

Survey of Church Musicians 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

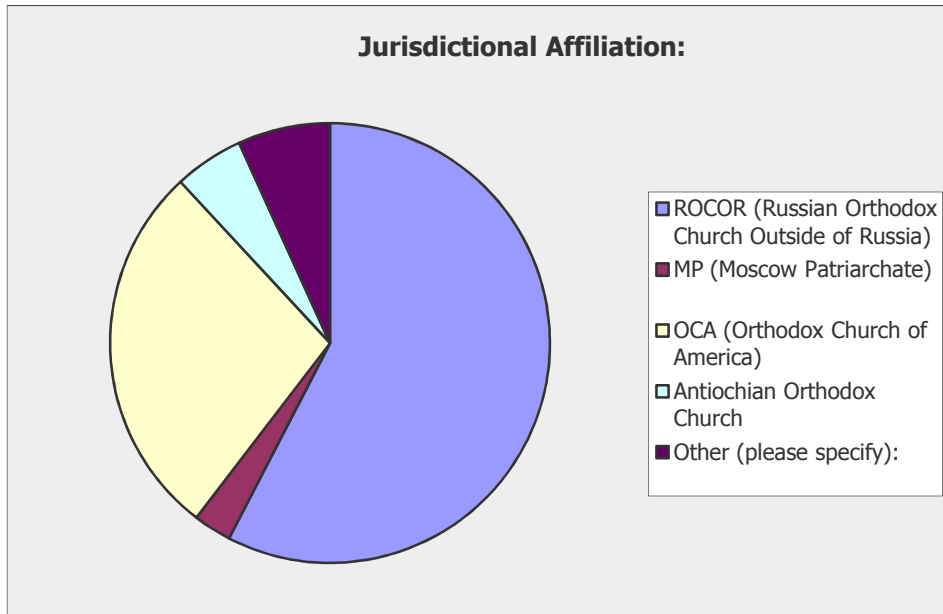
Abstract

Formed earlier this year, the Eastern American Diocesan Music Commission (“EADMC”) sought information to help formulate its priorities, and conducted a survey of church musicians. This survey was conducted on-line, via the Eastern American Diocesan web-site. Publicized through numerous channels, including online discussion groups such as “Ustav” and “PSALM,” and on “Facebook,” a popular social communication Internet service, the survey was open to church musicians from beyond our diocese and even beyond the ROCOR jurisdiction. This was purposely done, in order to obtain some comparative data.

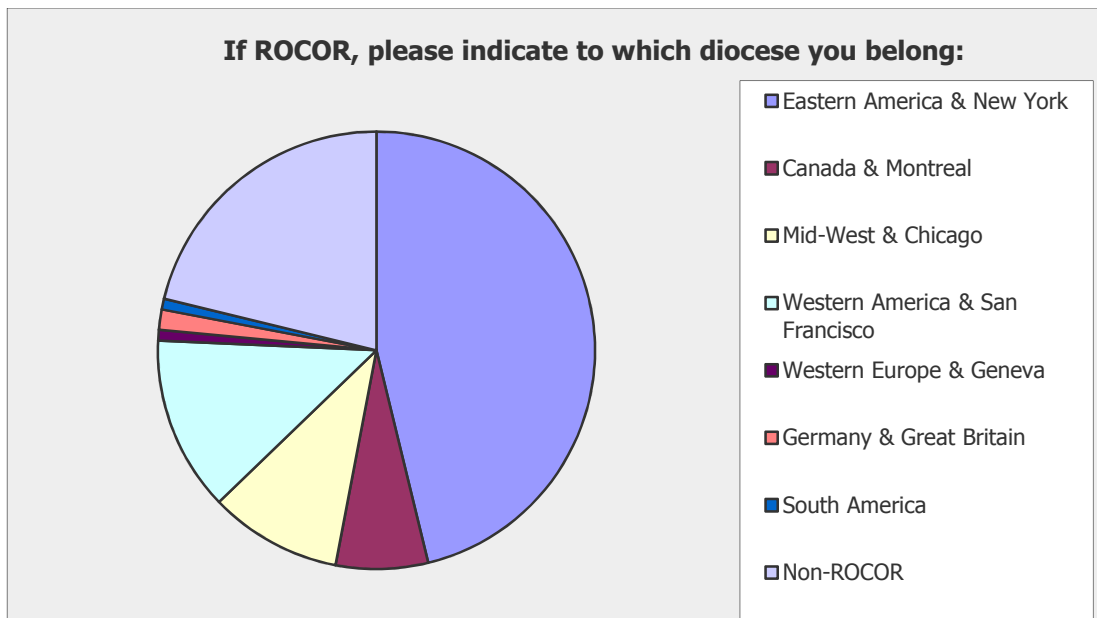
Data was collected from July 3 – October 7, 2009. The survey’s primary conclusions suggest three priorities for the EADMC: regional music conferences, expansion and coordination of online resources, and vocal training for our church musicians. In addition, recruitment is a primary concern for our choirs.

Respondents

The largest category of the survey's 177 respondents was from ROCOR (57.6%):



Of the ROCOR respondents, 61, or 46.2% were from the Eastern American & New York Diocese. Another 39 responses were from the combined dioceses of North America: Western-America & San Francisco (17, or 12.9%), Mid-West & Chicago (13, or 9.8%) and Canada & Montreal (9, or 6.8%).



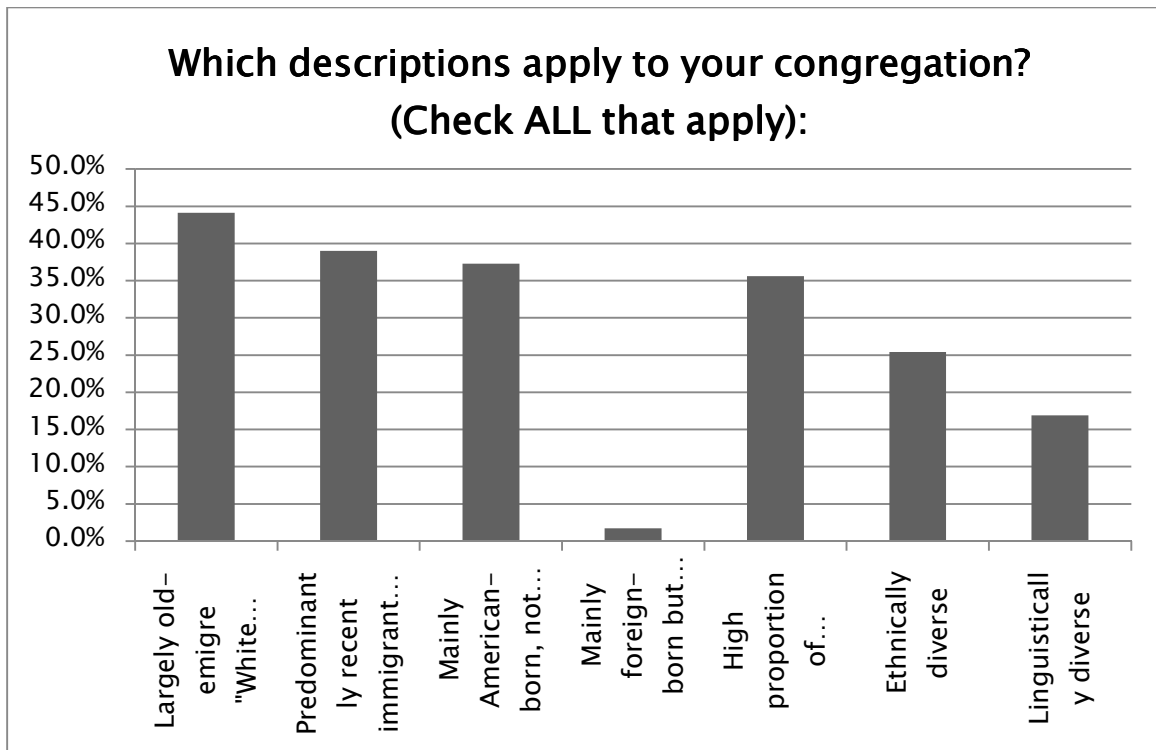
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2 November, 2009

List of Eastern American Diocese communities responding to survey:

Nativity of Most-Holy Mother of God Parish, Mahopac, NY
St Stephen the Protomartyr Russian Orthodox Church, Old Forge, PA
St. Elizabeth the New Martyr, Rocky Hill NJ
St Xenia Church, Methuen, MA
St. Nicholas, Stratford, CT
St. Nicholas Church, Millville, NJ
Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox church, Vineland, NJ
St. Xenia Orthodox Church, Methuen, MA
St Nicholas Orthodox Church, Endicott, NY
St Elizabeth the New Martyr Parish, Columbia, SC
Reigning Mother of God, Charlotte, NC
Saint Panteleimon Russian Orthodox Church, Hartford, CT
St. Basil's R. O. Church, Simpson, PA
St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church
St. Seraphim Church, Sea Cliff, NY
Holy Myrrhbearers Diocesan Women's Choir, Chestnut Ridge, NY
St. John the Baptist Cathedral, Washington, D.C.
Holy Fathers (153rd Street, NYC)
St. Sergius Parish at Synod of Bishops, Manhattan, NYC
Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church, Newark, NJ
St. Nicholas Parish, Red Bank NJ
St. Alexander Nevsky Church Richmond, ME
Synodal Cathedral of Our Lady of the Sign, NYC
Novo Diveevo, Nanuet, NY
Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, Mebane, NC
St. Nicholas Parish in Poughkeepsie, NY
St. Elizabeth's in Rocky Hill, NJ
St. Vladimir Memorial, Jackson NJ
Holy Protection/St Sergius Glen Cove, NY
St. Nicholas Church Poughkeepsie, NY
The Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA
Church of Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God, Albany NY
All Saints of America Russian Orthodox Church
Holy Cross Monastery, Wayne, WV
Holy Epiphany, Roslindale (Boston), MA
Holy Virgin Protection Church, Nyack NY
The parish of the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God.
Saint Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Fletcher, NC

Within the response pool from the Eastern American diocese, an equal number of respondents identified their primary position in church either as singer/choir member or as choir director (20 each, or 35.1% of each, together comprising 70.2% of the respondents from our diocese). Six rectors and two assisting priests of our diocese also responded. The total respondent pool had a comparable response, with 36.1% respondents identifying themselves as “Choir Director” and 27.7% identifying themselves as “Singer/Choir Member.” In all, respondents included fourteen rectors (8.4%), 4 assisting priests (2.4%), 10 “Psalomchik/Ustavchiki” and 10 “Lay Parishioners” (each 6.0%), 7 “Readers” (4.2%), 5 deacons (3.0%), and one each starosta (warden) and “starshaya” (“eldest”) sister.

Within the diocese, 50.8% of respondents described their parish as “Long-standing” and 11.9% were at a cathedral. With a newer parish defined as having been founded in the last 10 years, 18.6% of our diocesan respondents categorized their community as newer, and 8.5% considered themselves part of a mission. About 81% of our diocesan respondents represented communities of 100 or fewer regular attendees. Fewer than half of the diocesan respondents described their congregations as “White Russian/old émigré”) and 35.6% stated they had a high proportion of converts to Orthodoxy:



Gender: 57.8% of the total survey respondents identifying their gender were male, and 42.2% female. However, a vast majority (113 out of 177) skipped this question, so these figures are not necessarily representative.

Language: Among respondents from the Eastern American Diocese, 81.4% (not 100%) stated that Slavonic is used during divine services, at all. English is used by 66.1% of these respondents. Among these communities, 57.6% identify Slavonic as their primary language of worship, and 35.6% cite English as their main language, with 6.8% stating that the usage of both languages is evenly divided. In open-ended responses, many comments bemoaned **a lack of consistency and standardization of English usage among the available settings of liturgical texts.**

Choir Directors

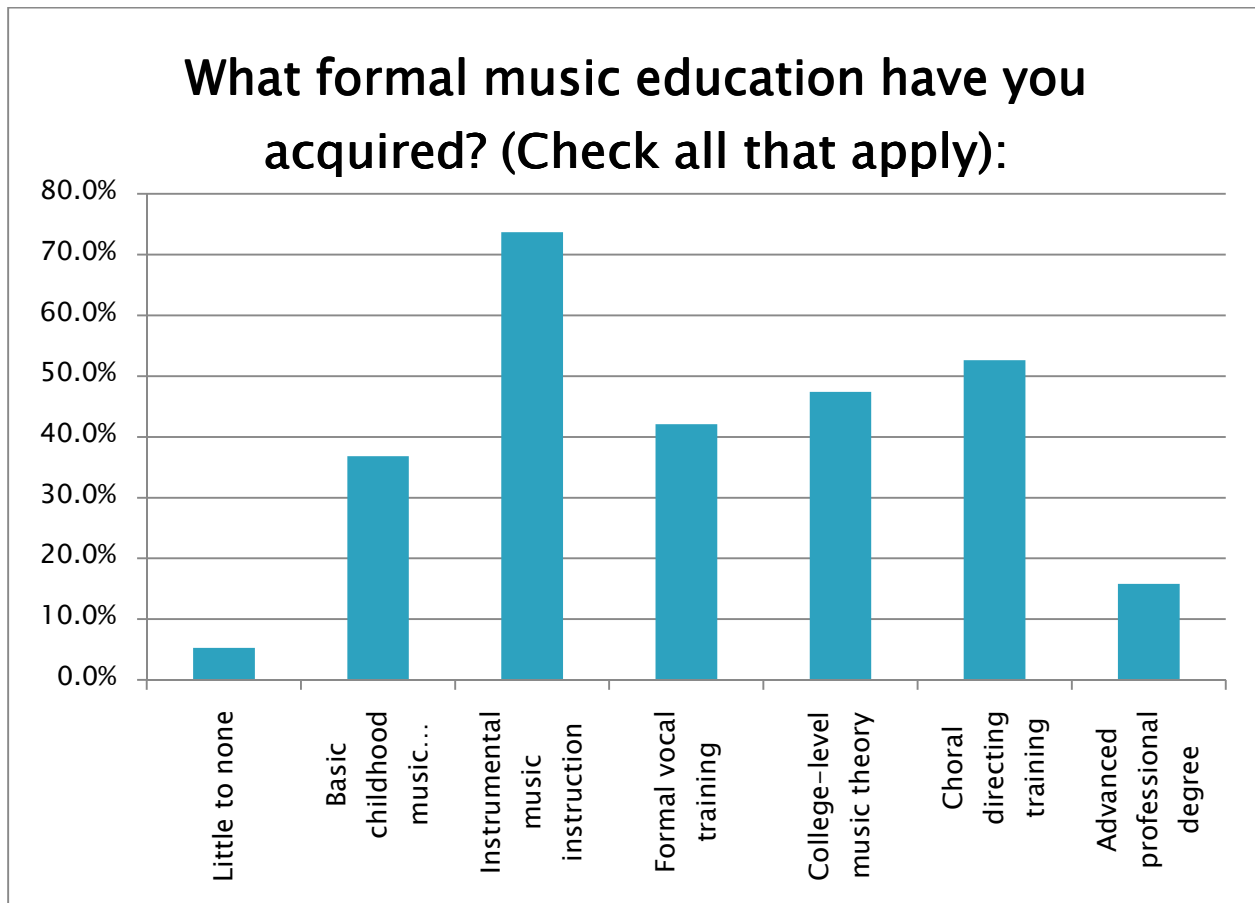
Among this group, there are a surprising number of individuals who are tonsured or ordained clergy leading our choirs, although not a majority. In the Eastern American Diocese, 59% of responding choir's leaders claim no ecclesiastical rank, but 31.1% are tonsured readers. The overall respondent pool had similar numbers, with 55.4% not ordained, 30.5% tonsured readers, 2.8% ordained sub-deacons, and 2.3% belonging to the holy diaconate.

Tenure: Those respondents who self-identified as a choir director – 64 total respondents, 19 of whom are within the Eastern American Diocese – were asked additional questions about their choirs and their own level of experience. The average Eastern American “regent” has been in charge of his/her current choir or kliros for approximately 8 ½ years. In comparison, the overall response pool had an average tenure of 10.4 years.

Nature of Appointment: Choir directors were asked to define how they had acquired their current position. They were allowed to “check all that apply.” The overall pool had 59.0% state that they were appointed by their rector, but 47.5% also stated that they were chosen “by default!” In other words, they took the position because no one else would, not because they actually sought it. Within our diocese, 52.6% were appointed by the rector and 15.8% by the parish council; 57.9% reported that s/he was ‘regent by default’. No one in our diocese had auditioned for the job – something only 3.3% of all respondents reported. This data begs the question: **how can our Church do more to make the “regent” position one to which talented people might *aspire*, as opposed to it being viewed as an obligation one accepts “by default.”**

Education: Only about half of the diocese’s responding choir directors have actual had choral director training (52.6%), slightly below the total respondent pool rate of 57.8%.

Below is a chart summarizing the responses from Eastern American Diocese choirmaster regarding their musical training, which, it must be noted, is not insignificant:

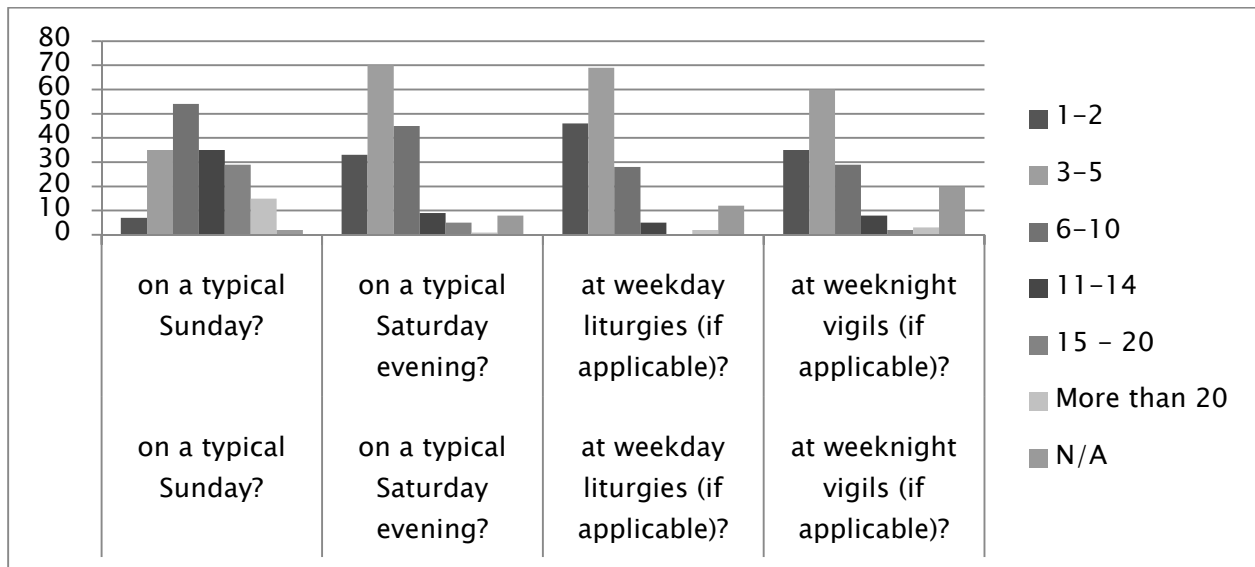


On the other hand, only 36.8% of our responding diocesan choir directors claim any theological education (the overall response pool has 40.6% of choir directors stating they have any theological education). Yet, 68.9% or respondents (overall and at the Eastern Diocesan level) state that the choir director oversees rubrics and readings. **The dearth of theological education on our klirosi suggests an opportunity for our church’s educators.**

Choirs

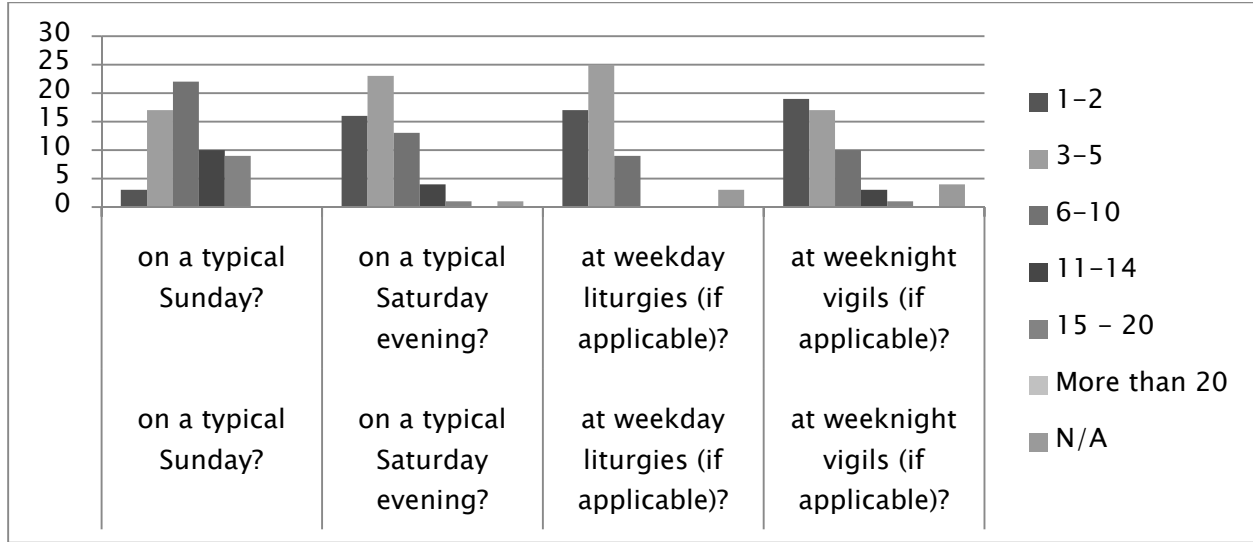
Demographics: All respondents were asked to estimate the size of their choirs on various occasions. The responses for the total response pool are shown below. The left axis represents the number of responses: each bar is a different category of choir size, as illustrated by the legend to the right:

Question 7 (Full Response Pool): How many people participate in the choir?



Not surprisingly, choirs are more robust on a typical Sunday than on other occasions, and even a weekend vigil typically has fewer than five people on klirors in most places. The pattern is quite similar within the Eastern American Diocese, as shown by the chart on the following page.

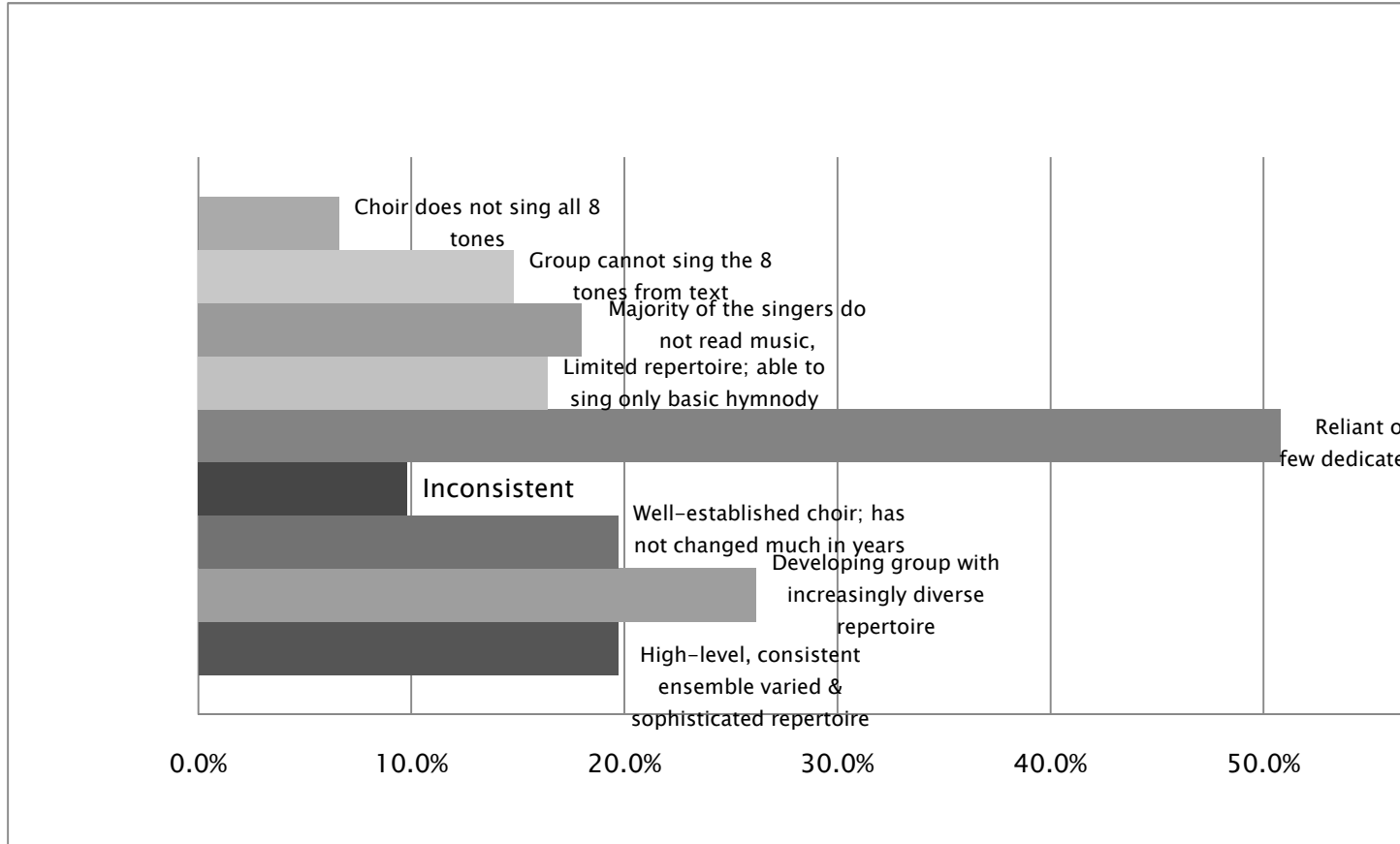
Q. 7 (Eastern American Diocese): How many people participate in the choir?



Makeup and Quality The survey posed a subjective question, asking respondents to describe the nature and quality of their choir or kliros. Overall, just slightly more than 50% of the choirs are SATB (that is, four-part harmony, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass), but only 13% were listed as all-male or all-female. Since most compositions are typically predicated on (at least) four-part harmony in the Russian tradition, this data provides a point to consider. This data is inconclusive, but if many choirs are not SATB, **there may be a significant need for more versatile repertoire for the non-SATB choirs.**

In the overall pool and at the diocesan level, approximately half stated that their choirs are “reliant on just a few dedicated members,” and the open commentary included many citations about the challenges of recruitment and motivation of reliable personnel. These comments and the following data suggest that **we have a great opportunity to develop ways to make the position of the choir member more attractive to the talented lay-person.**

The Eastern American Diocese's responses regarding the quality of its choirs are summarized in the following chart:



The clearest problem is a lack of reliable singers. Indeed, when asked to name aspects of church music that are priorities, 66.7% (two-thirds) of the respondents from our diocese selected Recruitment. Furthermore, 45.6% of our diocesan respondents cited a need for vocal training, and 28.1% said their singers need basic musical training. Repertoire needs improvement or expansion according to 33.3% of the diocese's respondents, and 17.5% said that rubrics are an issue requiring attention.

It is encouraging (or perhaps a point of skepticism) that some 45% of the diocese's respondents consider their choirs to be either at a high level or developing, and that 10.5% of them state that they have no problems, and that "everything is good."

Initiatives for the Eastern American Diocese

All respondents were asked to evaluate eight proposed initiatives. Three categories were tied for having the highest number of respondents from our diocese indicating those categories to be of greatest interest. Based on their average rating (how highly they were rated by those who did not list them as the top priority), the top three priorities, as rated by our diocese's respondents, are:

- Music and other resource sharing via Internet
- Regional or Diocesan mini-conferences for church musicians
- Vocal workshops for singers

Close behind in the rankings were two more popular suggestions:

- Conducting technique workshops or master classes
- Guest ensembles (to relieve or partner with your choir for services)

When asked to prioritize their top five initiatives, the above were ranked as follows:

- 1. Regional or Diocesan mini-conferences for church musicians**
- 2. Music and other resource sharing via Internet**
- 3. Vocal workshops for singers**
- 4. Conducting technique workshops or master classes**
- 5. Guest ensembles** (to relieve or partner with your choir for services)

It is interesting to note for comparative purposes that the national results were slightly different, with Internet resources ranking first, conferences second, vocal workshops third, conducting master classes fourth, and, a different proposal – choral retreats for ensembles – ranking fifth. At both levels, a sixth option was a close behind: that of having feedback and constructive critiques of choirs by visiting clinicians.

Conclusion

A few clear needs have been articulated: church musicians, though fewer in number than may be needed, are eager to gather, share resources, and learn. Fortunately, within our diocese and, indeed, across ROCOR, there are enthusiastic, experienced, talented and energetic individuals ready to work toward responding to these needs, to build on the strong foundations laid by the generations who preceded us. We must work with the leadership among today's church musicians and administrators, including the Synodal Liturgical Music Advisory Board (LMAB), the Holy Trinity Seminary and other educational programs, and the clergy and laity working with our youth, to ensure not only the preservation of our traditions, but the further development of them in a new era.

The members of EADMC are humbly aware that we must gather our talents and, like the faithful servants in our Lord's parable, multiply them. We are planning projects to respond to our constituent's stated priorities, and respectfully seek continued blessings upon our efforts and projects.