

Fast Questions and Fast Answers about Orthodox Students in American Colleges and Universities

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Here are the questions that are answered in this essay:

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One of the most notable findings from the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey¹ (ARIS) and the more recent reports by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Nones on the Rise"² (2012) and "U.S. Religious Landscape Study"³ (2014) was the substantial increase in the percentage of religious "Nones" – those individuals who do not belong to any organized religion or religious congregation⁴ – in the U.S. general population. This trend has become especially evident during the past two decades and it particularly affected American young people, those between the ages of 18-29.

According to these studies, among the total U.S. adult population, the share of religious "Nones" increased from 8% in 1990 to 15% in 2008, to 20% in 2012, and to 23% in 2014. At the same time, in the case of young people (age 18-29), the proportion of "Nones" grew from 11% in 1990 to 22% in 2008, to 33% in 2012, and 36% in 2014. Further, the "Nones on the Rise" study also found that if all religious "Nones" were to be further divided into "Atheist/Agnostic" and "Nothing in particular" groups, young people would have a particularly strong presence in the more anti-church-oriented "Atheist/Agnostic" group.

While the question about the general impact of higher education on the person's religiosity continues to be discussed, there seem to be mutual agreement that the time in college is a period when many young people cease their church participation, thereby effectively becoming religious "Nones." There is no reason to believe that Orthodox college students are any less affected by this growing religious disaffiliation than American young people in general.

At this point, there are no reliable data which comprehensively shed light on the personal backgrounds, beliefs, approaches, and attitudes of American Orthodox college students overall. But we do have some insights, drawn from two national studies of the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF)⁵ conducted by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA about the lives of those students who remain involved in the life of the Orthodox Church while studying in colleges and universities. The first study (2013) was of the Orthodox clergy who work as spiritual advisors (chaplains) with Orthodox students in the local OCF chapters on the campuses of US colleges and universities.

¹ "American Nones: the Profile of the No Religion Population. A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey." Available at: http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/NONES_08.pdf

² Available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>

³ Available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

⁴ It should be noted that while "Nones" do not have any particular religious affiliation or preference, some of them still may consider themselves to be "believers" or "religious person."

⁵ The Orthodox Christian Fellowship (www.ocf.net) is the only US national pan-Orthodox agency responsible for the Orthodox Christian collegiate campus ministry

Out of 148 spiritual advisors serving in OCF chapters that were active at the time of the study, 142 (96%) participated in the study. The second study (2014) was the study of student leaders in the OCF chapters. Out of 136 active OCF chapters (there was a decline in the active OCF chapters between 2013 and 2014), 128 (94%) participated in the study of student leadership in the local OCF chapters. Thus, we do have data and information about realities of Orthodox Church life on the campuses of US colleges and universities from the perspective of both the Orthodox clergy and Orthodox student leaders.⁶

Question 1. How many Orthodox students are enrolled in American universities and colleges?

There is no accurate and reliable source to answer this question. However, rough estimates can be made. According to the data from the "National Center for Education Statistics," the number of students attending American colleges and universities in 2018 is about 18,700,000 (foreign students excluded), or 5.7% of the entire U.S. population (325,700,000). According to the already referenced "U.S. Religious Landscape Study," Orthodox Christians constitute 0.5% of the U.S. total population; that is, about 1,630,000 persons.⁷ If we assume that the percentage of students among American Orthodox Christians is equal to the percentage of students in the U.S. general population, then 91,000 Orthodox students attend American colleges and universities. This figure, however, is likely to be an underestimate, because the "U.S. Religious Landscape Study" indicated that American Orthodox Christians have a higher percentage of persons with college and post-graduate degrees than the U.S. general population: 39% and 28% respectively. If we project the difference in educational attainments between the U.S. general population and American Orthodox Christians onto the above estimate for American Orthodox college students, then we obtain a figure of about 126,500 Orthodox students in American colleges and universities.

Question 2. How many Orthodox college students are actively involved in the life of the Church through their participation in the Orthodox Christian Fellowship?

The first study of Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) asked Orthodox spiritual advisors (clergy) serving in the local OCF chapters, "About how many students were in your OCF chapter in the last academic year?" The combined data on membership provided by the spiritual advisors in all OCF chapters indicated that nationwide about 1,800 students participate in the OCF. The same question was asked in the following study

⁶ The combined results from the first and second studies are presented in the report on the website of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA at:

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

⁷ It should be noted that this figure reflect the number of people who identify themselves as "Orthodox Christians," but are not necessarily involved in the Orthodox Church life on a regular basis. According to 2010 US Religious Census, the number of persons participating in the local parishes is about 800,000.

of the OCF student leaders. According to data reported by the student leaders in the local OCF chapters, about 1,350 students participate in all OCF chapters nationally.

Clearly, the actual number of Orthodox college students who are actively involved in the Church is very likely to be higher than either of these figures, because many of them may attend local parishes without being involved in OCF and some of them continue to live at home while studying in college (thus, continuing to attend at their home parishes). Still, the gap between the national OCF membership and our rough estimates of the entire number of American Orthodox college students offered in the previous question (91,000 as a very low estimate or 126,500 as a more likely figure) is huge and should be alarming for the national Orthodox Church leadership.

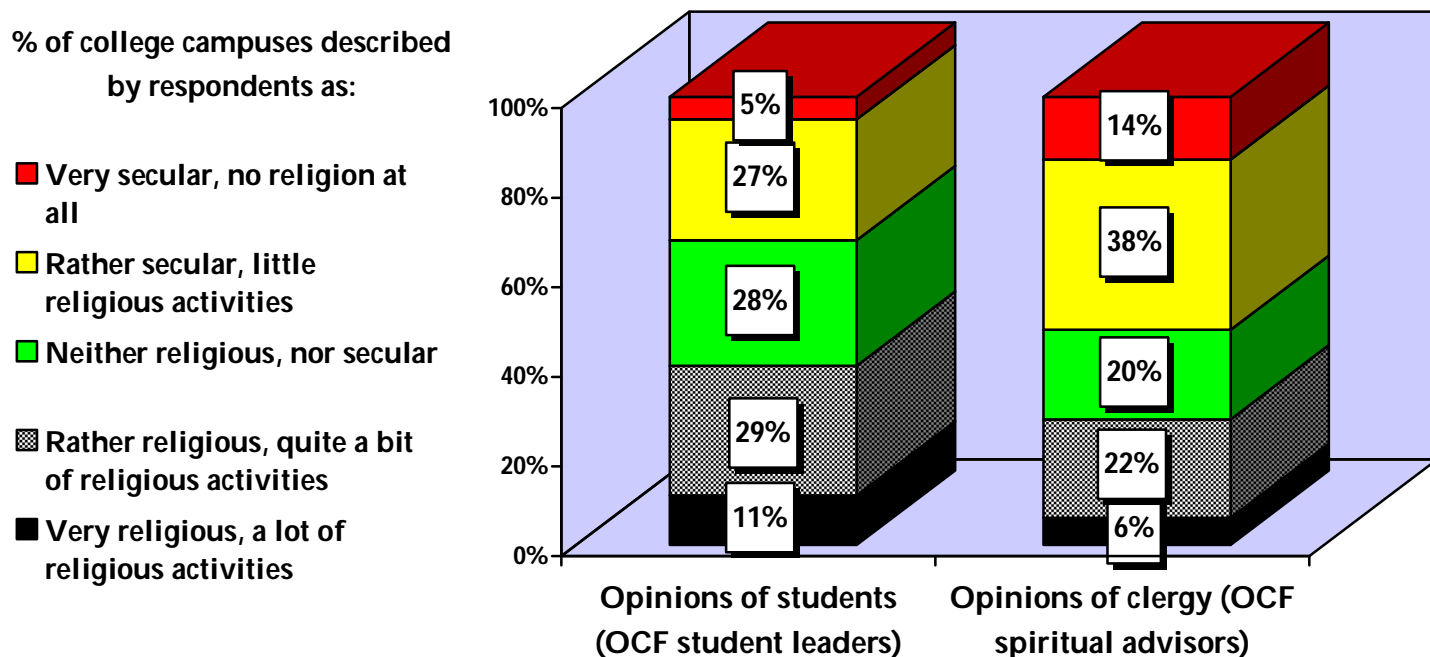
Question 3. What is the overall religious environment and how strong is the presence of religious organizations on the campuses of US colleges and universities? Are there any advantages or disadvantages of being an Orthodox student in colleges that are either "very religious" or "very secular"?

The impact of religious values and organizations on the lives of American colleges and universities varies greatly from campus to campus depending on each school's particular history, traditions, location, and whether it is a private or a state college.

The study, "Orthodox Christian Fellowship in the United States," asked respondents (Orthodox clergy serving as spiritual advisors and student leaders of OCF chapters), "Please, evaluate the general **religious environment** on the campus of this school on the five-point scale from 1 being "very secular/no religion at all" to 5 being "very religious / a lot of religious activities."

Notably, answering this question, the Orthodox students described overall religious environment in their colleges and universities somewhat differently than did the OCF clergy. Fig. 1 shows that only 28% of the OCF spiritual advisors were of the view that their schools were "Very religious" or "Rather religious" in comparison with 40% in case of Orthodox students. Vice versa, more than half (52%) of the OCF spiritual advisors described their schools' environments as either "Very secular" or "Rather secular," but only 32% of Orthodox students felt the same way.

Fig. 1 Differences in Opinions between OCF Student Leaders and OCF Spiritual Advisors about General Religious Environment on the Campuses of their Colleges and Universities



Why do more students describe the general environment of their schools as "religious," while more OCF spiritual advisors label the same campuses as "secular?" The possible explanation is that students and clergy have different personal "scales" in measuring strength of religious activities on a college campus. That is, what may seem as fairly intense religious life on the campus of a college from students' point of view can be perceived as "nothing special" from the standpoint of clergy.

Even more interesting was the fact that Orthodox students and their spiritual advisors have quite different opinions about "positives" and "negatives" of being either on a "very religious" or "very secular" campus. In short, in their comments, most Orthodox clergy voiced the opinion that being situated at either a "very secular" or "very religious" college environment can present difficulties and challenges for OCF chapters. For example, an OCF spiritual advisor from one "very secular" college in California commented: "Their secularism is very like a religion and wildly anti-Christian." And an OCF chaplain who serves at a campus on the opposite end of the spectrum, a "very religious" university in Texas, wrote: "Officially it is a secular, private university. Unofficially, most students and many teachers and staff belong to regionally prominent Protestant fundamentalist (Baptist, Church of Christ) or charismatic churches, and make no bones about saying so. They naturally expect you to do the same, and Orthodox are often under scrutiny to see if we 'qualify' as 'Christians'."

Unlike OCF spiritual advisors, OCF student leaders have mixed feelings about being either on “very religious” or “very secular” college campuses. Their comments show significant differences in students' opinions about the positives and negatives of both "secular" and "religious" college environments.

Some students attending “very religious” campuses are appreciative of the diversity and apparent cooperation among various religiously-based groups. For example: "While the campus is very religious, it also offers a huge diversity. For a campus of under 3,000, we have 27 religious organizations represented in Religious Council, which is the head of all of these organizations." However, other respondents from "very religious campuses" felt that the high intensity of religious expression on campus was perceived rather negatively by the majority of the students. A comment from one OCF chapter's president exemplifies such an opinion: "Many of the religious groups on our campus tend to be seen as annoying or invasive to other students."

The same applies to students' feelings about the advantages or disadvantages of "secular" campuses. For some of them, the “secular” campus means near-suppression of religious activities. For example: "I often feel as if bringing up religion on campus to other students is taboo." But other OCF student leaders on "secular" campuses did not believe that there was any conflict between the general environment of a school and various active religious student groups. As a student wrote: "While the University of 'X' is a secular university, there are many active student religious groups on our campus."

Question 4. Who “drives” the OCF chapters: OCF spiritual advisors (clergy) or the student leaders?

Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to ask the students themselves. The survey asked OCF student leaders two questions. The first was, "Which of the following best describes the present situation in your OCF chapter?" with the following possible responses:

- ❖ "Our OCF chapter is basically student-driven"
- ❖ "Our OCF chapter is primarily led and guided by the OCF spiritual advisor (chaplain)"

The follow-up question was, "Regardless of the present situation, in your opinion, who should be in charge of OCF programs and activities?" with the possible responses:

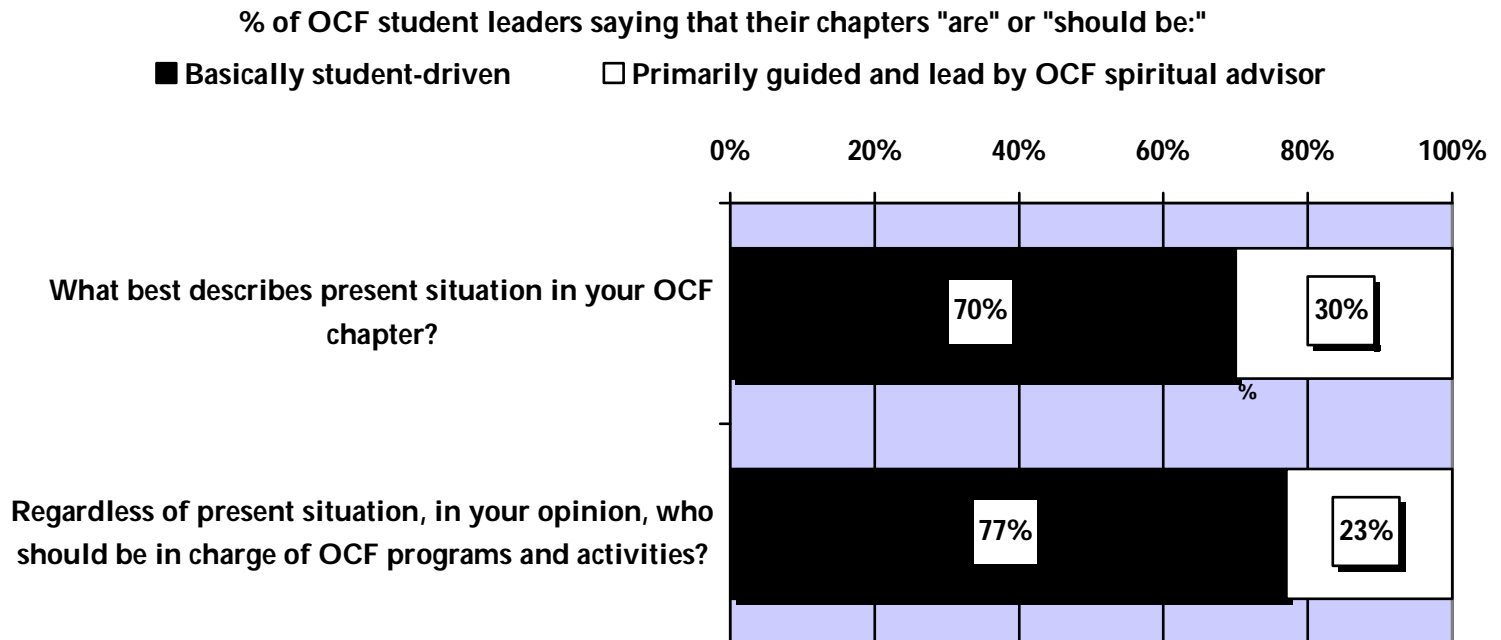
- ❖ "OCF should be basically student-driven"
- ❖ "OCF should be primarily led and guided by the OCF spiritual advisor (chaplain)"

Fig. 2 shows students' answers to these two questions.

Fig. 2 Opinions of OCF Student Leaders about Actual versus Desirable Leadership Models in their OCF Chapters:

Question 1: "What best describes the present situation in your OCF chapter?"

Question 2: "Regardless of the present situation, in your opinion, who should be in charge of OCF programs and activities?"



In summary, the vast majority (seven out of ten) OCF chapters in the United States are "student-driven," and only less than one-third of them are primarily led by OCF spiritual advisors. Further, Fig. 2 shows that even more OCF student leaders believe that OCF chapters **should be** "student driven"; i.e., in a number of chapters, student leaders desire to change their present "guided by OCF spiritual advisors" model and switch to the "student-driven" model.

Question 5. Where do Orthodox students – the members of OCF – gather for worship services? Are there any designated facilities available to them? Or do they need to go to one of the local parishes and – if "yes" – are the students happy with such situation?

One can think about advantages and disadvantages of both situations: when Orthodox students meet with their spiritual advisor and worship in some designated facility (either on or off campus), and when they participate in liturgical services at one (or several) of the nearby Orthodox parishes.

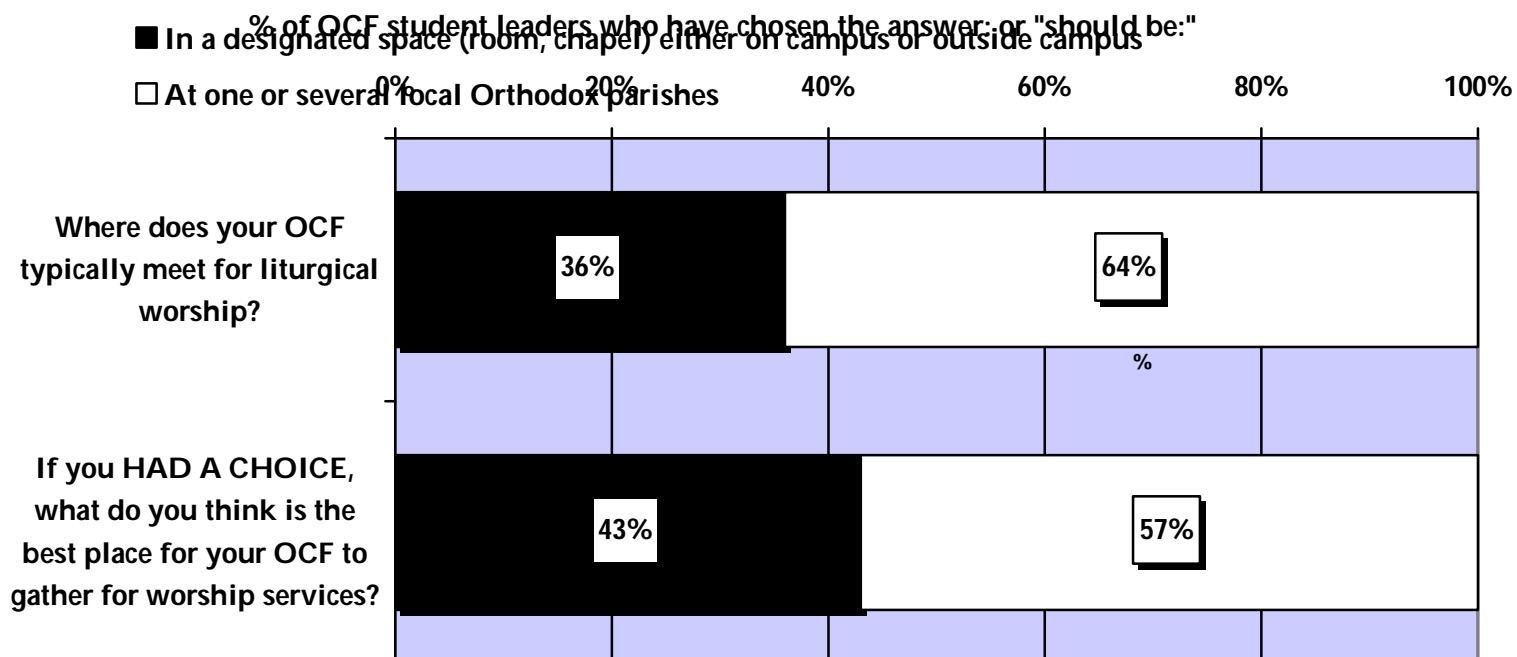
On the one hand, meeting and worshipping in the local Orthodox churches means that students are exposed to a more regular church life with the services following a full church calendar. In addition, participating at a local parish gives OCF chapter the possibility of building a strong relationship with the parish community and potentially engaging this parish's help and support. On the other hand, each parish community has its own established traditions and "ways of doing things" that may or may not be comfortable for the students. This is especially true when taking into account the fact that OCF members represent various Orthodox jurisdictions and may not be familiar with the style of worship (and possibly have "linguistic barriers") in the parishes that belong to jurisdictions other than their own. In simple terms, if the students meet in their designated facility they may feel more "in charge" of building their own Christian community, whereas in a local parish they will always be expected to follow this parish's spoken and unspoken rules.

The study "Orthodox Christian Fellowship in the United States" asked student leaders of OCF chapters two questions:

- ❖ "Where does your OCF typically meet for liturgical worship?"
- ❖ "If you HAD A CHOICE, what do you think is the best place for your OCF to gather for worship services?"

Fig. 3 shows the answers of students to both questions.

Fig. 3 Opinions of OCF Student Leaders about Actual versus Desirable Place Where Students Gather for Liturgical Services:



Only slightly more than one-third (36%) of the chapters have designated facilities that they can use for their worship gatherings. In the vast majority of cases (64%), OCF members do not have facilities of their own and meet for prayer and worship in local Orthodox parishes: either in the same parish (more typical situation) or at several parishes interchangeably (less typical scenario).

Comparing students' answers to questions about actual and desirable situations, one can see that somewhat more chapters would prefer to have their own worship space (43%) than is presently the case (36%). However, this "gap" between desirable and actual situations is very modest and basically students are satisfied with their current arrangements: the chapters with designated meeting-facilities are happy to have and use these facilities, whereas the chapters worshipping in the local parishes are also satisfied with their situation.

Question 6. What exactly do students do in their OCF chapters? Are they satisfied with their chapters' programs and activities?

The variety and content of OCF programs vary greatly from chapter to chapter. At the same time, all OCF activities can be conventionally divided in five broad categories:

- ❖ Worship, prayer and liturgical life
- ❖ Orthodox Christian education and learning about their faith
- ❖ Social fellowship and activities
- ❖ Religious outreach and evangelical ministries
- ❖ Social outreach and service to the community

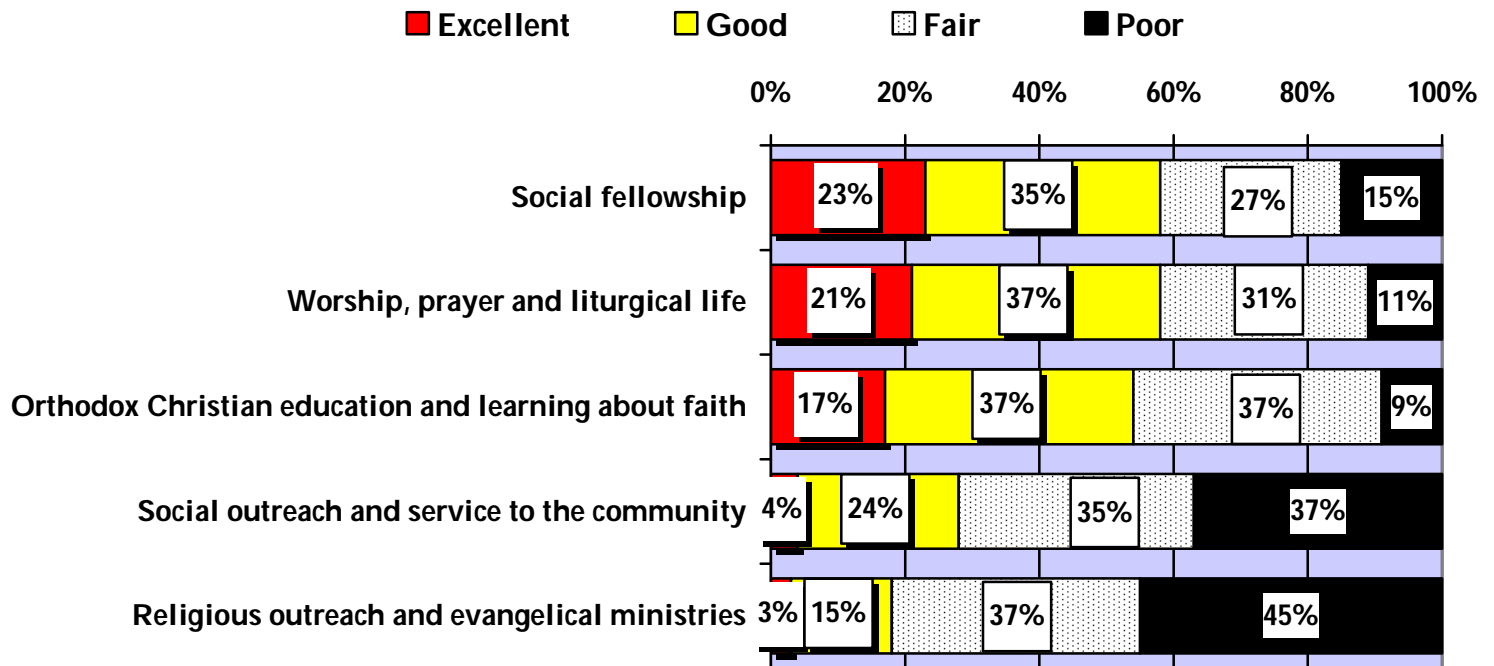
The study, "Orthodox Christian Fellowship in the United States," asked OCF student leaders: "Please, evaluate how **successful** this OCF chapter is with regard to five different areas of activities." The respondents had four options to evaluate each area: "excellent," "good," "fair," or "poor."

Fig. 4 shows that activities associated with "Social fellowship," "Worship, prayer and liturgical life" and "Orthodox Christian education and learning about faith" generally work quite well in most OCF chapters. More than half of OCF student leaders evaluated these types of activities in their chapters as "good" or "excellent."

Fig. 4 Evaluation of Quality of Various OCF Activities by Student Leaders of OCF Chapters:

"Please, evaluate how *successful* this OCF chapter is with regard to five different areas of activities"

% OCF chapters evaluating their programs and activities as:

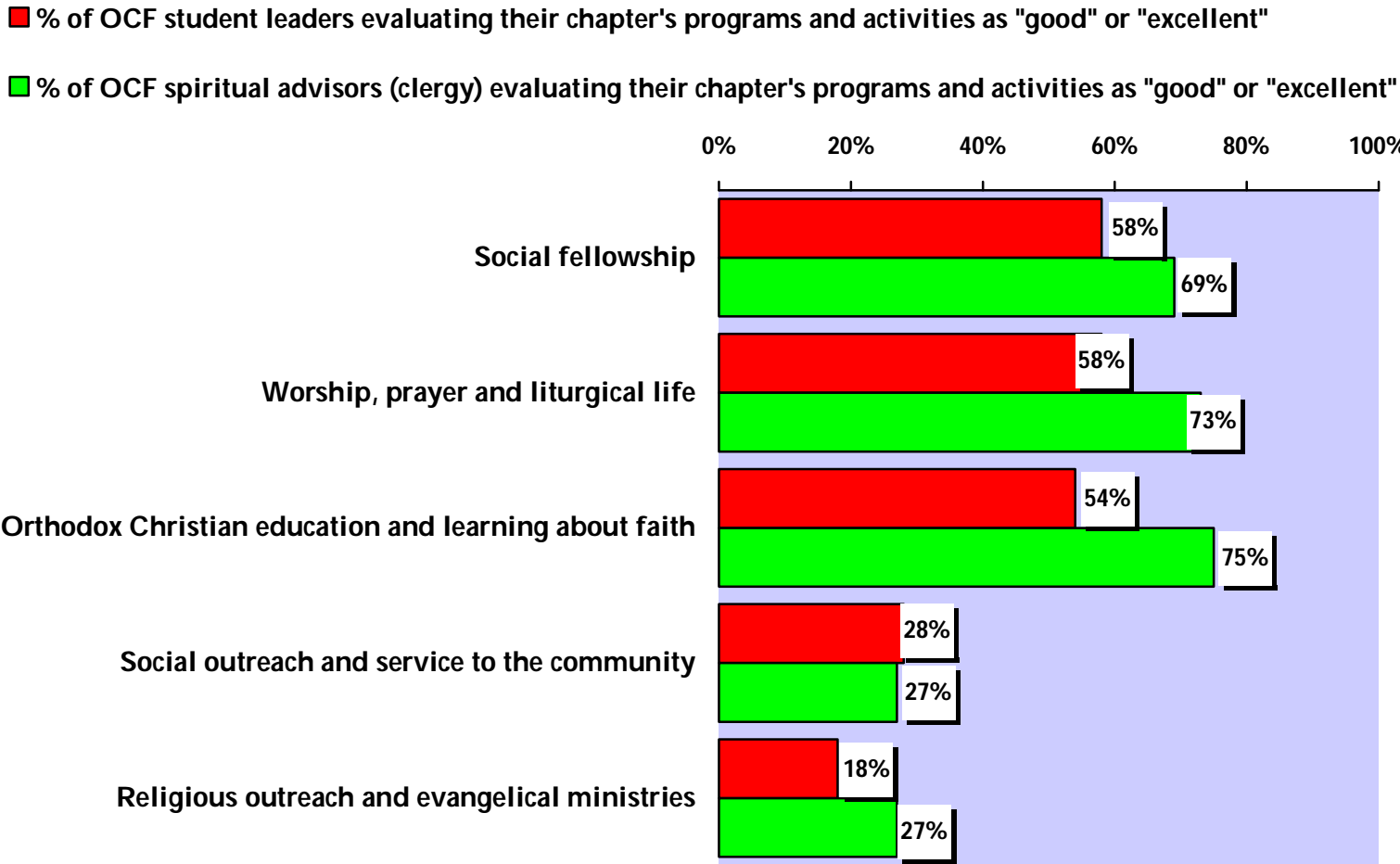


What does not work in the vast majority of OCF chapters are "Religious outreach and evangelical ministries" and "Social outreach and service to community." Only 28% of OCF student leaders thought that their chapters had "good" or "excellent" programs of "Social outreach and service to the community" and only 18% of them felt the same way about "Religious outreach and evangelical ministries."

The same question was offered to the clergy serving as spiritual advisors to OCF chapters. Fig. 5 allows us to compare the opinions of Orthodox priests and students about what works and what does not work. The most important observation is that, with the exception of "Social outreach and service to the community," OCF chaplains gave significantly higher valuations to their chapters' programs and activities than did OCF student leaders. That is, significantly more clergy than students said that various programs and activities in their chapters were "good" or "excellent."

Fig. 5 Opinions of OCF Students Leaders versus OCF Spiritual Advisors (Clergy) about Quality of Various OCF Activities in their Chapters:

"Please, evaluate how *successful* this OCF chapter is with regard to five different areas of activities"



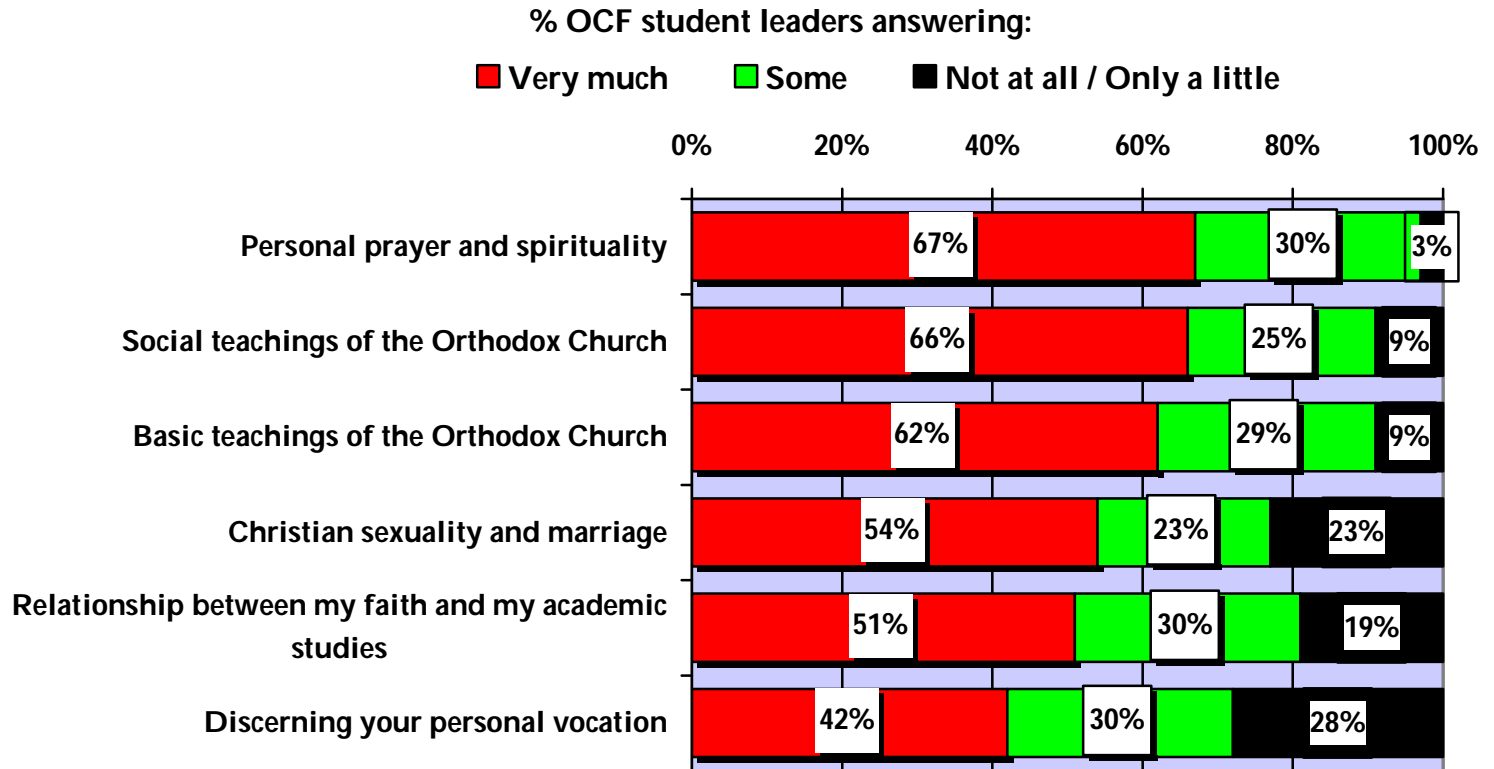
The differences in opinions between students and OCF spiritual advisors about the quality of OCF activities is especially great in how they evaluate those programs related to "Orthodox Christian education and learning about the faith." Three-quarters (75%) of OCF chaplains believe that "Orthodox Christian education and learning about the faith" in their chapters are "good" or "excellent," but only 54% of OCF student leaders feel the same way. This fact is especially alarming, because study data tell us that the students want to learn more about the Church and Orthodox faith. The study asked OCF student leaders: "How interested would you be in learning about the following topics:"

- ❖ "Personal prayer and spirituality"
- ❖ "Social teachings of the Orthodox Church"
- ❖ "Basic teachings of the Orthodox Church"
- ❖ "Christian sexuality and marriage"
- ❖ "Relationship between my faith and academic studies"

❖ "Discerning your personal vocation"

Fig. 6 shows that the students are especially interested in knowing more about two subjects: "Personal prayer and spirituality" and "Social teachings of the Orthodox Church." Two-thirds (66-67%) of the respondents said that they are "very much" interested in learning about these subjects.

Fig. 6 Personal Interest of OCF Student Leaders to Learn More about Various Subjects:
 "How interested would you be in learning about the following topics?"



Question 7. What are the major needs and concerns of the OCF chapters in American colleges and universities?

The study, "Orthodox Christian Fellowship in the United States," asked OCF student leaders: "In your opinion, what is **most needed** for this OCF chapter to strengthen and to grow?" The questionnaire offered the students ten items to consider. With regard to each item, they could respond, "this is very urgent for us," "this would be helpful," or, "we are basically satisfied with this." Fig. 7 shows these ten needs in descending order of urgency: from those needs for which more students said, "this would be helpful" or "this is very urgent for us," to those for which more students replied, "we are basically satisfied with this."

Fig. 7 Needs of the Local OCF Chapters: "In your opinion, what is *most needed* for this OCF chapter to strengthen and to grow?"

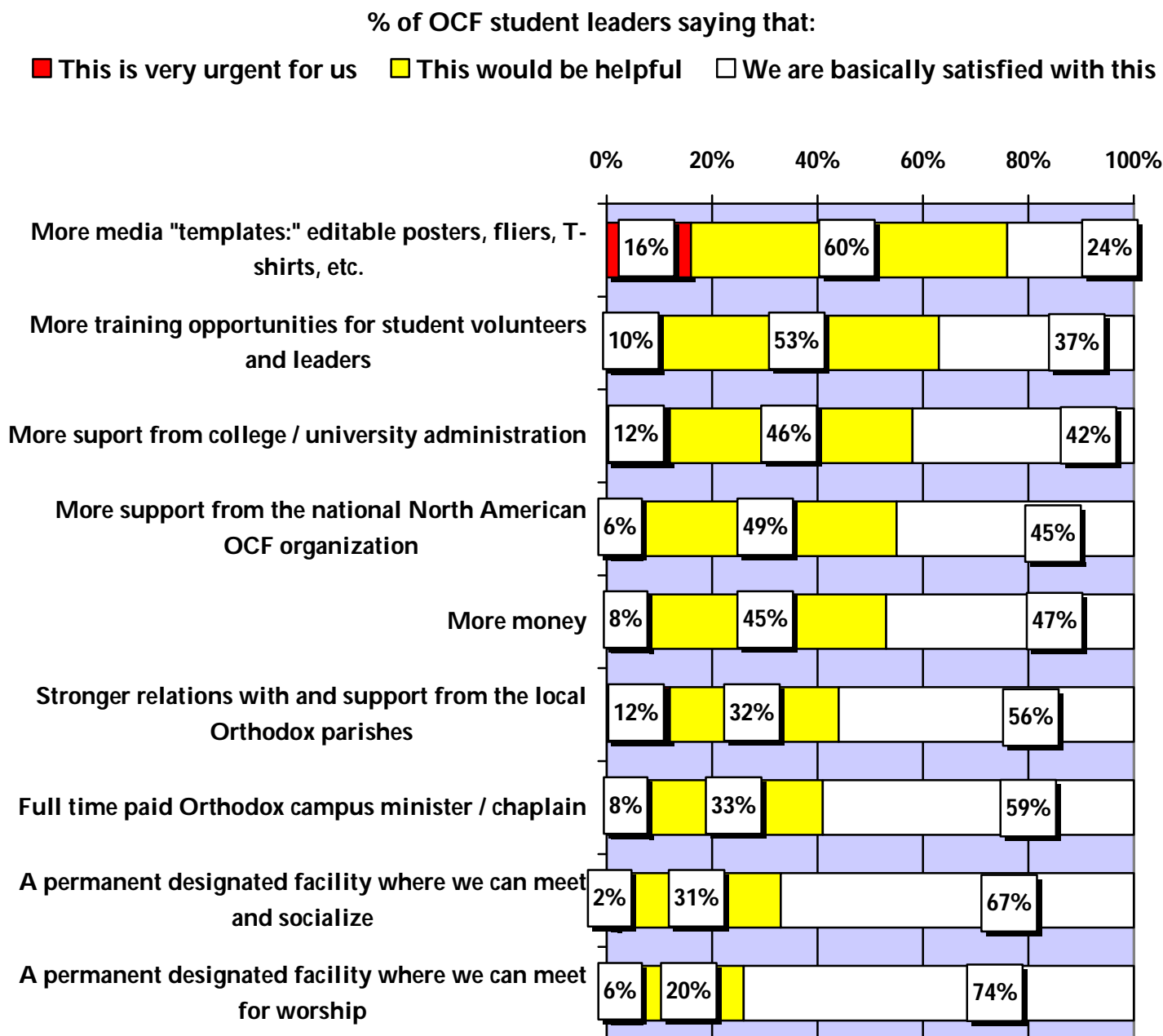


Fig. 7 shows that there are five **most urgent** needs that were described by more than half of OCF chapters as "this will be helpful" or "this is very urgent for us." These five needs are:

- ❖ More media "templates:" editable posters, fliers, T-shirts, etc. (84% of chapters reported "this will be helpful" or "this is very urgent for us")
- ❖ More training opportunities for student volunteers and leaders (63%)
- ❖ More support from the college/university administration (58%)
- ❖ More support from the national OCF organization (55%)
- ❖ More money (53%)

Out of these five most urgent needs, three are the needs that American Orthodox Church leadership can and should help with:

- ❖ More media "templates:" editable posters, fliers, T-shirts, etc.;
- ❖ More training opportunities for student volunteers and leaders;
- ❖ More support from the national OCF organization

The same question – about the needs of the OCF chapters – was offered to the Orthodox priests who serve as spiritual advisors in the OCF chapters. Fig. 8 shows that there are certain differences in clergy' and students' opinions.

Fig. 8 Comparison of Opinions of OCF Student Leaders and OCF Spiritual Advisors (Clergy) about "What is *most needed* for this OCF chapter to strengthen and to grow?"

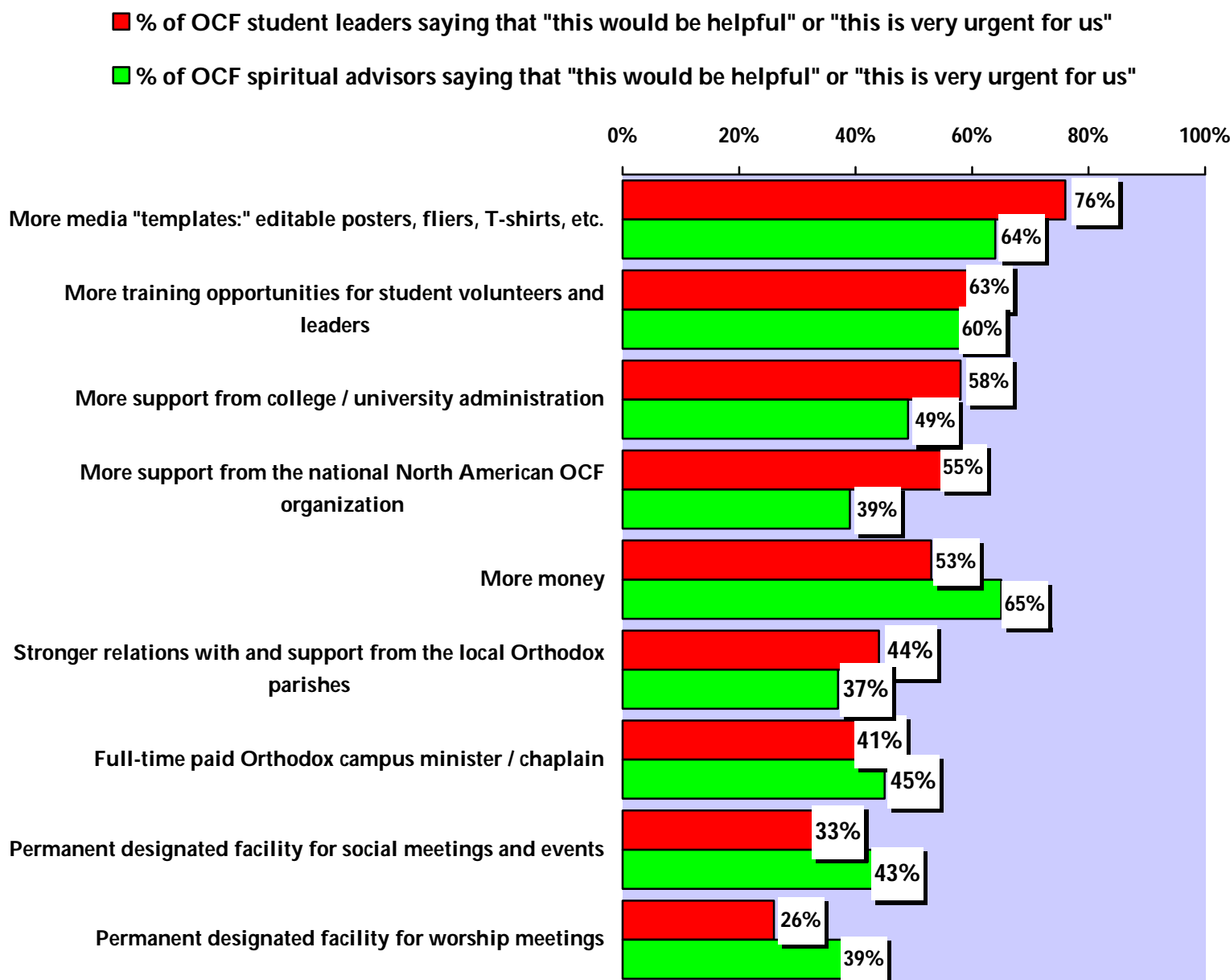


Fig. 8 shows that OCF spiritual advisors are significantly less concerned than students about assistance in two areas: "More media "templates:" editable posters, fliers, T-shirts, etc." and "More support from the national OCF organization." However, the clergy are significantly more concerned than OCF student leaders about the need to have "more money" for their OCF chapters.

Question 8. Is there anything noteworthy about the personal beliefs of Orthodox students: their opinions and attitudes towards different aspects in the life of the Orthodox Church?

It might be only a social stereotype, but clearly for many the words "being a college student" are associated with the period of life when people are more open to new ideas, experimental, willing to try new things, and amenable to change. By the same token, this is also the time when young adults tend to ask difficult questions and are more skeptical about what their elders would think are "unshakeable" beliefs, rules, and traditions. Is this true about American Orthodox students and, especially, is this true about their attitudes about Orthodox Church life? Again, our data are limited to only those students who are actively involved in the OCF chapters, but nevertheless they offer some interesting insights.

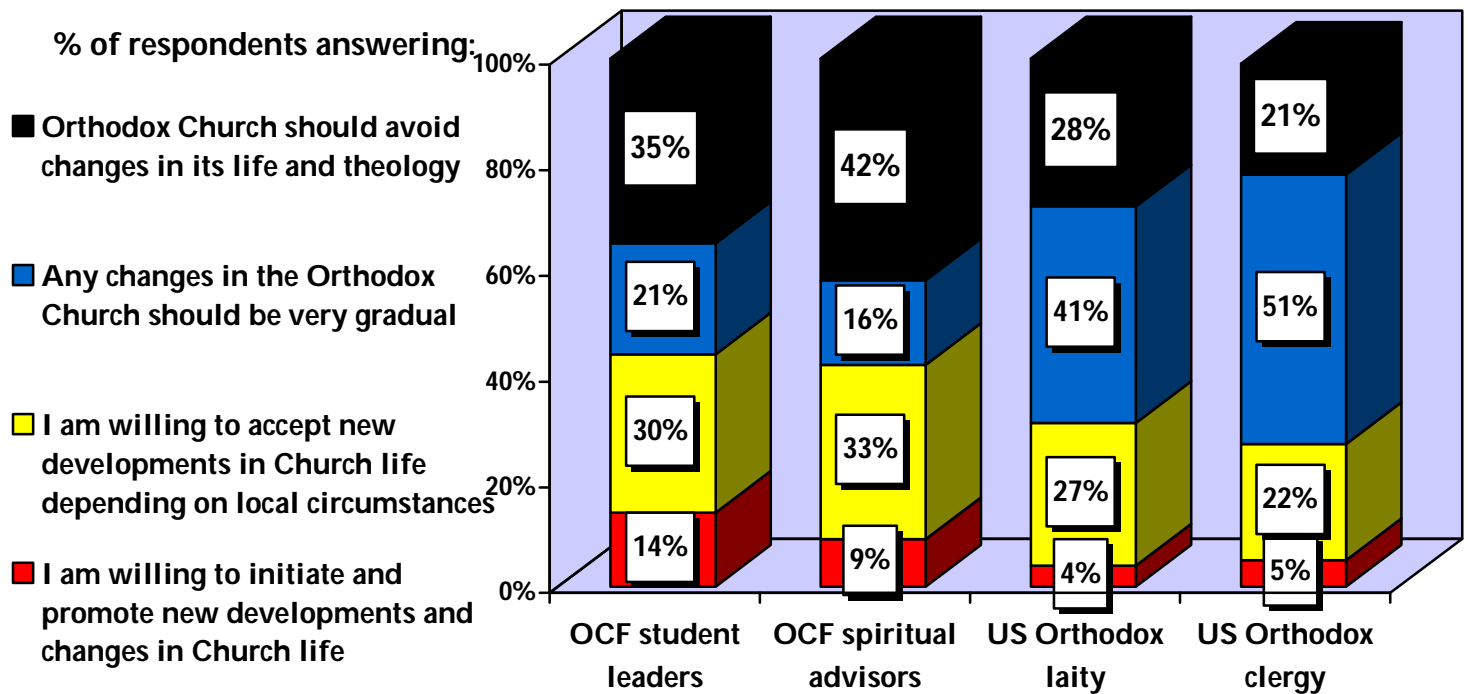
In order to ascertain the opinions of the students about innovations and changes in the Orthodox Church, we used the question drawn from a model proposed by Rev. Dr. Anton C. Vrame.⁸ In short, Dr. Vrame has suggested four types of "orthopraxy" - the way Orthodox Christians live out their religious beliefs and behave socially while being influenced by their religious convictions. These four types of orthopraxy are based on the degree of willingness of Orthodox Christians to accept or reject changes and innovations in the life of the Church. The study, "Orthodox Christian Fellowship in the United States," asked OCF student leaders, "When you think about your overall approach to church life, which answer best describes you?" The students were given four choices to describe their position as:

- ❖ The Orthodox Church should avoid changes in its life and theology
- ❖ Any changes in the Church should be very gradual
- ❖ I am willing to accept new developments in Church life depending on local circumstances
- ❖ I am willing to initiate and promote new developments in the Church

⁸ Vrame, Anton, 2008. "Four Typologies of Orthopraxy in America." In *Thinking Through Faith: Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*. A.Papanikolau and E.Prodromou, ed., Crestwood, New York, St.Vladimir's Seminary Press.

This question was also offered to OCF spiritual advisors (clergy). Furthermore, the same question was asked in the national studies of Orthodox Church lay members, "The Orthodox Church Today,"⁹ and of US Orthodox clergy, "Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America."¹⁰ Therefore, we have a unique opportunity to compare the opinions of Orthodox students about changes in the Church with the responses of their OCF spiritual advisors, their elders (Orthodox adult laity), and American Orthodox clergy in general. See Fig. 9.

Fig. 9 When you think about your overall approach to church life, which answer best describes you? (%)



Two important observations can be made from Fig. 9. First, compared to US Orthodox clergy in general and American Orthodox laity, more OCF student leaders are "reform-oriented." Indeed, 44% of OCF student leaders chose the answers, "I am willing to initiate and promote new developments in Church life," or "I am willing to accept new developments in Church life depending on local circumstances." in comparison with 27% among US Orthodox clergy in general and 31% among American Orthodox laity.

But the second observation is even more interesting. Although there is a slight difference between the opinions of the students and their OCF spiritual advisors (42% "reform-oriented") about changes and innovations in the church life, nevertheless their positions are much more similar to each other than they are to the views expressed by US Orthodox priests in general and by American Orthodox laity. In other words, Fig. 9 suggests

⁹ Full report on this study is available at www.orthodoxreality.org

¹⁰ Full report on this study is available at www.orthodoxreality.org

that the clergy who have chosen to be OCF spiritual advisors are not "typical average" Orthodox priests: rather, they are persons whose personal attitudes are closer to the students' views and opinions.

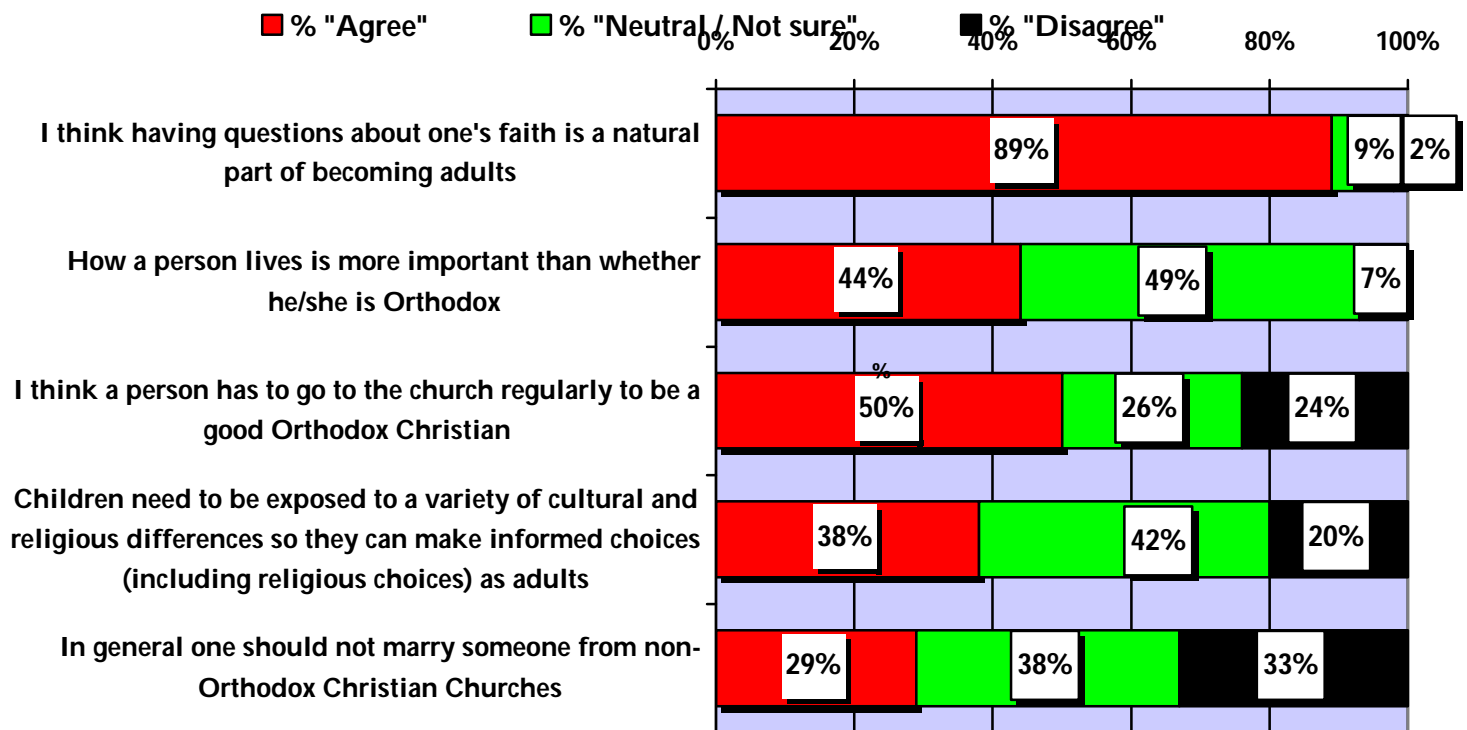
In order to learn more about the moral and religious attitudes of the OCF student leaders the study asked whether they agree or disagree with following five statements:

- "I think having questions about one's faith is a natural part of becoming adults"
- "How a person lives is more important than whether he/she is Orthodox"
- "I think a person has to go to church regularly to be a good Orthodox Christian"
- "Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults"
- "In general, one should not marry someone from non-Orthodox Christian Churches"

Fig. 10 shows students' opinions about these five statements.

Fig. 10 Please indicate to which extent you AGREE OR DISAGREE with the following statements

% of OCF student leaders agreeing or disagreeing with each statement:



The first statement, "I think having questions about one's faith is a natural part of becoming adult," has received almost unanimous approval among the OCF student leaders: nearly nine out of ten agreed with this

statement. That is, Orthodox students are firm believers that it is absolutely normal to raise difficult questions about one's faith and to explore one's religiosity and beliefs.

The second statement, "How a person lives is more important than whether he / she is Orthodox," explores the idea that a broad range of life choices are more meaningful than specific religious beliefs. A significant number of the students (44%) supported this idea and very few of them (7%) disagreed. However, the largest group of students (49% - almost half of them) were unsure in their responses.

Just half (50%) of the students agreed with the third statement: "I think a person has to go to church regularly to be a good Orthodox Christian." That is, only half of them take seriously the basic requirement of the regular church attendance. Considering the likelihood that OCF student leaders are more church-engaged than most of their peers, we can safely assume that even fewer "ordinary" Orthodox students think that regular church attendance is important.

The opinions of the students about last two statements, "In general, one should not marry someone from non-Orthodox Christian Churches" and, "Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults," are probably good indicators of how they will approach their future family lives.

The statement, "Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices (including religious choices) as adults," speaks to the idea that children should be familiar with and experience for themselves the cultural and religious "mosaic" of American society. Similarly to the statement, "How a person lives is more important than whether he/she is Orthodox," significantly more students were in favor of this idea (38%) than were opposed to it (20%). Again, like the statement, "How a person lives is more important than whether he/she is Orthodox," the largest group of students (42%) was unable to clearly formulate their opinion.

Fig. 10 shows that the question of intermarriage appears to be the most difficult and divisive for the students. A similar percentage of them agreed (29%) and disagreed (33%) with the statement "In general, one should not marry someone from non-Orthodox Christian Churches." The largest proportion of students (38%) were not sure about their personal position concerning intermarriages.

Out of five statements presented to the student leaders, three were also offered to their spiritual advisors (clergy). These three statements were:

- "How a person lives is more important than whether he/she is Orthodox"
- "In general, one should not marry someone from non-Orthodox Christian Churches"
- "Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults"

See Fig. 11a, 11b and 11c.

Fig. 11a Opinions of OCF Student Leaders versus OCF Spiritual Advisors about the Statement "How a person lives is more important than whether he or she is Orthodox."

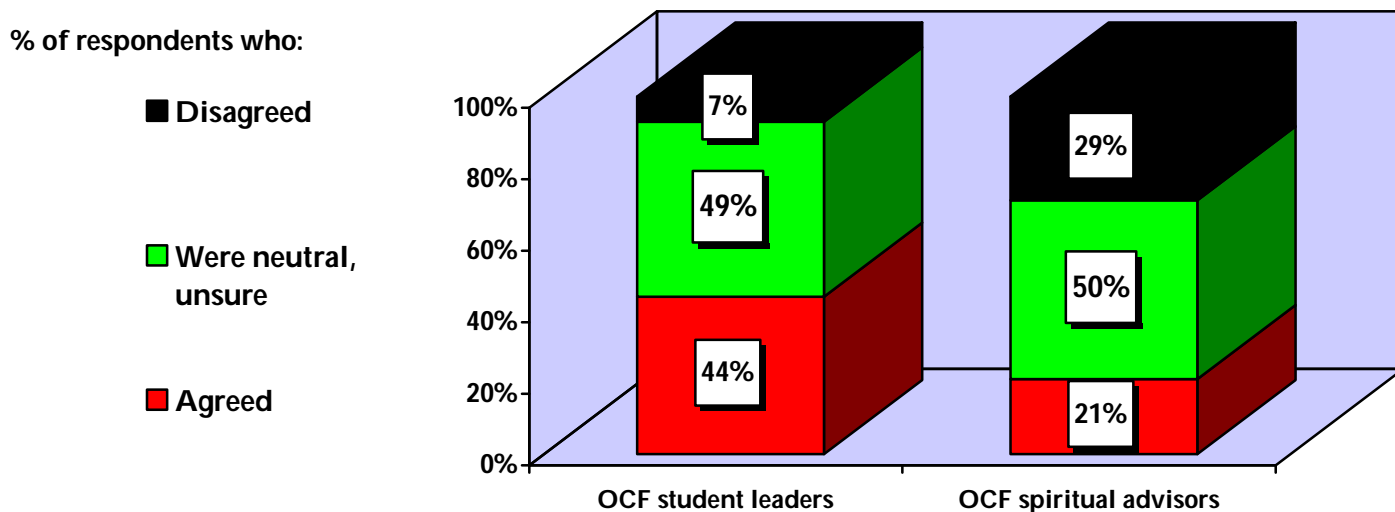


Fig. 11b Opinions of OCF Student Leaders versus OCF Spiritual Advisors about the Statement "Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults."

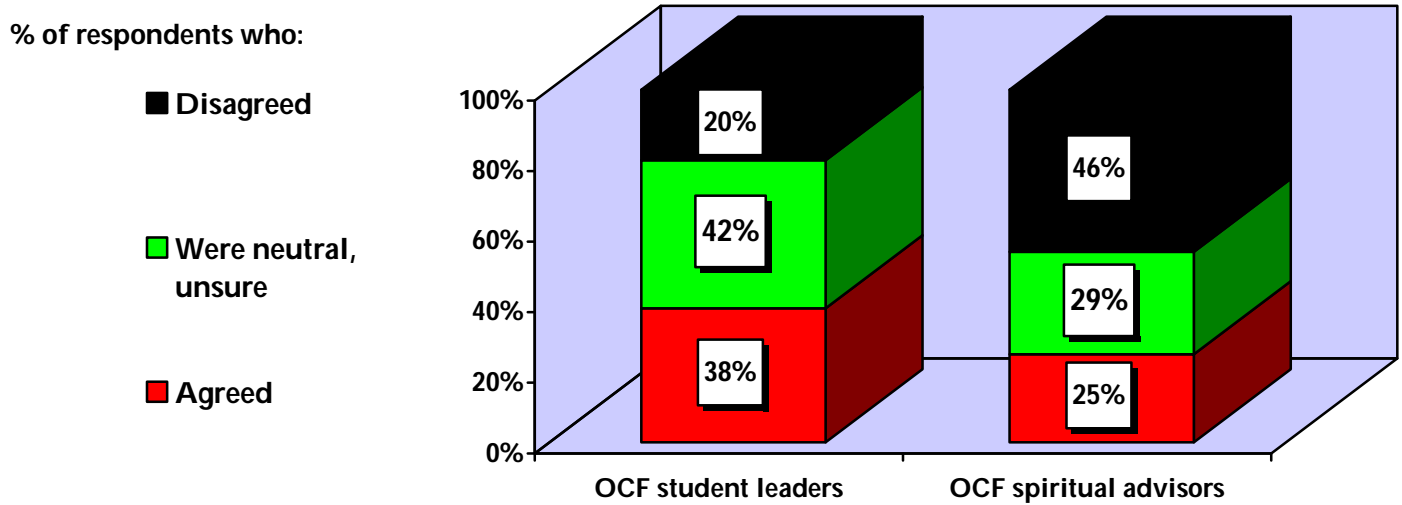


Fig. 11c Opinions of OCF Student Leaders versus OCF Spiritual Advisors about the Statement "In general, one should not marry someone from non-Orthodox Christian Churches"

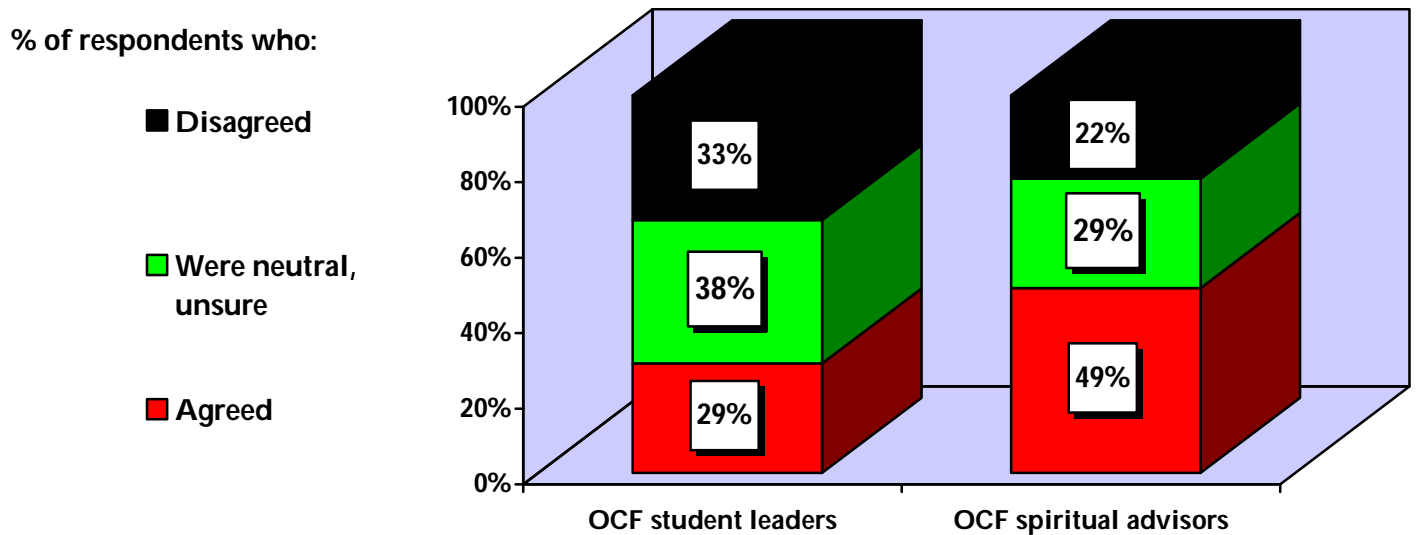


Fig. 11a, 11b, and 11c lead to two observations. The first is that the OCF student leaders are more "liberal" (or flexible) in relating Orthodox beliefs to their personal lives than the OCF spiritual advisors. Indeed, compared to OCF spiritual advisors, more students agreed to the statements: "How a person lives is more important than whether he/she is Orthodox" and "Children need to be exposed to a variety of cultural and religious differences so they can make informed choices as adults." On the contrary, many fewer OCF student leaders than OCF spiritual advisors agreed with the statement "In general, one should not marry someone from non-

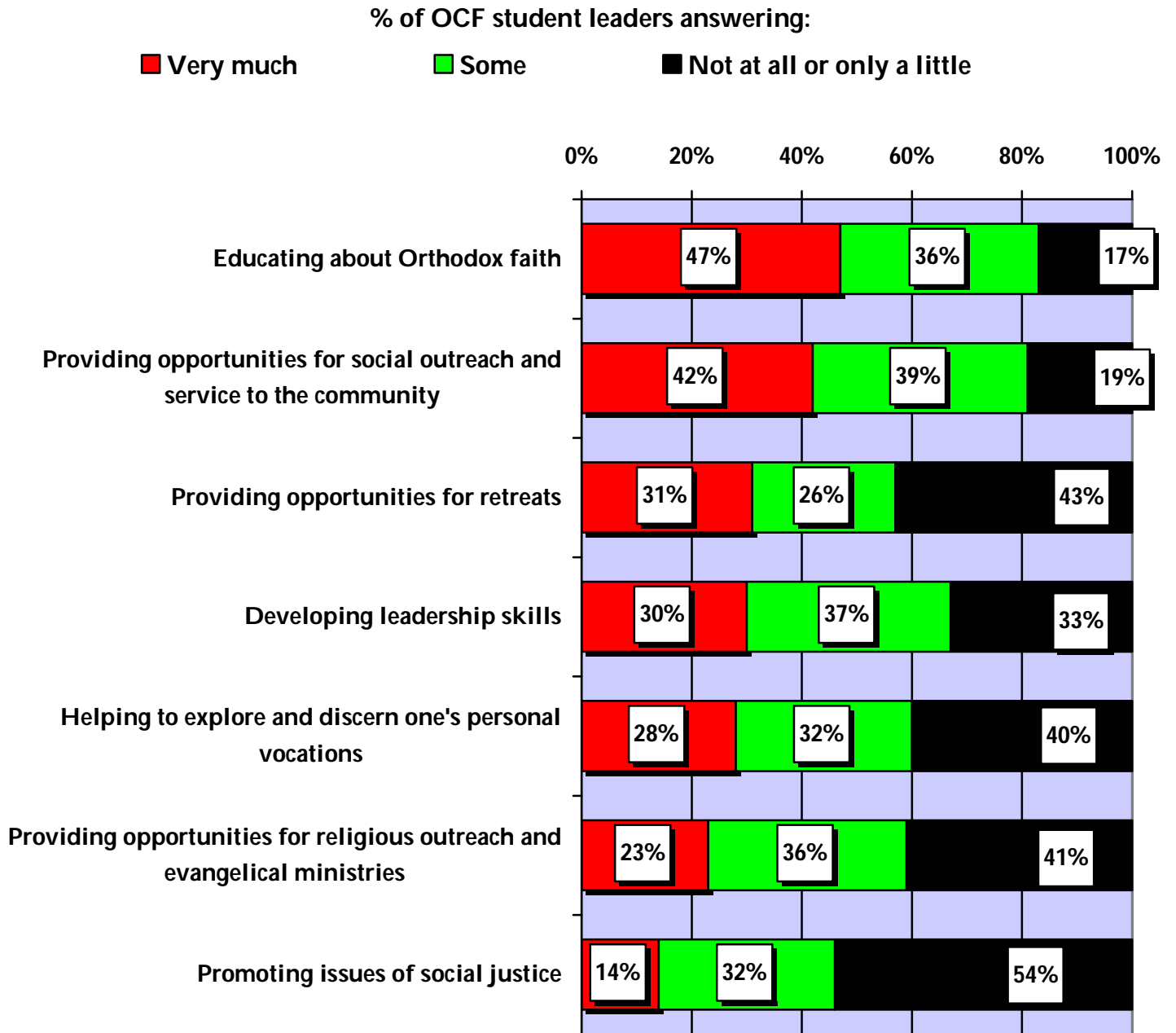
Orthodox Christian Churches." Interdenominational marriages among Christians were thus more acceptable to the students than to their clergy advisors.

The second observation is that compared to their spiritual advisors, more Orthodox students are "Neutral or unsure" about issues dealing with family matters: the questions of intermarriages and exposure of children to cultural and religious diversity. This is understandable. The students are still in the very initial stages of their adulthood, and a vast majority of them are still single. Thus, most of them were probably not presented yet with the actual need to make these choices.

Question 9. What are the reasons that attract Orthodox students to join OCF chapters?

Clearly, OCF offers students opportunities for fellowship and having a good time together. But besides the social aspects, what else is important for Orthodox students' participation in OCF? The questionnaire asked: "How much were you attracted to OCF by each of the following?" The respondents were given seven items to consider. With regard to each item, they could respond "not at all," "only a little," "some," and "very much." See Fig. 12 on the next page.

Fig. 12 Reasons and Motives for Students to Participate in OCF:
"How much were you attracted to OCF by each of the following?"



The top two reasons that attract students to OCF are opportunities to learn more about the Orthodox faith and to become engaged into social outreach and service to the community. On the opposite end are two factors that seem to be relatively unimportant for students' decision to join OCF: "promoting issues of social justice" and "opportunities for religious outreach and evangelical ministries."

Question 10. How do Orthodox parishes benefit from their work and cooperation with OCF chapters?

This question may appear a little strange, because normally people think about how Orthodox parishes **help** OCF chapters. And, indeed, in many ways OCF chapters depend on support from the parishes. Nearly all spiritual advisors in OCF chapters are the priests whose primary responsibility is to serve the local parish community. They work with OCF chapters in their spare time and typically without any monetary compensation. In question 5, we also discussed the fact that nearly two-thirds (64%) of OCF chapters do not have any designated facilities for their liturgical services and meet for prayer and worship at the local parishes. In addition, many US Orthodox parishes support OCF chapters financially and sponsor their events and activities. Nevertheless, the 2017 national study, "Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America: A Parish Life Study"¹¹ revealed that a parish's work with OCF could also have positive impact on the parish community. More specifically, this study found that a parish's involvement with an OCF chapter and that parish's success in serving its own young adult members go hand in hand with each other. That is, compared to other parishes, those parishes that ARE involved with local OCF chapters:

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

Fig. 13a, 13b, and 13c illustrate this finding.

¹¹ Conducted by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA. The study report is available at: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/assets/files/studies/2018-01-OrthodoxChurchesIn21CenturyAmericaFinal.pdf>

Fig. 13a Parish's Involvement with Local OCF Chapters Also Means More Young Adult Parishioners

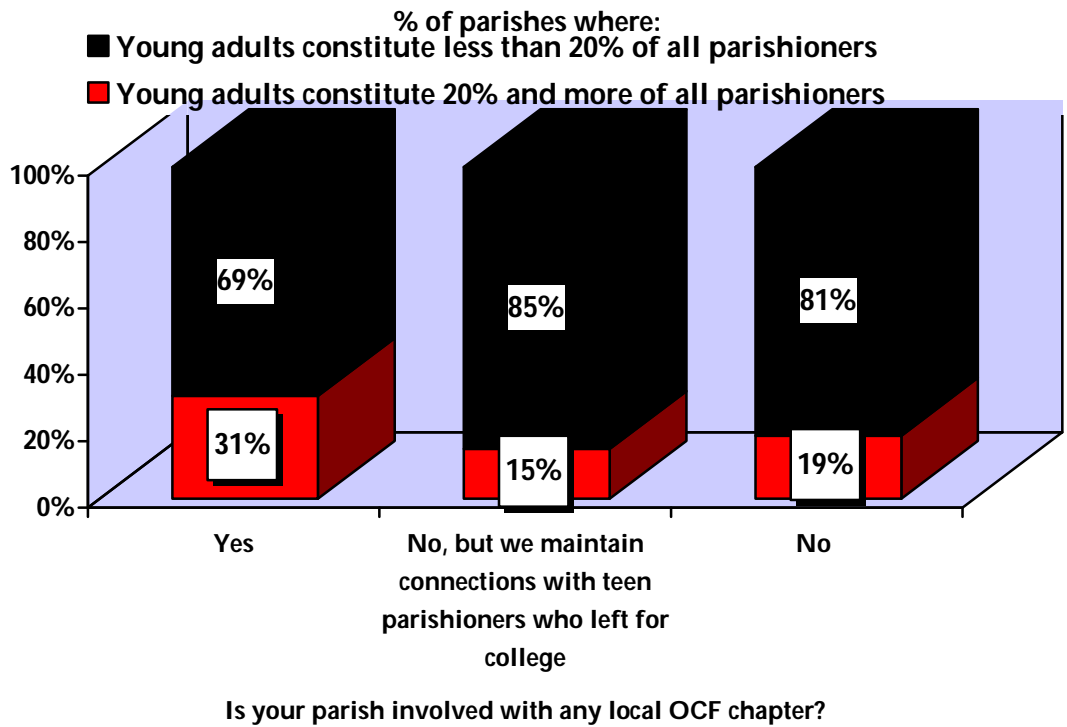


Fig. 13b Parish's Involvement with Local OCF Chapters Attracts More Young Adults into a Parish

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

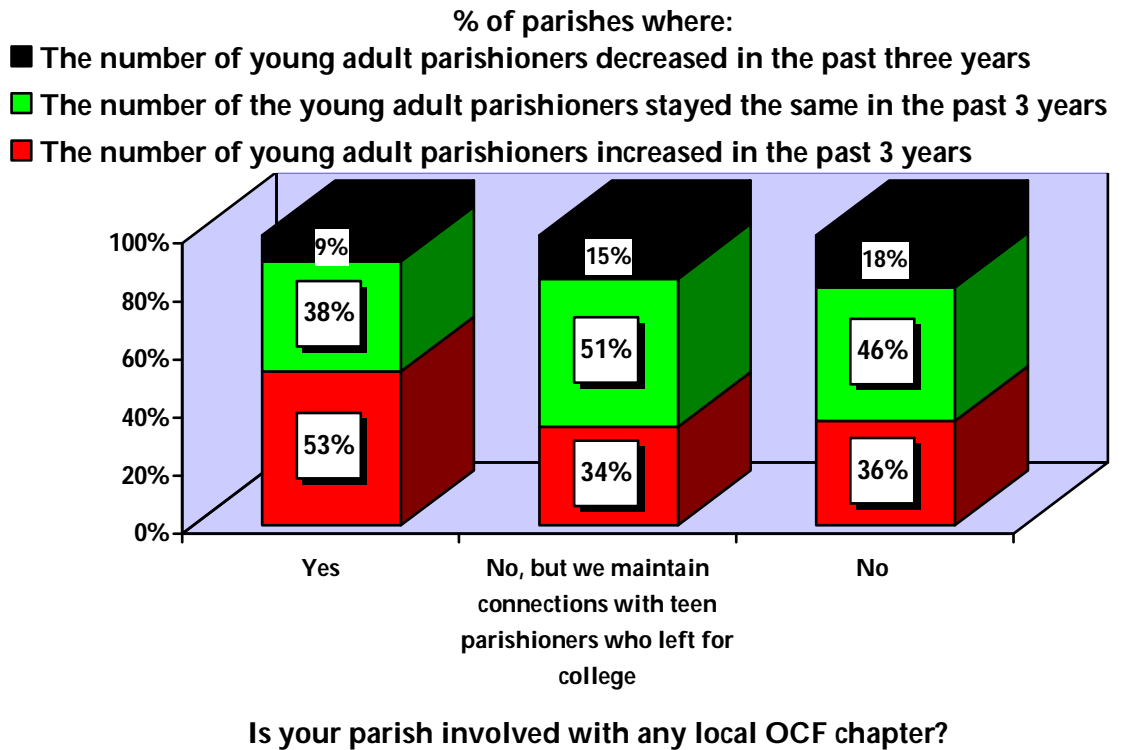
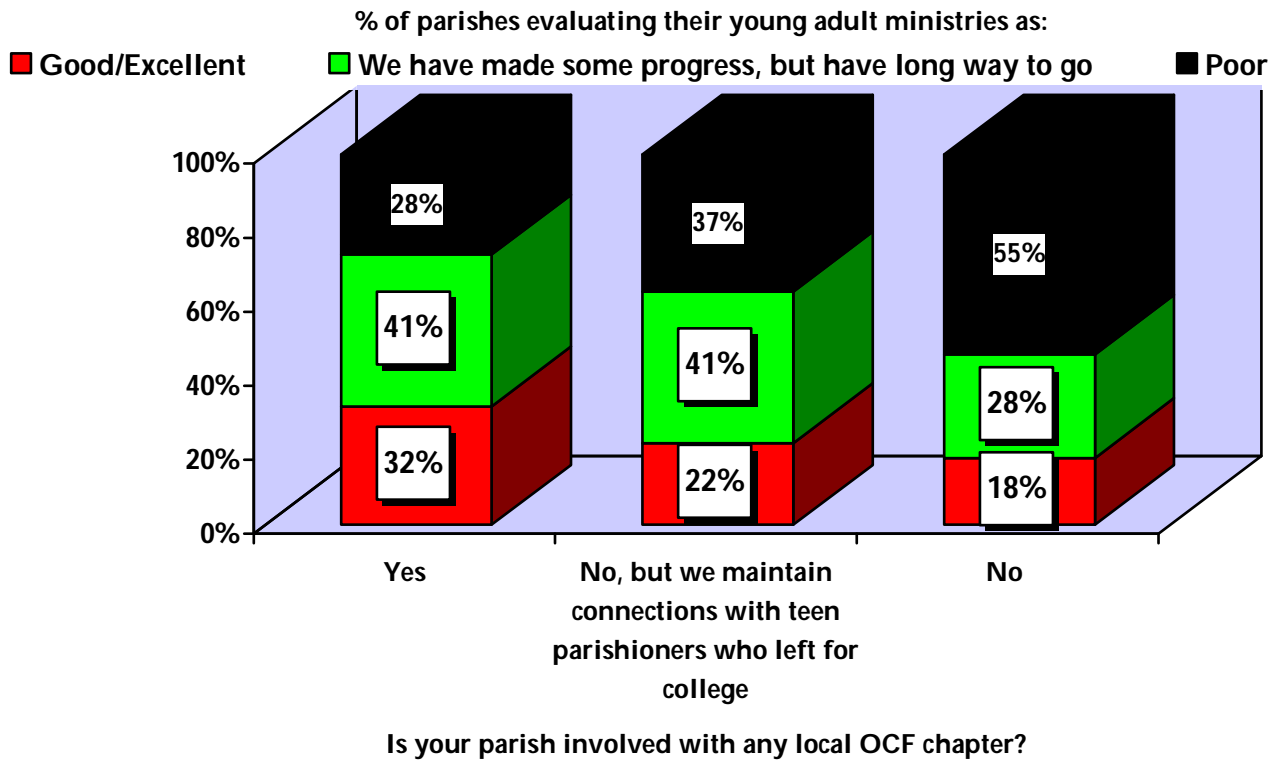


Fig. 13c Parish's Involvement with OCF Chapters Helps to Improve Parish's Young Adult Ministries

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



Clearly, it is equally likely that:

- ❖ A parish's involvement with OCF could have a positive influence on young adults' presence among parishioners and the quality of the parish's young adult ministries
- ❖ A strong presence of young adult parishioners and good young adult ministries could result in that parish's decision to work with the OCF chapter

The bottom line is simple: a parish's success in serving its young adult parishioners and parish's involvement with local OCF chapters are related to and reinforce each other. And in either case, it is clear that the priest's active commitment to engaging young adults as well as the broader parish membership must play a key role in making both of these activities successful.