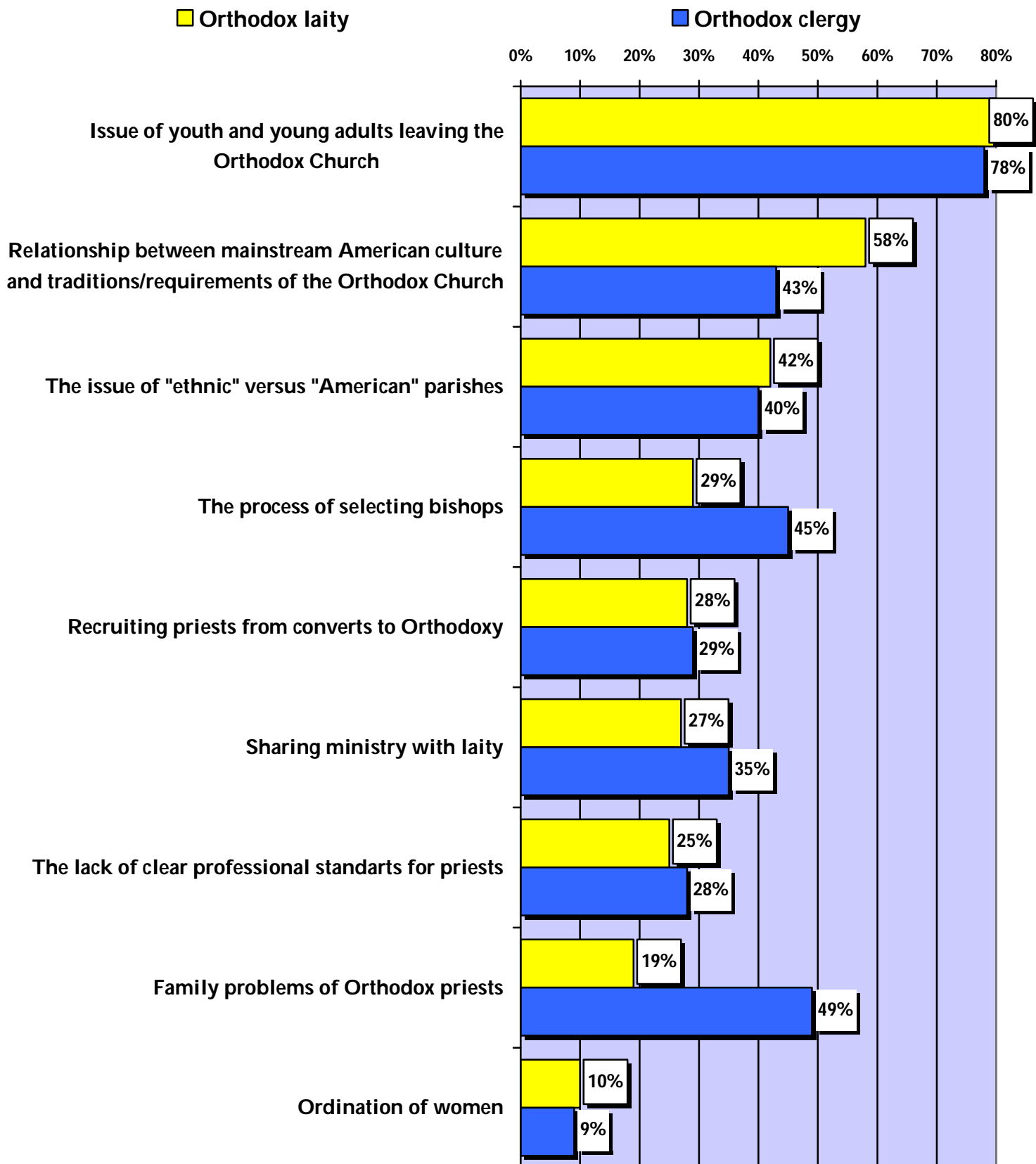
Three major observations can be made from Fig. 10. First, Orthodox clergy and laity are unanimous in their opinions that the issue of “youth and young adults leaving the Church” is by far most urgent for an open discussion in the Church.

Second, it appears that the question of the “relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church” is more immediate and urgent for the laity than for parish priests. Indeed, 58% of parishioners feel that this subject is “very important” to openly discuss in the Church, in comparison with only 43% of the clergy. A possible explanation for this difference is that in their everyday lives the Orthodox laity are constantly exposed to and interact with “non-Orthodox America” (principally through their secular jobs). In contrast, the lives of the priests revolve to a greater extent around Church-related matters, and their professional and, possibly, social relationships are to a higher degree focused on their fellow Orthodox clergy or on their parishioners.

Accordingly and third, this difference in daily focus can also explain why a significantly higher percentage of clergy than laity felt that the subjects of “selection of bishops” and “family problems of the Orthodox priests” are “very important” for public discussion.

Fig. 10 Laity versus Clergy: Opinions about Importance of Open Discussion on Various Church Related Issues: “How important would an *open discussion* be in the Church in the following areas?”

% of respondents replying "very important to be discussed"



Question 7. Do American Orthodox laity and clergy think that a local parish should have the right to choose its priest from among available ordained priests?

The short answer is: "The idea that a parish should have the right to choose its priest receives a much stronger support among Orthodox laity than among Orthodox clergy." Here are the data explaining this short answer. In "The Orthodox Church Today" study, lay parishioners were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement "I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priests from among available ordained priests." The same statement was offered to American parish clergy participating in the study "Evolving Visions of Orthodox Priesthood in America." Fig. 11 shows responses to this question by Orthodox parishioners versus parish clergy. Fig. 11 also provides comparisons between cradle Orthodox and converts and among different age categories of parishioners.

Fig. 11 Do you agree or disagree with the statement:

"I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available ordained priests."

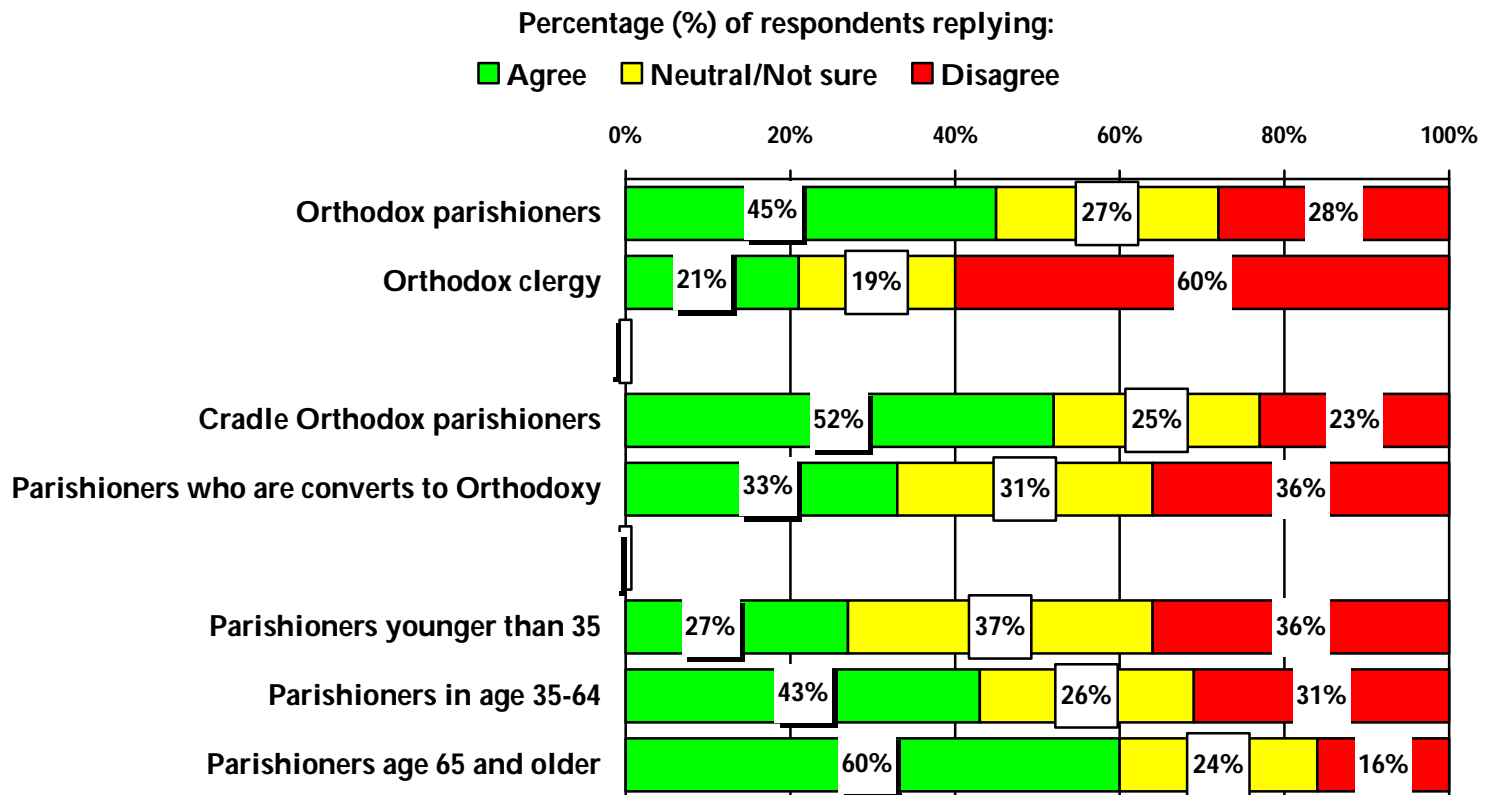


Fig. 11 shows that nearly half (45%) of the laity would support the selection of the priests by parishioners instead of the established Church practice, in which the bishop appoints parish clergy. Only 28% of lay church members would reject this change. In distinct contrast, a strong majority of parish clergy (60%) would oppose

such innovation in procedure and only one in five priests would let parish members choose their own priests. At the same time, Fig. 11 also shows that lay church members are internally quite divided among themselves about this idea. An absolute majority of cradle Orthodox parishioners voice their support for such innovation, while a plurality of convert church members reject it. Only slightly more than one quarter of younger church members are in favor of this idea, in comparison with a strong majority among senior parishioners (65 and older).

Question 8. Do American Orthodox laity and clergy think that the current process of electing bishops should be changed?

The general answer to this question is: “Yes, overall, the majority of clergy and laity are in favor of certain amendments in the current process of electing bishops.” More specifically, in the Orthodox Church today, neither laity nor parish clergy have much influence on electing bishops. The data from two national studies tell us that the majority of Orthodox lay parishioners and rank-and-file parish clergy feel that they should have more impact on the selection of diocesan bishops.

In “The Orthodox Church Today” study, parishioners were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, “I think it would be a good idea if Orthodox clergy and laity were more involved in the selection of bishops.” A strong majority (57%) replied “agree,” and only 14% selected the answer “disagree” (the remaining 29% chose the option “Neutral/Not sure”). Although there were some differences between cradle Orthodox and converts and among church members in various age categories, in all groups of respondents the percentage of those who agreed with this statement was much higher than the share of those who disagreed. See Fig. 12.

Fig. 12 Do you agree or disagree with the statement:

“I think it would be a good idea if Orthodox clergy and laity were more involved in the selection of bishops.”

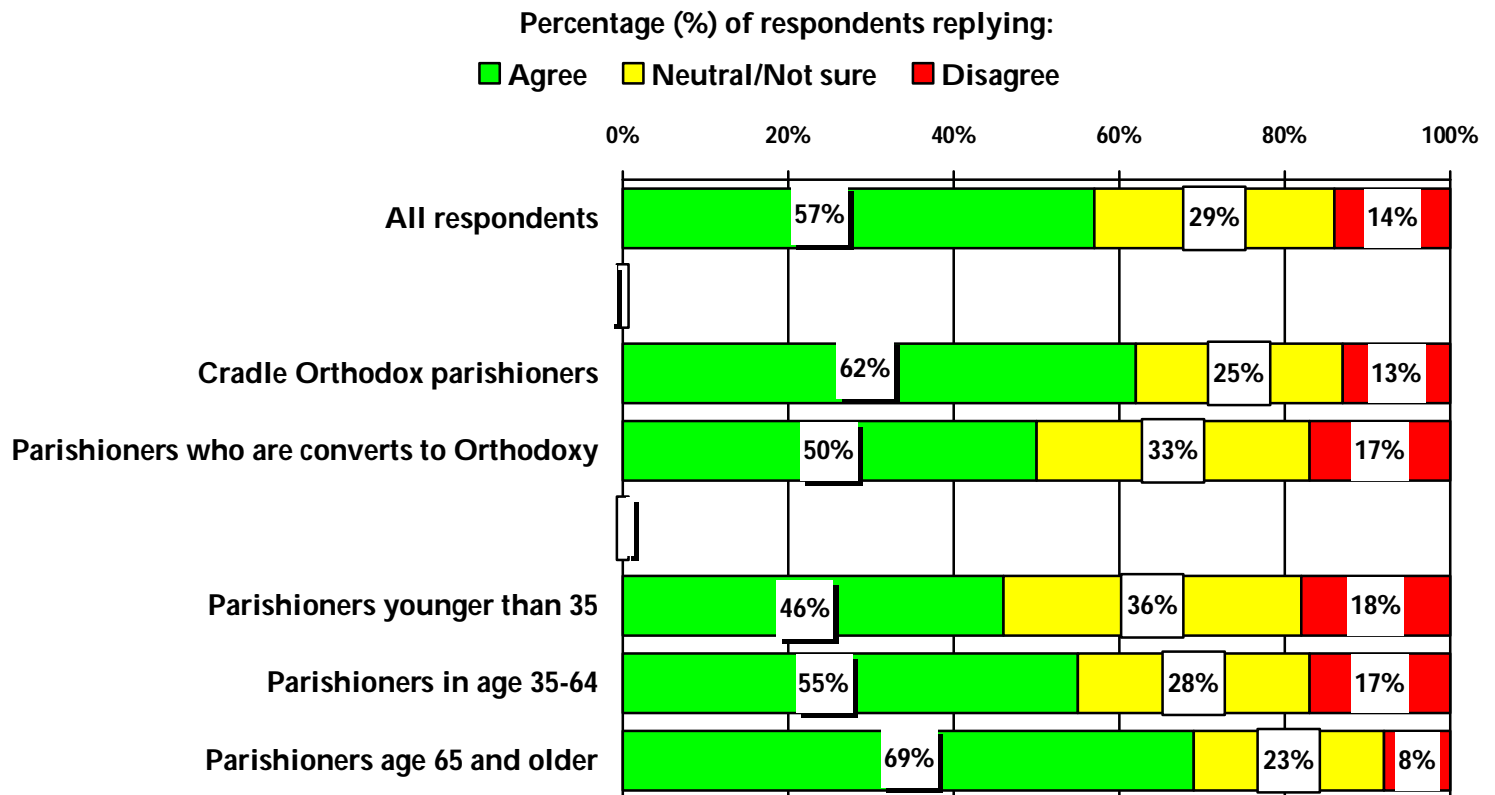


Fig. 13 shows two findings from the study of American Orthodox clergy, “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America.” First, nearly half (47%) of American Orthodox priests feel that the diocesan clergy should have the right to choose their bishops. Second, an absolute majority of American parish clergy would favor the abolition of the current requirement of choosing bishops only from the celibate clergy. Indeed, 53% of clergy participating in the study agreed to the statement: “I think it would be a good idea if bishops could be selected from among married clergy in addition to celibate clergy.”

Fig. 13 Two Desirable Changes in the Process of Bishops' Selection from the Perspective of American Orthodox Clergy

Do you agree or disagree with the following two statements?

Percentage (%) of parish clergy replying:

Agree Neutral/Not sure Disagree

