

The Servant Parish Project: Strengthening Our Ministry to the Poor and Suffering

Father Theophan Whitfield

Chapter 5 Attitudes and Experiences of Orthodox Christians

1. *Overview of the chapter*
2. *Purposes and procedures*
3. *Participant profiles*
4. *Trends in the data*
5. *Conclusions*

1. Overview of the chapter

To this point we have surveyed a range of biblical, patristic, and theological sources that deal directly with providing relief to the poor and suffering. In this chapter we will explore the outlooks and experiences of contemporary Orthodox Christians in North America concerning compassionate ministries to those in need. Data describing these outlooks and experiences were collected using an IRB-approved survey designed to support the aims of the research project. After describing the purposes and procedures of the survey, we will explore the responses and draw a few conclusions.

2. Purposes and procedures

A survey for the present Servant Parish Project was designed to explore and quantify the following among Orthodox Christians:

- (1) basic attitudes toward social action,
- (2) sources of personal beliefs about social action, and
- (3) actual and potential sources of motivation for increasing personal involvement in social action.

In addition to these three purposes, the survey also provided an opportunity to harvest ministry ideas and to collect additional local stories of ministry successes and failures. A copy of the survey questions is included as Appendix 1.

The Servant Parish Project survey was published using the Google Forms platform at a website deducted to the research project: www.servantparish.org. Participation in the survey was advertised by reaching out to a wide variety of Orthodox social media sites. On those sites, the project was described and a direct link to Google Forms survey was provided. An attempt

was made to advertise the project to a wide range of Orthodox audiences. All jurisdictions were targeted, as were all political preferences, ranging outward from more traditional to more progressive.¹

Using this method, it was not possible to produce a random sample of adult Orthodox Christians in North America, but at this time such a sample is nearly impossible to achieve, owing to the many practical limitations that would be impossible to avoid. Also, the population of adult Orthodox Christians in North America is not well-defined, and neither is there anything like a comprehensive list or database of names from which sampling might be conducted. The survey, therefore, is best described as a (non-random) sample taken from the population of English-speaking Orthodox Christians who (1) have access to social media, and (2) are interested in both learning and sharing their ideas about ministry to the poor and suffering. The sample is self-selecting, in the sense that each participant chose to be a member of the group. Consequently, sources of self-selection bias are unavoidable. Using the data to draw conclusions about the general population described by (1) and (2) above cannot be made without a great deal of caution. Every attempt will be made to respect these sampling limitations when exploring the data.

3. *Participant profiles*

A total of 145 participants completed the survey, mostly between March and July of 2018. (A small number of responses were collected in later 2018 and early 2019.) Here is a report of the makeup of the sample.

¹ The following organizations promoted the Servant Parish Project survey on their associated websites:

Orthodox Church in America
St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary
Orthodox Christian Laity
Orthodox Christian Studies Center (Fordham University)
Orthodoxy in Dialogue

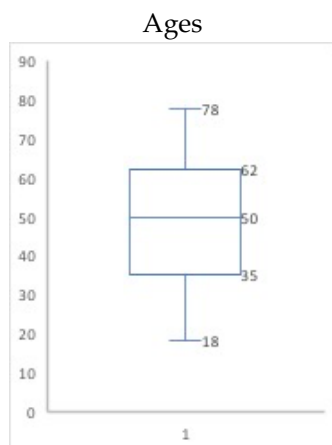
In addition, the following Facebook groups also promoted the survey: Orthodox Hipster Coffee Hour, Orthodox Clergy Group, Presvyteras Coast to Coast, Progressive Orthodox Christianity, Traditional Orthodoxy, and Orthodox Christian Studies Group. The survey was also publicized on the personal Facebook pages of Jim Forest (author and founder of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship) and George Demacopoulos (co-founder of Fordham's OCSC).

Sister Vassa Larin (host and publisher of *Coffee with Sister Vassa*) politely declined the request to promote the survey, as a matter of general social media policy, and the following organizations and websites either did not respond or were not able to move forward with the request: The Orthodox Peace Fellowship, the American Orthodox Institute—USA, Eastern Orthodox Christian News (Facebook), International Orthodox Christian Studies (Cambridge University), the *Monomakhos* blog of George Michalopoulos.

GENDER. When asked about gender, participants responded as follows:

Male:	72	(49.7%)
Female:	70	(48.3%)
Non-binary:	2	(1.3%)
Prefer not to say:	1	(0.7%)

AGES. Participants ages were distributed fairly uniformly from 18 to 78 years, with a median age of 50.



CLERGY/LAITY. Church roles were distributed as follows:

Clergy (Bishop, Priest, Deacon):	22	(15.2%)
Lay member (including Subdeacons and Readers):	118	(81.4%)
Catechumens:	5	(3.4%)

CRADLE/CONVERT. Among those who are not catechumens, 44 (30.3%) were born into an Orthodox family ("cradle Orthodox," colloquially) and 96 (66.2%) were received into the Orthodox Church through personal or family conversion apart from any prior affiliation ("convert Orthodox").

ATENDANCE. When asked to describe the frequency of one's attendance at an Orthodox Church, the large majority of participants responded "mostly weekly:"

Mostly Weekly:	130	(89.7%)
Mostly Monthly:	10	(6.9%)
Only a few times a year:	4	(2.8%)

Almost never: 1 (0.7%)

JURISDICTION. 126 participants reported their current jurisdiction affiliation. Seventeen did not report a jurisdiction, and one did not know.

Orthodox Church in America	63
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America	23
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America	20
(No response)	17
Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia	6
American Carpatho-Russian Diocese	5
Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)	2
Serbian Orthodox Church	2
Orthodox Church of Ukraine	2
Greek Archdiocese of Canada	1
Orthodox Vicariate of Jamaica	1
Romanian Orthodox Church	1
I don't know	1

GEOGRAPHY. Respondents were asked to report the location of their home church. The data is combined into regional categories to obtain the following distribution

Northeast	42
Midwest	22
West	20
Southeast	16
Southwest	10
Canada	8
Jamaica	1
Romania	1
No response	25

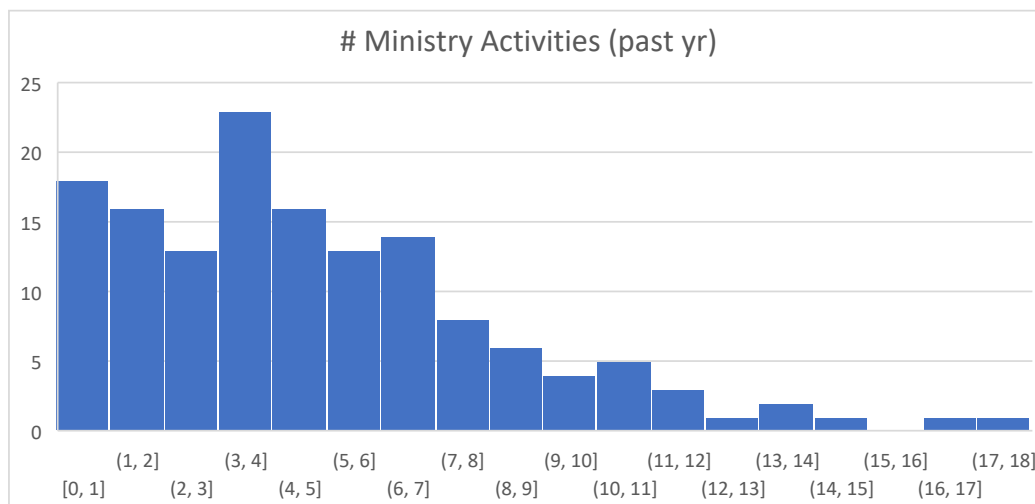
(A map which divides the United States into the five regions of Northeast, Midwest, West, Southeast, and Southwest is given in Appendix 2.) The general distribution of home parishes represented in the data is largely consistent with the general distribution of Orthodox Christians in the United States, where there is a higher concentration in the Northeast and Midwest, with growing communities in the West, Southwest, and Southeast especially.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS. As a group, the participants completing the project survey display the same sort of variation as one finds in the larger Orthodox population of North America. Three groups are somewhat more strongly represented in the sample than in the general population (members of the OCA, members of the ordained clergy, and “convert” Orthodox Christians), and Canadians are probably slightly underrepresented, but these differences between sample and population are not so great. One category that is probably disproportionately present in the sample is the group of those who report attending an Orthodox church “mostly weekly” (87.9%). Although he speaks anecdotally as an Orthodox priest, the researcher is nevertheless quite sure that the true percentage of Orthodox Christians who attend services that frequently is considerably lower.

4. Trends in the data

A. Participants are moderately active in outreach to the poor and suffering, but ministries that require personal contact with those in need have lower participation rates.

Nearly all participants reported some form of volunteer experience. When asked to describe participation in ministries to benefit the poor and suffering (both inside and outside the parish) only five reported engaging in no such ministries in the past twelve months. Given a selection of 33 different volunteer experiences, 138 participants chose at least one. (The option to describe other, unlisted activities was also provided.) The full distribution is given below.



Participants engaged in a median of five activities. The middle 50% of participants reported between three and seven activities. A few outliers reported a large number of recent ministry experiences (≥ 13).

Among the menu of 33 ministry experiences, we can distinguish between those that require personal contact with those in need (call them “first-personal” ministries) and those that do not (“third-personal” ministries). An example of a first-personal ministry is volunteering to serve food at a local homeless shelter. A third-personal ministry would be donating to benefit a charity or food drive. Here is a table listing the ministries that were selected by at least 20% of participants.

**Most Frequently-Selected
Forms of Ministry among Participants**

Volunteer Experiences (last 12 months)	# of Participants	% Total	First/Third Personal
Fundraising or donating to benefit a charity or non-profit	103	71.0%	3
Food drives to support local food pantries	76	52.4%	3
Soup kitchens or other means of providing meals to others in need	62	42.8%	1
Clothing drives	56	38.6%	3
Disaster relief (financial support)	49	33.8%	3
Hospital or hospice visitation	48	33.1%	1
Missionary support (for example, through the OCMC)	43	29.7%	3
Relationship-building in the community	41	28.3%	1
Nursing home or “homebound” visitation	41	28.3%	1

By far, the ministries that were selected most frequently were third-personal ministries. One explanation for the prevalence of third-personal ministries among the highest ranking responses is the convenience associated with these forms of help. It is quite simply easier to make a monetary donation to a homeless shelter than it is to volunteer one’s time onsite.

If we focus on the options that correspond to the actions described by Christ in the parable of the sheep and the goats, we find that only soup kitchen ministries have a participation rate larger than one-third (33%).

Ministries Associated with the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

Volunteer Experiences (last 12 months)	# of Participants	% Total	First/Third Personal	Rank (1-33)
Soup kitchens or other means of providing meals to others in need	62	42.8%	1	3
Hospital or hospice visitation	48	33.1%	1	6
Nursing home or “homebound” visitation	41	28.3%	1	9
Immigrant or refugee support	24	16.6%	1	11
Homeless shelters	19	13.1%	1	14
Prison visitation or other inmate ministry	15	10.3%	1	17
Disaster relief (onsite assistance, for example as a first-responder)	3	2.1%	1	30

Nevertheless, a large majority of participants (122, 84%) reported at least one activity that required direct personal contact with someone in need, and 110 (76%) reported participating in at least one of the “Matthew 25 ministries” detailed in the table above. It is interesting to note that participants report a fairly low rate of working with the stranger (16.6%), the homeless (13.1%), and the imprisoned (10.3%).

The survey did not collect data measuring the intensity of recent ministry experiences. For example, the survey does not distinguish between a participant who volunteers 20 hours each week at a homeless shelter and a participant whose assistance was much more limited. As different as the experiences of these two participants might be, both are nevertheless eligible to report “Homeless Shelters” as a recent ministry experience. The survey aimed to capture a lower-resolution picture, one that provides a general description of respondent’s basic commitments to ministries to the poor and suffering. The discussion in this section supports the summary that participants are moderately active in outreach to the poor and suffering, but that ministries requiring personal contact with those in need have lower participation rates.

B. Advocacy in secular spheres is consistently higher than in church spheres, and such activism is low in connection with ministries mentioned by Christ in Matthew 25.

Participants were asked to report recent experiences of advocacy as well:

In the last twelve (12) months, have you voiced public support for any issue of personal importance to you, in either the “secular/public” sphere, or more specifically within “ecclesial/church” circles?

Examples of public support in the “secular/public” sphere include (1) directly communicating with government officials, (2) attending rallies or marches, (3) composing editorials or articles for general circulation, or (4) giving a speech or presentation to a general audience.

Examples of public support within “ecclesial/church” circles include (1) publishing editorials, articles, or blog posts in any forum (online or otherwise) with a dedicated focus on faith and religion; (2) giving speeches or presentations in a church setting; or (3) leading or teaching in a class in the parish. (Sermons given by clergy fall into this category.)

The table below summarizes the responses. The issues are ordered by the frequencies given in the Secular/Public column.

Rates of Advocacy in Secular vs Ecclesial Settings

Issue	Secular/ Public	Ecclesial/ Church	Difference (Secular – Ecclesial)
Race relation issues	41.4%	22.8%	18.6%
Immigrant or refugee support	38.6%	19.3%	19.3%
Hunger and poverty issues	37.9%	32.4%	5.5%
Healthcare and health insurance issues	29.7%	11.7%	17.9%
Mental health issues	28.3%	14.5%	13.8%
Environmental issues	27.6%	14.5%	13.1%
War and peace issues	26.2%	17.2%	9.0%
Addiction and recovery issues	23.4%	16.6%	6.9%
Housing issues	22.8%	11.0%	11.7%

Pregnancy crisis issues	17.2%	13.8%	3.4%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	16.6%	11.7%	4.8%
Human trafficking issues	16.6%	9.7%	6.9%
Labor issues	15.2%	2.8%	12.4%
Veterans issues	13.8%	4.8%	9.0%
Domestic violence issues	13.1%	9.0%	4.1%

Participants reported advocacy work at a rate of 83%. Only 20 of 145 reported no such work at all. But on all issues, participants were more likely to engage in advocacy in secular spheres than in church-related spheres, by an average of 11%. Also, when the focus turns to issues connected to ministries mentioned by Christ in Matthew 25, it is noteworthy that no single issue attracted a majority of positive responses. Hunger and poverty issues were supported at the highest rate, but the rate in ecclesial spheres barely reaches one-third of participants. Christ commands us to welcome the stranger, but only 19.3% of the sample urged support for immigrants in church circles. (Interestingly, the rate of advocacy around immigration issues is much higher through secular platforms.) The sick are to be cared for, but barely one-tenth of participants report voicing support for healthcare issues among other Christians, and this rate only rises to 14.5% when the focus more specifically is mental health. Advocacy for the addicted is similarly low. And basic activism related to labor issues—which might include income inequality, minimum wage legislation, gender equity, migrant worker safety—barely registers, especially as a concern discussed in ecclesial spheres (2.8%).

Twenty-eight (19.3%) of those surveyed reported voicing support for issues not listed. The most frequently mentioned concern in the “Other” category were issues of gender and sexuality (11 responses, 7.6%), but the survey did not allow the respondent to distinguish between activism carried out in the secular or ecclesial spheres.

C. Active ministry to the poor and suffering is an important part of our calling as Orthodox Christian, but is neglected in parish life.²

Participants overwhelmingly believe that active ministry to the poor is an important part of our calling as Orthodox Christians, with 96% responding that such ministry is either important or very important (Q1). Additionally, at rates just as strong, they believe that Orthodox clergy should be preaching and teaching on topics related to wealth and poverty (Q2) and encouraging the faithful to take an active role in the community on issues related to

² The analysis in this section is based on the summary tables in Appendix 3, “Attitudes about Ministry to the Poor and Suffering.”

poverty, homelessness, and hunger (Q3). In fact, 95% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that doing so is “very important to the identity of Orthodox Christians” (Q4). Accordingly, and again at similar rates, participants believe that hierarchs should make outreach to the poor and suffering a priority for the parishes in their dioceses (Q5).

Although members of the sample largely agree that the Orthodox Christian tradition provides clear teachings on topics related to justice, war, and poverty (Q8), they nevertheless offer a more negative assessment of how well our parishes are living up to these commitments, as the table for Q6 (Appendix 3) displays:

Orthodox parishes are not successfully ministering to those Christ calls “the least of these my brethren” in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2 (1%)	7 (5%)	42 (29%)	58 (40%)	35 (24%)

In fact, only 12% can strongly agree that one’s local town or city is a better place because of the work done by one’s parish to help those in need. Only 33% are willing to agree, and the remaining 58% either strongly disagree, disagree, or have no opinion (Q9). And the respondents offer this negative assessment of parish ministry to the poor and suffering even though they report that it is easy to find opportunities for outreach to the needy in the community (Q7).

D. Attitudes about ministry to the poor and suffering are formed by a mixture of influences, from within and from outside the parish, but certain key parish experiences have notably weak influence.³

Participants were asked to rank the importance of various influences on their beliefs about outreach to the suffering. By far the top influences cited in the survey were participation in the Divine Liturgy, personal conscience, the parable of the sheep and the goats, Christ’s encounter with the rich young man, and the lives of the saints. Call these the “gold-medal” influences on attitudes toward the poor and suffering.

³ The analysis in this section is based on the summary table in Appendix 4, “Sources of Beliefs about Ministry to the Poor and Suffering.”

Gold-Medal Influences	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
Your participation in the Divine Liturgy	0 0%	2 1%	11 8%	24 17%	108 74%
Personal conscience	0 0%	0 0%	3 2%	37 26%	104 72%
Christ's Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31-46)	6 4%	4 3%	11 8%	27 19%	96 66%
Christ's encounter with the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31, Luke 18:18-30)	2 1%	9 6%	22 15%	30 21%	82 57%
Examples from the lives of the saints	0 0%	5 3%	15 10%	54 37%	71 49%

In previous chapters we have dwelt at length on four of these five sources. In chapter 2, we explored the parable of the sheep and the goats. In chapter 3, we learned from a case study from the Cappadocian fathers, and along the way we put the spotlight on Basil's interpretation of Christ's encounter with the rich young man. In chapter 4, we underscored the essential link between our experience of Christ and his kingdom in the Liturgy and the commandment to "go and do likewise" through the liturgy after the Liturgy. If our survey data reflects more generally the important influence of these gold-medal sources, it is critical to return to them again and again through the preaching and teaching ministries of the church.

Alongside the above, the following should be considered "silver-medal" influences, not quite as formative, but respectably so.

Silver-Medal Influences	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
Personal relationships I have with the poor and suffering	4 3%	4 3%	14 10%	55 38%	66 46%
Teachings of Saint John Chrysostom	11 8%	7 5%	18 12%	45 31%	58 40%

Other Scripture ⁴	5 3%	2 1%	24 17%	42 29%	58 40%
General sense of gratitude and a desire to give back	1 1%	4 3%	19 13%	62 43%	57 39%
Learning about the work of other Orthodox parishes who assist the poor	5 3%	17 12%	27 19%	41 28%	53 37%

Notably, contact with the poor themselves has a powerful influence on the attitudes of participants. One is reminded of the emphasis on ekphrasis in the poverty sermons of the Cappadocian fathers, and of the stress they lay on unmasking the “anonymous poor” and returning to them the voice and human dignity that poverty and sickness too often take away. In the survey, direct personal experience—love that is concrete and up close—emerges similarly as a leading shaper of attitudes.

Related is the influence that comes from sharing first-hand experience and relationship-building with others. Participants cite that learning from the work done by other parishes is important to them. Also addressed in the survey, but not scoring high enough to land in the top ten influences, are the “ripple effects” that come from hearing the stories of missionaries, monasteries, and Orthodox humanitarian organization.

Influence of missionaries, monasteries, and Orthodox humanitarian organizations

⁴ Other passages provided in the responses include: healing of Legion, healing of the paralytic (with four friends), the parable of good Samaritan, Christ and the woman at the well, the feeding of the five thousands, the raising the son of the widow on Nain, Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 13:1–16 (“going outside the camp”), Philippians 2:1–11, 1 John 3:17, Acts 20:35, James 1:27, Matthew 6:1–4, Epistle of James (chapter 2), the community of goods in Acts 2, 1 Corinthians, John 12:8, Mark 14:7, Deuteronomy 15:11, parable of the talents, Luke 14:12–14, Romans 12:20–21; Matthew 19, 20–25; parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Matthew 14:15–21, Matthew 5, the Book of Ruth, Matthew 18:6 (“Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much”), 1 Corinthians 13:1–13, Psalm 102/103, Matthew 6:22–34, Matthew 23:23, Matthew 12:41, Matthew 23:30, Leviticus (passages regarding the sojourners, the poor who should be able to collect gleanings), The Beatitudes, Leviticus and the NT passages on love of neighbor, Christ’s ministry to sick and marginalized of His time, Isaiah 58 on true fasting, James 2:18, Acts 20:35, Galatians 2:10, every healing and compassionate act of our Lord, Exodus 23:9, Acts when the church in Antioch takes up a collection for the church in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:13, the passages in Isaiah regarding the ingathering of the nations, Mark 12:41–44, Book of Revelation (condemnation of rich and powerful who rule the earth), parable of the fig tree, 1 John 3:17.

Learning about the work of Orthodox humanitarian organizations (Such as FOCUS North America, or the IOCC)	13 9%	19 13%	37 26%	40 28%	33 23%
Learning about the work of missionaries through the OCMC	19 13%	31 21%	32 22%	32 22%	28 19%
Learning about the work of monasteries who assist the poor	6 4%	21 14%	25 17%	48 33%	43 30%

Because each of these is a potentially powerful form of ekphrasis to motivate the individual believer, parishes should make more of an effort to learn and share stories from these sources as well.

Rounding out the top 50% of influences investigated by the survey are these “bronze-medal” sources.

Bronze-Medal Influences	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
The Prophets of the Old Testaments	9 6%	14 10%	27 19%	43 30%	52 36%
Teachings of St Basil the Great	14 10%	11 8%	20 14%	43 30%	49 34%
Events or figures from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s	19 13%	21 14%	29 20%	29 20%	46 32%
Sermons by parish clergy	13 9%	12 8%	29 20%	44 30%	45 31%
Learning about the work of monasteries who assist the poor	6 4%	21 14%	25 17%	48 33%	43 30%

We already mentioned the importance of raising our awareness of monasteries and their outreach to the suffering. And now we see where additional good work may be done. Given the high-impact value noted above of Christ’s parable of the sheep and goats and his encounter with the rich young man, it is possible to deepen the impact that the prophets have on our attitudes toward ministry by underscoring the continuity between Christ’s words and the prophets’ words about the poor. Similarly, the influence of the teachings of St Basil could be heightened by exploring more fully the historical situations that gave rise to his well-known works, as we did in chapter 3. And why not allow two good sources to work as partners? Perhaps clergy, when preaching on wealth and poverty, should make good use of pivotal figures and stories from contemporary movements associated with civil rights and racial equality.

What about the sources that were rated least-influential by participants? There are some surprises to note.

Least-Influential Sources	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
Video or podcast lectures by Orthodox Christians on the internet	33 23%	34 23%	29 20%	22 15%	22 15%
Books and articles by Orthodox writers on justice	28 19%	29 20%	31 21%	31 21%	21 14%
College courses or professors	40 28%	28 19%	29 20%	22 15%	21 14%
Adult study classes at my parish	45 31%	31 21%	23 16%	19 13%	17 12%
Social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram	39 27%	27 19%	38 26%	24 17%	16 11%
(For adult converts, n=100) The catechism I received.	27 27%	19 19%	27 27%	16 16%	11 11%
Sense of guilt	40 28%	42 29%	23 16%	27 19%	10 7%

First, it is devastating to discover that adult converts to Orthodox Christianity in the survey rank the influence of their catechism nearly at the bottom.⁵ Only “a sense of guilt” is ranked lower as an influence on attitudes to the poor and suffering. Similarly, adult study classes—which picks up where catechesis often stops—is a striking underachiever. Adult study classes are ranked lowest when we restrict attention to the failing grade of “not important,” lower even than one’s sense of guilt (45 > 40). Moving beyond the particular parish experiences of respondents, we discover that the wider church has a few gaps to fill. Although they avoid the ignominy of finishing nearly last, it is still a concern that educational resources like books, articles, lectures, and podcasts by Orthodox Christians on justice and poverty are ranked in the lowest quartile of survey options. These are potential sources of effective learning and communication, but in the survey data, Orthodox print and digital media are about as effective as Facebook for strengthening our ministries to the poor and suffering.

E. Personal contact, relationship building, and education will make a positive impact.

What might lead an Orthodox Christian to increase the intensity of his or her work on behalf of the poor and suffering? Participants were asked the following question:

Would the following lead you to increase your financial giving and volunteer service in support of ministries that assist those whom Christ calls “the least of these my brethren” in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)?

A summary of the responses is provided below in two parts, and also as Appendix 5.

Of the ten options offered in the survey, here are the five which participants rated as most likely to lead to positive change.

Sources of Behavior Change (1 of 2)						
Changing Behavior: Rank 1-5 (of 10 options)	Very Unlikely	Not Likely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely	
Invitations from friends to join them as volunteers.	2 1%	2 1%	11 8%	70 48%	60 41%	

⁵ We have already noted that the third-century *Apostolic Teachings* set forth active ministry to the poor and suffering as a requirement for those seeking baptism. See note 1, chapter 4.

Meeting people at my parish who struggle with poverty, addiction, and violence.	1 1%	2 1%	20 14%	68 47%	54 37%
Presentations at Church by representatives from local non-profit organizations that clearly explain how my volunteer service can help those in need.	5 3%	8 6%	25 17%	62 43%	45 31%
Learning more about how poverty, addiction, and violence affects families and children in my community.	5 3%	9 6%	31 21%	60 41%	40 28%
A parish retreat, led by an invited speaker, on the topic of “justice and the local Orthodox parish” from an Orthodox perspective.	12 8%	11 8%	33 23%	51 35%	38 26%

Each response in the top five involves some significant degree of human contact, or else greater awareness of the experiences of those in need. Survey participants will likely increase their commitment to ministries that serve the poor and suffering if they are simply asked by friends to join them as volunteers. This simple strategy increases the likelihood of deeper commitments by 89%. Nearly as powerful are personal relationships with people in need of compassionate outreach. Participants report that they are 84% more likely to increase both giving and service in support of the poor if they were to learn more directly from those who struggle against poverty addiction, and violence. Similarly, responses indicate that partnering with local non-profit organizations (74%) and learning more about the impact of poverty, violence, and addiction on families and children in the community (69%) will likely move Orthodox Christians to greater involvement. The option in fifth place is a retreat which emphasizes the role played by the local parish in pursuing justice. Given the stress on relationships and personal stories in the preceding options that rank more highly, it is reasonable to claim that addressing what can be done *locally* is what makes this fifth option attractive. People have a desire to know how they can bring love and compassion to those they are most likely to know.

Of the ten scenarios imagined by the survey, these are the five that rank the lowest.

Sources of Behavior Change (2 of 2)

Changing Behavior: Rank 6-10 (of 10 options)	Very Unlikely	Not Likely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
The news that your parish is in extreme financial distress and faces the possibility of closing in the next few years.	6 4%	18 12%	35 24%	44 30%	42 29%
More frequent sermons by parish clergy on wealth, poverty, and injustice.	9 6%	16 11%	35 24%	58 40%	27 19%
New publications or journals from an Orthodox perspective dedicated to the history, theology, and practice of ministry to the poor and suffering.	8 6%	17 12%	40 28%	53 37%	25 17%
Pastoral letters (encyclicals) and direct appeals from my jurisdiction's Holy Synod of Bishops on wealth, poverty, and injustice.	15 10%	20 14%	32 22%	54 37%	23 16%
Clear, compelling online podcasts or lectures on pressing social issues from an Orthodox perspective.	15 10%	19 13%	40 28%	52 36%	19 13%

These are by no means weak shapers of future behavior. Even the lowest-ranking option is likely to move at least 49% of respondents to further work in support of “the least of these my brethren.” But the element that seems to distinguish the upper five from the lower five is the explicit incorporation of personal, humanizing experience. Participants agree that more sermons on injustice (59%), new publications and journals dedicated to merciful ministry (54%), episcopal encouragement (53%), and better social media presentations (49%) will likely lead to stronger commitments, but these rates are still lower than the options that involve some form of face-to-face familiarity with the personal struggles of those who suffer (89%, 84%, 74%, 69%, and 61%).

5. Conclusions

Participants are moderately involved in ministries to the poor and suffering, and express an interest in deepening their commitments. In the sample, support for correcting injustice is

more likely than not to take place in secular settings, but participants firmly believe that ministry to “the least of these my brethren” is part of the basic identity of Orthodox Christians. For nearly all, this identity and its connection to social action is strongly shaped by participation in the eucharistic Liturgy, Christ’s teachings about wealth and poverty, and the lives of the saints. Participants also credit personal relationships with the poor and suffering as a source of their beliefs about ministry, as well as first-hand stories about ministry shared by other parishes and Orthodox organizations. And in general, those who responded say that deepening their connection to the poor and suffering in their immediate neighborhoods and parish communities is likely to increase their involvement. Learning more about the human face of suffering through the teaching and preaching ministries of the church would also lead to such an increase, although participants overwhelmingly suggest that at present they are least influenced and inspired by Orthodox writers on justice, parish adult education, Orthodox social media contributions, and their experience as catechumens. In the final chapter that follows, we will consider how parishes might benefit from these empirical insights and how they might combine them with insights already learned from biblical, patristic, and missiological literature to create “servant parishes” dedicated to the co-equal liturgies of the Eucharist and compassionate ministry to the suffering brother and sister.