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The Social Capital of Russian Orthodox Christianity in the Early 21st Century: Applying Social Network Analysis

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This article examines the influence of religion on the formation of social capital in Russia. The study suggests that the active involvement of parishes in organizing social work, based on the principles of the delegation of responsibility from priests to laity, increases parochial social networks and engages more laypeople, including those who do not practice an active religious life. The data for the article comes from research projects conducted from 2011–13 at the “Sociology of Religion” Research Seminar at St. Tikhon's Orthodox University, and includes a mass survey of parishioners in 12 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church, located in cities of various size and in various regions of Russia (the total sample size

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is 985 respondents); in-depth interviews with parishioners and priests in 15 parishes (in total, 153 interviews); and the first wave of results from the nationwide survey OrthodoxMonitor (national representative sample of 1500 respondents).

Keywords: sociology of religion, social capital, social network analysis, Russian Orthodox Church, parish community.

Introduction: Research Concepts and Methods

IN recent years the significance of social capital and social support for the improvement of quality of life and for development in various countries has been an active area of research and discussion. Hence the Better Life Index of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a project aimed at measuring the quality of life and well-being of populations according to various factors, stated:

Humans are social creatures. The frequency of our contact with others and the quality of our personal relationships are thus crucial determinants of our well-being. Studies show that time spent with friends is associated with a higher average level of positive feelings and a lower average level of negative feelings than time spent in other ways. Helping others can also make you happier. People who volunteer tend to be more satisfied with their lives than those who do not. Time spent volunteering also contributes to a healthy civil society.

The report went on, saying:

A weak social network can result in limited economic opportunities, a lack of contact with others, and eventually, feelings of isolation. Social isolation may follow family breakdown, the loss of a job, illness or financial difficulties. Once socially isolated, individuals may face greater difficulties not only reintegrating into society as a contributing member, but also fulfilling personal aspirations with respect to work, family and friends” (OECD).¹

1. The importance of social capital for individuals and communities is discussed in many studies, the most widely known being Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*, in which, after analyzing a large amount of empirical data, Putnam suggested that social capital is an important factor contributing to a higher quality of life in terms of economic prosperity and subjective well-being, happiness, health, security, etc. (Putnam 2000: 287–363).

Comparative rankings of countries according to social support networks put Russia near the bottom of the list. For example, in the OECD's index, Russia ranks 28th out of 36 countries for its Quality of Support Network indicator. Such findings raise the question of which factors might improve the Russian situation.

The concept of social capital has been used by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Robert Putnam, and some other authors. Bourdieu defined social capital using the concept of membership in a group:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition — or in other words, to membership in a group. (...) The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (Bourdieu 1986).

For Coleman, social capital embodied the characteristics of a social structure — “*social* organization constitutes *social capital*, facilitating the *achievement* of goals that could not be achieved in its absence or could be achieved only at a *higher cost*” (Coleman 1990: 304). Putnam described the sources of social capital and its consequences, and posed the problem of the relationship between “bridging” social capital and “bonding” social capital (Putnam 2000).

Studies show that religion is one of the most important factors² improving the indicators of accumulation of social capital by communities. Thus Putnam, summarizing the influence of the religious factor in the performance of social capital and civic engagement in the United States, wrote: “First, religion is today, as it has traditionally been, a central fount of American *community life and health*. *Faith-based organizations* serve civic life both directly, by providing social support to their members and social services to the wider community, and indirectly, by nurturing civic skills, inculcating moral values, encouraging altruism, and fostering civic recruitment among church people” (Putnam 2000: 79). Heidi Unruh and Ronald Sider noted in this regard, “Congregations translate their social capital into social well-be-

2. In this article we consider only one of the possible sources of accumulating social capital, while not rejecting the existence and importance of other sources. See the description of other factors affecting the accumulation of social capital in Coleman 1988 and Putnam 2000: 31–183.

ing by taking collective action, by empowering the civic involvement of members, by uplifting individuals by incorporating them into the church's caring community" (Unruh and Sider 2005: 236). J. A. Schneider concluded that "faith communities became the major source of community, social and cultural capital, and empowerment" (Schneider 2006: 293). Robert Wuthnow emphasized that "besides sponsoring service programs and reminding parishioners about the value of helping the needy (...) congregations may fulfill an important community function simply by facilitating the formation of friendships and other personal ties. Such ties or 'social capital,' as it is increasingly termed, can become the means through which people in need receive care informally from others in their congregations" (Wuthnow 2004: 79–80).

Until now there have been no specific studies analyzing the problem in Russia, but a number of studies on related issues suggest that the dominant denomination in Russia — Orthodox Christianity — is not likely to contribute to improving the quality of social life and the development of civil society (Mitrokhin 2003, Filatov 2005).

In this article we would like to summarize the results of projects designed to answer the question of whether religion (Orthodoxy) influences indicators of individual involvement in social support networks in Russia. The concept of social capital is pivotal for our research.³

There are two main levels of analysis in the study of social networks. Each level makes it possible to address various research problems. The first level is represented by ego networks of parishioners — the number of people (which may include both practicing and non-practicing Orthodox, as well as representatives of other denominations) with which each person interacts directly. The second level of analysis is provided by the whole social network of a parish community. Here we may pose a question about the overall structure of social ties in the parish, about the effects that may arise from one or another configuration of social ties.

The key indicators we used for assessing the characteristics of the social networks of parishioners and parishes are represented in table 1.

3. The problem of quantifying the concept of social capital is very complex. Scholars propose distinguishing between resources and access to these resources, while stressing a great number of individual components. We can point to the methodology of the "Resource Generator" of M. Van der Gaag and T. A. Snijders as one of the most detailed ways of using the concept (Van der Gaag, Snijders 2005). In this article social capital is primarily defined as engagement in social support networks. We identify several types of resources and distinguish between two key standpoints: those of "the donor" and "the recipient."

Table 1: Operationalization of the main concepts

Concept	Indicator	Method
1 Parishioners' ego networks		
1a Social capital from a "recipient's" standpoint	Perceived size of social support network that the respondents have access to (may appeal to in case of need). <i>Question:</i> "If you get into a crisis (for example, job loss, family problems, or illness), who can you turn to for help? In your opinion, how many people are there to whom you can turn for help in a crisis?"	Survey of parishioners exiting the liturgy (filling out the questionnaire on their own)
1b Social capital from a "donor's" standpoint	Involvement in the practices of mutual assistance in three areas: labor help, financial assistance, and moral support. <i>Question:</i> "In the last 12 months, how often did you do anything from the following list for any of your relatives, friends, neighbors or acquaintances: helped someone out of your household with chores or shopping; lent money; found some time to talk to a distressed/depressed person?"	Survey of parishioners exiting the liturgy (filling out the questionnaire on their own)

2 Whole networks of parishes

2a Embeddedness in the community ⁴	Density of contacts with people of varying degrees of involvement in church life	Semi-formalized interviews with parishioners, priests, and parish transactors ⁵
2b Delegating responsibility in the social work of the parish	Position of the rector in the structure of parish ties	Semi-formalized interviews with parishioners, priests, and parish transactors

For analyzing the ego networks of parishioners belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church, this study used the results of the research project “Social Support Networks in the Orthodox Church Community,” conducted in 2012–13. A questionnaire survey of parishioners and church employees (in total 12 Orthodox parishes, 985 persons) was conducted on Sundays when parishioners were leaving the church at the end of the liturgy⁶ in parishes located in population centers of various sizes: megapolis downtown (1 parish), megapolis residential district (1 parish), a city of over 1 million residents (2 parishes), a city of over 500,000 residents (2 parishes), a city of over 200,000 residents (2 parishes), a city of over 100,000 residents (1 parish), a town of 50,000 residents (1 parish), a town under 20,000 residents (1 par-

4. We understand embeddedness as sustained interaction of a parish represented by priests, church workers, and parishioners with organizations, institutions and residents on the territory of the parish. As a rule, such relationships are formed during implementation of social projects by the parish outside of the church territory.
5. “Parish transactors” are organizations, institutions, as well as local residents and recipients of social help, with whom the parish interacts in the person of priests, church employees, and parishioners.
6. On the morning of the survey the announcement of the survey was posted on the doors and/or information boards at the entrance to the churches. After the service, the rector or clergy of the church would make an announcement about the survey to the parishioners. Questionnaires were distributed to parishioners, as they were exiting the church, by 2–5 field workers. The questionnaire was filled out by the respondent and, if possible, returned immediately. In cases in which respondents were in a hurry to leave, the questionnaires would be given to them to fill out at home with a request to bring them back the following week, but most of the questionnaires were collected on the day of the survey. Respondents who complained of poor eyesight had their answers taken down by field workers; however, the proportion of such questionnaires in the general array was small (about 15).

ish), a village (1 parish). Geographical distribution of the survey included eight Russian regions: the city of Moscow, Iaroslavl Region, Kaluga Region, Rostov Region, Samara Region, Irkutsk Region, Altai Krai, and Krasnoiarsk Krai. In order to compare our findings with results across all of Russia, we also used the data from the nationwide *OrthodoxMonitor* survey (December 2011).⁷

Our analysis of the whole networks of parishes is based on the research project “Social Work Organization in Russian Orthodox Church Parishes in the First Half of the 21st Century: Sociological Analysis.” The survey consisted of a series of in-depth interviews in 15 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow Region, Kaluga Region, Iaroslavl Region, Samara Region, Irkutsk Region, Altai Krai, Krasnoiarsk Krai, and Khabarovsk Krai (the total number of interviews was 153). A series of questions concerning participation in various social activities of the parish (the number of participants, the regularity of participation, whether the participants were parishioners or non-parishioners, in which way those people were engaged in the activities, and so on) and with whom the parish comes into contact in the course of social work implementation (partner organizations, sponsors, people, institutions, and so on) was asked during the interview. The whole network of the parish was reconstructed by encoding interview data in GEPHI software designed for network analysis.

Social Support Networks: The Ego Network Level

The first level of analysis is provided by the ego networks of parishioners, comprising their friends and family as well as the circle of people with which each person directly interacts and communicates, and that he can ask for help in need (which may include people actively participating in church life, non-practicing people, and representatives of other denominations). Here we can raise questions about the size and composition of ego networks and the social capital rooted in these relationships.

In order to evaluate how involvement in parish life affects social capital, we will consider two aspects of social interactions. In ex-

7. The first wave of the nationwide *OrthodoxMonitor* survey (<http://socrel.pstgu.ru/en/orthodoxmonitor>, accessed on August 4, 2014) was conducted by the “Public Opinion Foundation” (FOM) from December 14 to 21, 2011. Research methodology was developed at the “Sociology of Religion” Research Seminar at St. Tikhon’s Orthodox University. The sample was representative of the urban and rural population of Russia aged 18 years and older. The sample size was 1500 respondents.

changes in social support networks, participants may act as “donors” or “recipients.”⁸ We looked at how the representatives of the surveyed parishes differed in self-assessment of their capacity to receive help from others in a difficult situation, as well as how the respondents themselves were involved in helping relationships.

In the analysis of our data that follows, first, we will consider involvement in the practice of mutual help in three areas — spending time and energy to provide services in the form of assistance with household chores, financial assistance, and moral support (table 2) — and try to estimate the strength of the social ties involved through their regularity (intensity).

Respondents were asked the question, “In the last 12 months, how often did you do anything from the following list for any of your relatives, friends, neighbors or acquaintances: helped someone out of your household with chores or shopping; lent money; found some time to talk to a distressed/depressed person?” This question was asked in the questionnaire of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) that focused on social networks (2001). We slightly expanded the list of possible answers compared with that study. The same question was also asked in the *OrthodoxMonitor* survey of December 2011 (as were our other questions), making it possible to compare our data on parish communities with the results in Russia as a whole.

8. Thus Alejandro Portes emphasizes the need to distinguish between two positions in exchange relations — the recipients (the “owners” of social capital, who have access to it and may turn to this resource if necessary), and the donors (the “sources” of social capital — the “owners” of other resources which the recipients can access by using their social ties with the donors) since the motives of donors and recipients in the exchanges mediated by social capital can vary significantly (Portes 1998: 6). Portes notes the lack of a clear distinction between the two in Coleman. Among Russian scholars studying social networks and informal economy, this distinction was used, for example, by S. Barsukova and G. Gradoselskaia. Barsukova distinguished between four types of participants in the exchange of a variety of resources (food, money, labor): radical donor, moderate donor, moderate recipient and radical recipient, depending on the intensity and degree of reciprocity (Barsukova 2005). Gradoselskaia introduced a typology of network agents, based on the distinction between four main resources: money, food, information and labor, as well as four types of participation in exchange: donors (providing transfers), consumers (receiving transfers), “exchange” (those who both provide and receive transfers) and independent agents (not participating in exchange relations) (Gradoselskaia 1999).

Table 2: “In the last 12 months, how often did you do anything from the following list for any of your relatives, friends, neighbors or acquaintances?” (column %)

	Parishes	Russia in general
... helped someone out of your household with chores or shopping		
several times a week	18	12
about once a week	16	11
2–3 times a month	12	15
about once a month	15	14
not less than 2–3 times a year	13	15
once a year	6	6
not a single time in the past year	9	20
difficult to say	11	8
Base (number of respondents)	753	1500
... lent money		
several times a week	5	2
about once a week	6	5
2–3 times a month	13	13
about once a month	17	18
not less than 2–3 times a year	25	24
once a year	15	8
not a single time in the past year	10	22
difficult to say	10	9
Base (number of respondents)	783	1500
... found some time to talk to a distressed/depressed person		
several times a week	24	12
about once a week	16	13
2–3 times a month	11	17
about once a month	15	16
not less than 2–3 times a year	3	15
once a year	2	6
not a single time in the past year	2	12
difficult to say	9	10
Base (number of respondents)	852	1500

The interviewed representatives of parishes significantly differ from the average Russians in terms of their involvement in the practices of mutual support.⁹ In general, there turned out to be a very high percentage of non-responders to the above set of questions in parish communities.

In terms of spending their time and energy (household help), the representatives of parish communities differed according to the extreme categories of response — “not a single time in the past year” and “once a week or more frequently.” The share of those who did not provide this type of assistance in the past year was 20 percent in general in Russia and 9 percent among the representatives of the Orthodox communities. A third of Orthodox respondents (33%) helped someone with housework or shopping once a week or more often, while in Russia in general this figure was 10 percent lower (23%).

Financial aid in general is provided much less frequently than moral support both in Russia as a whole and among the representatives of the studied parish communities. However, if 22 percent of Russians did not provide material assistance with money in the past 12 months, this group was much smaller among the interviewed representatives of parish communities, amounting only to 10 percent.

As far as moral support is concerned, the differences between average Russians and Orthodox parishioners were more significant: among the interviewed parish representatives 24 percent of the respondents spent some time talking to a distressed/depressed person in the past year several times a week, while in general in Russia those who engaged in this form of support several times a week over the preceding year amounted to half as many at 12 percent. Those who did not provide moral support to people close to them in the past year were practically absent among the interviewed parish respondents (2%, compared to 12% throughout Russia).

Thus, we can conclude that the ties of the representatives of parish communities are characterized by a higher level of frequency and intensity than those of Russians on average. Mutual aid and moral support is more pronounced among parish members than among the Russian population in general.

In order to determine the composition and size of the supporting ego networks in Orthodox parish communities and in Russia in general from the perspective of the recipient, we asked the following question: “If you find yourself in a crisis (for example, job loss, family problems, or illness), who can you turn to for help? In your opinion, how many people are there to whom you can turn for help in a crisis?”¹⁰

9. For determining the statistical significance of differences, we used the Mann–Whitney U test. For all three questions in this section, the differences in the intensity of involvement in the practices of mutual support were statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$).

10. The question of the size of the social support network was asked without specific prompting; respondents were asked to write the answer as a number rather than select

The number of people to which our respondents might turn in a crisis — those involved in parish communities — is noticeably wider than on average in Russia (table 3). For example, 32 percent of the representatives of parish communities have 10 or more people in their support network; in Russia on average the corresponding figure is much lower, only 18 percent. Seven percent of Russians reported that they did not have anyone at all to turn to for support, while such responses amounted only to 3 percent among the surveyed members of parish communities. The average size of a support network among the surveyed parishioners was six people, while in Russia on average this figure was only 4.6.¹¹

Table 3. In your opinion, how many people are there to whom you can turn for help in a crisis?

Social Support Network Size	Parishes (percent of respondents)	Russia in general (percent of respondents)
0 (no such people)	3	7
1	4	7
2	9	16
3	14	16
4	6	9
5	21	17
6	5	5
7	5	3
8	1	2
9	1	0
10	18	12
11 or more	14	6
Mean	6.0	4.6
Base (Number of respondents)	713	1239

from a predetermined range or list of numbers. For calculating mean values and for regression analysis we used initial quantitative assessment if the respondent's answer did not exceed "10." All responses from 11 and up were converted to the value of "11"; we also included the answer "many" in this category.

11. The differences are statistically significant. To check for the equality of means, we used the Independent Samples T-test. $T = -9.086$, $p < 0.0001$.

Although at first glance the differences between the surveyed parishioners and average Russians seem to be sufficiently significant, they may be only a consequence of a markedly differing social and demographic composition of the respondents. For example, there were significantly more women among parish respondents; the average age was slightly higher than in the all-Russian survey; among parishioners there was also a larger percentage of respondents with higher education and those who estimated the financial position of their families as more wealthy. We used linear regression in order to control for these social and demographic variables, and to calculate the “pure” impact of belonging to the parish.¹² The results of the analysis are presented in table 4.

When the main social and demographic variables were included in the model, belonging to the parish continued to be an important factor in determining the size of social support networks. However, the coefficient of determination for the model under discussion was not very high, which indicates the presence of other influencing factors not included in the model. Social and demographic characteristics and indicators of the level of religiosity explain 11 percent of variation in the sizes of social support networks. Since the scales that were used for measuring the main independent variables are characterized by different dimensionalities, we paid more attention to the standardized coefficients, which made it possible to estimate a relative contribution of each factor.

Table 4. Results of the linear regression analysis. The dependent variable is the size of the social network of support.

	Unstandardized coefficients (b)	Standardized coefficients	Significance
Intercept	2.33		0.000
Parishioners (0 – no, 1 – yes)	0.64	0.08	0.025

12. The analysis is based on the aggregate data from two studies – the nationwide *OrthodoxMonitor* survey and the data array from our survey of parishioners, “Social Support Networks in the Orthodox Church Community.” The array of the nationwide survey also included a number of practicing Orthodox Russians, but their number is not large, and we assume that important differences will not be significantly obscured by such a mixture. In addition, we included the question on frequency of attending church services as a control variable for the analysis, which should compensate for the above-mentioned feature.

ARTICLES

Frequency of attending church services (0 – never, 6 – once a week or more often)	0.18	0.12	0.001
Gender (0 – female, 1 – male)	0.17	0.03	0.337
Age (15 – 95)	- 0.01	- 0.07	0.010
Education (1 – incomplete secondary education, 6 – several university degrees, doctoral degree)	0.11	0.04	0.119
Employment (0 – no, 1 – yes)	0.38	0.06	0.043
Material wealth (1 – not enough money for food, 6 – well-off)	0.34	0.13	0.000
Registered marriage (0 – no, 1 – yes)	0.34	0.05	0.047
Having two or more children (0 – no, 1 – yes)	0.36	0.05	0.040
Have you helped anyone outside of your household with chores or shopping (0 – not a single time past year, 6 – several times a week)	0.08	0.06	0.044
Lent some money	0.03	0.02	0.575

Found some time to talk to a distressed/de- pressed person	0.08	0.05	0.061
R ²		0.11	

One could assume that the differences in the size of social support networks among respondents who were interviewed in parishes and during the all-Russian survey were primarily determined by the degree of their religiosity (which can be measured through a question on the frequency of attending church services). The logic here is that the more often a person goes to church, the more often he/she meets other members of the parish, and the greater the probability that they will form additional social ties, resulting in a wider perceived size of the social support network.¹³ If the frequency of attending church services were a factor sufficient for explaining the religious component of the observed differences in the sizes of the support networks, the inclusion of this factor into the model along with the factor of belonging to the parish would make one of these factors non-significant. It is noteworthy that when we simultaneously included belonging to the parish and the frequency of attending church services into the model, both of these factors were significant, indicating that these indicators represent somewhat different phenomena — neither of them fully exhausts the effect of the other. Both factors make an impact in a positive direction: the more frequently the respondents attend church services, the larger their social support networks, and even in case of frequency of attending church services being equal, the social network would be wider among the surveyed parishioners. The frequency of attending church services is, however, one of the most important factors in our model — its relative contribution is the most conspicuous (had the largest standardized coefficient).

No less important a factor in defining the size of the social support network was the material situation of the family. The more materially secure the person was (considers their family materially secure),

13. It should be noted that the relationship between the indicators of intensity of religious practices and formation of social ties may have a more complex, non-linear nature. For more detail on some of the phenomena that impede communication in an Orthodox community in particular, the attitude that can be described as “sacred individualism,” see Zabaev 2011.

the greater was their social support network. This result is noteworthy because it contradicts the intuitive idea that support from others is more important for a less well-off family — the lack of material resources should lead to a greater interdependence and more active involvement in the social network of exchange. However, we observe the opposite effect. On the one hand, this result can be explained by the fact that material wealth makes it possible to generate wider support networks — if a person has more opportunities to provide support to others, they accumulate more reciprocal obligations. On the other hand, less wealthy respondents may give a more pessimistic estimation of the size of their social support network, because their judgment is more realistic: all things being equal, they are likely to have an experience of having recourse for help to others.¹⁴

Having a job had a positive impact on the size of a social support network. A working person has the ability to turn to colleagues for help in a difficult situation.

Age, on the contrary, had a negative impact: the older the respondent was, the smaller was the size of their social support network. A particularly noticeable decrease in the size of the social network was typical for the oldest age group (70+).

Marital status showed a significant impact on the size of the social support network. Those respondents who were in a registered marriage had a wider network of social contacts that they could utilize in a difficult situation. The presence of a spouse, on the one hand, makes it possible to ask him (her) for help, if necessary; on the other hand it expands the social network available to the family through the contacts of the spouse.

The presence of children in the family also contributes to wider social support networks. This effect may be caused by the expansion of the list of social contacts due to the inclusion of families of a child's friends. It is noteworthy that it was not the number of children that "worked" the best way in the model, but the dichotomous variable, where "1" meant having two or more children in the family, and "0" indicated the presence of one child or the lack of children. This means

14. The importance of the material factor in forming certain types of social networks, in particular, "networks of survival" and "networks of development," is emphasized by I. Shteinberg: "Material inequality generates two types of networks. These are 'networks of survival,' intended for maintaining the subsistence level of all participants in network relations at the expense of egalitarian redistribution of network resources between them, and 'networks of development,' which are intended for expanded reproduction of material goods, development and strengthening of social capital for the whole network and each of its members" (Shteinberg 2010: 48).

that differences in the sizes of support networks caused by the presence of children in the family begin to manifest themselves most clearly with the appearance of the second child.¹⁵

The impact of such factors as gender and level of education was not statistically significant (however, we left them in the model as controls).

The social support network was wider among those people who themselves helped people who surrounded them. The effect is noticeable when help included personal involvement — moral/psychological support or help with housework, while the provision of material support (lending money) did not make an impact on the size of the available social network according to our data.

Thus, the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church show a higher level of social capital relative to Russia on the whole; parish communities manifest stronger mutual assistance and moral support compared to Russian social environments on average.¹⁶

Analysis of Parish Community as a Whole Network

When we speak about the social network of a parish community, we should understand that it is not a closed network: along with the parishioners of the church it includes a wide range of actors. The development of social ties within the parish, and even more so between parishioners and people from non-parish circles in the context of li-

15. When the indicator, measuring the number of children in the family — a 5-point scale from “0” (no children) to “4” (four or more children) — was used in the model, it was not significant ($p = 0.310$), while the results from other variables were very close to the model described in the article (as well as in the models with other indicators describing the number of children). Apparently, the relationship is not linear, since the coefficient becomes negative in a situation when there is one child in the family if we include dummy variables related to the number of children (for example, “presence of one child,” “presence of two or more children,” and “no children” as the reference category) into the model, which means that the perceived size of the social support network becomes even smaller after the birth of the first child; after the birth of the second child the social network expands reaching approximately the original level, and continues to slowly grow with the further increase in the number of children. This interesting effect can also be interpreted in a reverse manner: large families emerge when people feel the support of others.
16. Unfortunately, our data does not allow us to conclude whether this effect describes only Orthodox communities, or, more plausibly, whether it will also be present in the communities of other religions (the number of respondents of other religions was not sufficient for carrying out a similar statistical analysis). In order to answer this question, it is necessary to conduct additional studies aimed at a more in-depth examination of various religious communities.

turgical life, is difficult. Therefore it is logical to assume that the main mode of development of a parish social network is extra-liturgical activities and parochial social life. During the implementation of social projects, such as assistance to various categories of the needy, pastoral care of social facilities, organization of cultural and educational activities at the parish and beyond, as well as other activities outside of the parish,¹⁷ the participants in those projects (parishioners, priests, parish workers) establish contacts with many people and organizations, not necessarily Orthodox and not necessarily engaged in religious practice.

Scholars who have studied the effectiveness of local non-profit organizations in the United States have noted that the degree of “neighborhood embeddedness” directly affects the effectiveness of the organization: the more developed ties a local organization (human rights groups, social assistance groups, and so on) has with other organizations, the more effective is the work of the organization (Mesch and Schwirian 1996). The researchers of religious organizations (congregations, parishes) have demonstrated the relationship between the embeddedness of a parish in the local community and the effectiveness of social work performed by the parish (Unruh and Sider 2005). Thus, extra-liturgical life (in particular the practice of social assistance) in the parish fosters the preconditions for the development of a social network among the parishioners and the formation of numerous external ties of the parish community. This network, in turn, works as a precondition for more effective parochial social work.

Our study clearly demonstrates that extra-liturgical life fosters conditions for increasing the social capital of the parish, thus contributing to the expansion of parishioners’ support networks through strengthening ties both within the parish (through participation in common activities regardless of their nature, duration, consistency, etc.) and beyond. The analysis of the parish community as a whole social network will make it possible to illustrate the structure of the social ties in the parish and the configuration of the ties between the parish and the “outside world.” This approach will also raise the issue of the conditions for the development of the social network of a parish, if by development we understand the density of social ties between the parish and the outside world, the “embeddedness” of the parish in society. Figure 1 shows an example of the entire social network of an Orthodox parish.

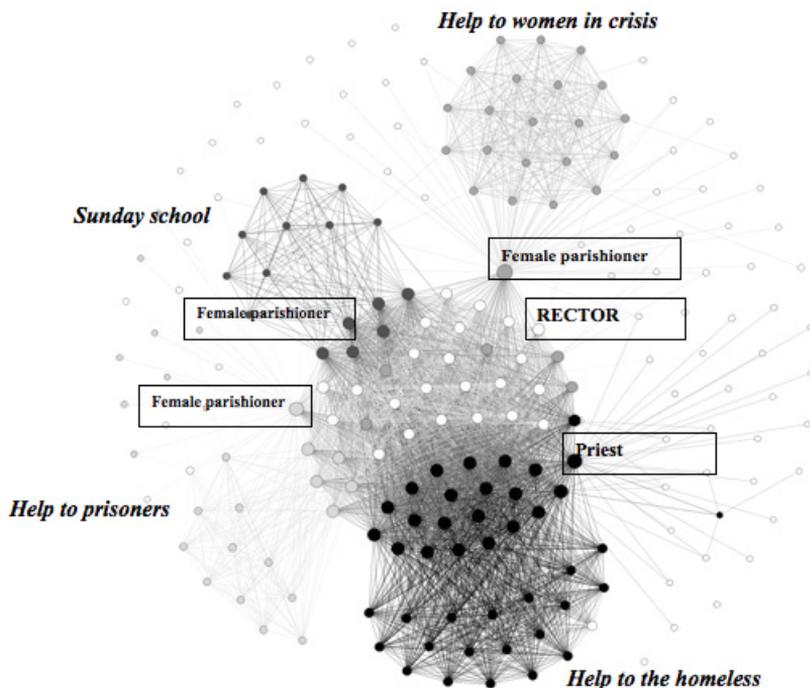
17. For more detail on the types of parish social activities, see Zabaev, Oreshina, Prutskova 2013.

Analysis of the Whole Social Network of an Orthodox Parish. Figure 1 shows the social network of a parish with well developed extra-liturgical social activities.

It is a large church in Moscow: the parish is headed by a rector and four priests; the number of parishioners in 2012 on major holidays reached over 1000 communicants (at two liturgies); on ordinary days the church had over 300 communicants (at two liturgies). Different shades of gray mark the participants in various areas of extra-liturgical activities. The sizes of the nodes represent the number of ties (the larger the unit is, the more ties this unit possesses).

This parish carries out various types of activities: there are groups of targeted assistance to those in need (feeding the homeless), engagement in inter-parochial network projects (assistance to prisoners), as well as non-profit organizations that grew out of parish initiatives (assistance to women in crisis). Along with social work of various kinds, the parish has a Sunday school, has developed mutual help between parishioners, and has targeted assistance to individual applicants.

Figure 1. Social network of an Orthodox parish community

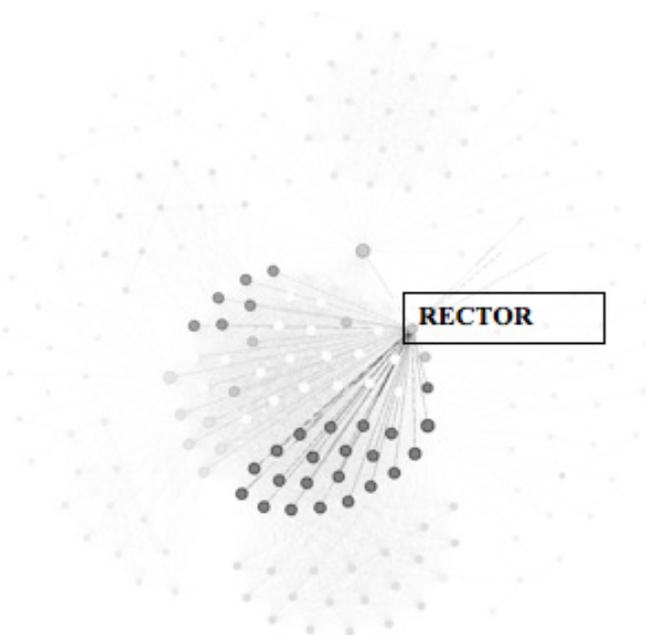


A methodological note. The entire network of the parish was constructed by encoding data from in-depth interviews with priests, parishioners and other members of extra-liturgical life of the parish using GEPHI software designed for network analysis. A number of methodological issues arise in the process of building up the whole social network of the parish, primarily the selection of the basis for constructing the network. There can be many such bases: networks of personal acquaintance (the network units know each other by sight and by name), networks of people going to confession to the priests of the church, networks of church communicants (those who regularly take communion) and “visitors” (who go to church occasionally, for example, on major church feast days), networks of sharing things, and so on. In the process of investigating this level through formalized methods, we faced a number of other methodological problems, in particular those related to the lack of a complete list of parish members, or the fact that many members know each other only by sight, which is a significant impediment to establishing complete sociometric matrices. In this regard, when we are building up a social network of a parish community, we need to understand the assumptions used for reproducing the configuration of the network. In our case, these assumptions are the following: (1) the basis for the construction of the network is participation in the extra-liturgical life of the parish — parochial social work, parish projects, and activities not associated directly with worship; (2) units of the network (nodes) are people or organizations involved in extra-liturgical activities of the parish. These nodes include parochial units (parishioners of the church — those who attend services and take communion in the church) and non-parochial units (parishioners of other churches, non-practicing Orthodox, members of other denominations, etc.) — this division has allowed us to monitor the process of linking non-parochial units to the projects and activities of the parish, and to draw conclusions on the “embeddedness” of the parish in the neighborhood community; (3) ties between the nodes are the involvement of units in a common activity regardless of whether they know each other only by sight or by name.

The social network of the parish is characterized by the following features. First, parochial social work functions by delegating responsibilities; most of the activities are coordinated by the laity; the rector does not lead any social work projects. Figure 2 shows the social network of the rector, which primarily includes the core of parish members, while the external ties of the parish are formed by the participants in the social projects. The rector (as well as other priests) does

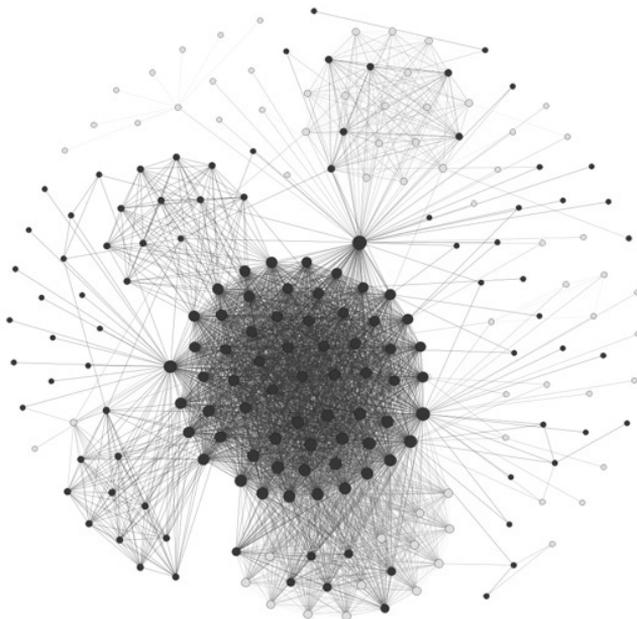
not place external ties upon himself, and he is not the sole leader, coordinator, or administrator of extra-liturgical activities.

Figure 2: Social network of an Orthodox parish community:
Rector's network



Second, the parish has a developed network of external ties because it engages non-parochial participants in the parish's activities. In the case of the crisis center for women, these participants are hired professional psychologists. In the case of assisting prisoners, non-parochial participants include parishioners from other churches. In the case of help to the homeless, the ties are represented by volunteers from among the friends and relatives of parishioners – members of the group (including non-practicing Orthodox members, representatives of other denominations, for example, Protestants, and assisting sponsoring organizations). Figure 3 shows the parochial and non-parochial participants in the social activities of the parish. The engagement of non-parochial participants takes place in the context of systematic or project-oriented social work of individual groups through mobilizing the outside contacts of parish members participating in the social work.

Figure 3: Social network of an Orthodox parish community: Connecting non-parishioners to parish participants in the process of social work¹⁸



In summary, we can once again emphasize that extra-liturgical practices and social projects not only provide increased inter-parish ties between parishioners, but also multiply external ties. The latter is achieved by engaging sponsoring and partner organizations, friends and relatives of participating parishioners, hired professionals (if necessary), parishioners of other churches, and other people in parish initiatives. This leads to the embeddedness of the parish in the neighborhood community (connection to the world “beyond the church fence”), which increases the level of social capital of the parish and generates a large number of weak ties¹⁹ that can be employed both for parish affairs and for the personal needs of the parishioners. As we can see, an important condition for the development of a parish network is delegating the extra-liturgi-

18. In the figure, black denotes parishioners, gray denotes the participants in parish activities who are not the parishioners of the church (some of them may be Orthodox, the members of other denominations, or may not identify themselves with any particular denomination).

19. Mark Granovetter argues for the importance of weak ties in Granovetter 1973.

cal activities of the parish, and the decision not to close oneself off from all contacts (including contacts with external organizations and other parishes) on the part of the rector or parish priests. The ties established in the process of parish social work in fact become a set of social relations that can be used in the interests of not only the parish as a whole, but also of its individual members. The above example of a parish network suggests that extra-liturgical activities of the Orthodox parish create preconditions for increasing the social capital of the parishioners and for the formation of support networks, the importance of which for the social welfare of citizens is confirmed by numerous studies.

Conclusion

The data presented above allow us to conclude that religion (Orthodoxy in our case) may be a factor that increases the social capital of Russians and strengthens their social support networks.

Our studies on the analysis of the whole network of a parish suggest that active involvement of parishes in organizing social work, based on the principles of delegating responsibility and executive powers from the priests to the laity, may enlarge the social network of the parish, connecting more and more laypeople to it, including people who do not practice active church life. This process of unfolding the social network of the parish, creating the potential to bring more people to the Church through parish social activities, is especially important for Russia, a country that experienced forced secularization in a very severe form, since there are very few tools for connecting a person to religion. Basic mechanisms of personal conversion barely work in Russia and similar countries, because of the lack of early religious socialization.²⁰ The absence of personal experience of contacts with the representatives of institutionalized religions minimizes the possibility of falsification/verification of the reports concerning religion emerging in the media and the public realm.

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20. For more detail see Prutskova 2013.

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