

# **JUSTICE AND FAITH**

**Individual Spirituality and Social Responsibility in the  
Christian Reformed Church in Canada**

**SURVEY FINDINGS**

**September 2014**

## OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the findings of a national survey of Christian Reformed Church members in Canada. This survey was one data collection method in a larger 2-year research project, *Justice and Faith: Individual Spirituality and Social Responsibility in the Christian Reformed Church in Canada*.

The Justice and Faith project is exploring the relationship of justice and faith in the spiritual lives of Canadian members of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA). It is a partnership between the Institute for Christian Studies, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Centre for Community Based Research. The Justice and Faith project is funded by a Partnership Development Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and by cash and in-kind contributions from the research partners.

**CPRSE**  
Centre for Philosophy,  
Religion & Social Ethics

**ICS**  
Institute for  
Christian Studies

  
Christian  
Reformed  
Church



CENTRE FOR  
COMMUNITY  
BASED RESEARCH

## OVERVIEW

The Justice and Faith survey consisted of 37 questions, attempting to answer three main research questions:

- **How is the relationship between justice and faith currently understood and practiced in North American (especially Canadian, evangelical) Christianity?**
- **To what extent is justice a priority in the faith and lives of CRC congregants?**
- **How can CRC people be best engaged to embrace justice as a part of Christian faith and life?**

The survey is one of three data collection methods in the Justice and Faith project, alongside key informant interviews and a literature review. Reports on the findings of the other methods may be found at [www.crcna.org/CanadianMinistries/justice-and-faith-project](http://www.crcna.org/CanadianMinistries/justice-and-faith-project) and [www.icscanada.edu/cprse](http://www.icscanada.edu/cprse).

# **SECTION 1: WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS SURVEY?**

## HOW SURVEY PARTICIPANTS WERE SELECTED

Seventy eight randomly selected CRC congregations in Canada were invited to participate in the survey, taking into account the regional (Classis) and urban/rural distributions of churches. Fifty congregations agreed to participate. The survey was administered in each congregation by a survey “champion” who was also a member of that congregation.

Six randomly selected active adult professing members from each congregation were invited to participate in the survey. Survey champions were instructed to continue inviting randomly selected members until they had reached 6 participants. 28 congregations (56% of the sample) achieved full participation; 16 congregations (32%) had 4 or 5 participants; 6 congregations (12%) had 3 or fewer participants. A total of 264 people participated in the survey.

The refusal rate for congregations was 36%. The refusal rate for individuals in participating congregations was also 36%. These participation rates are consistent with other church-based research.

The survey results are considered accurate +/- 6%, 19 times out of 20.

This survey sample is a representative sample of CRC members in Canada, meaning that the results of this survey can be considered true for the full population of active adult Christian Reformed Church members in Canada.

## Q2: OF WHICH CRC CONGREGATION ARE YOU A MEMBER?

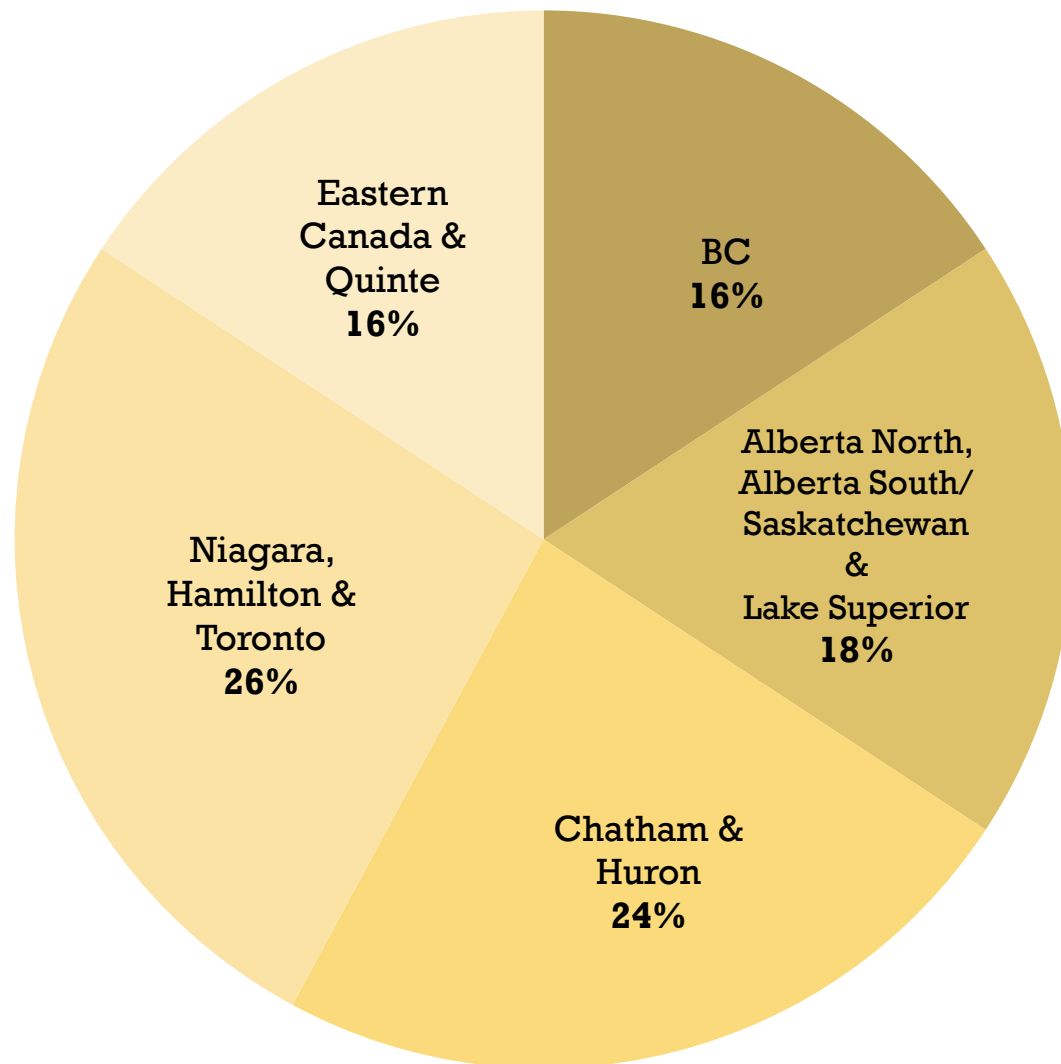
**254 responses**

Percent of total responses

Responses are reported by the classis (regional grouping of churches) of which each participating congregation is a part.

Responses were grouped by classis for data analysis.

This chart shows the percentage of total responses in each grouping of classes.



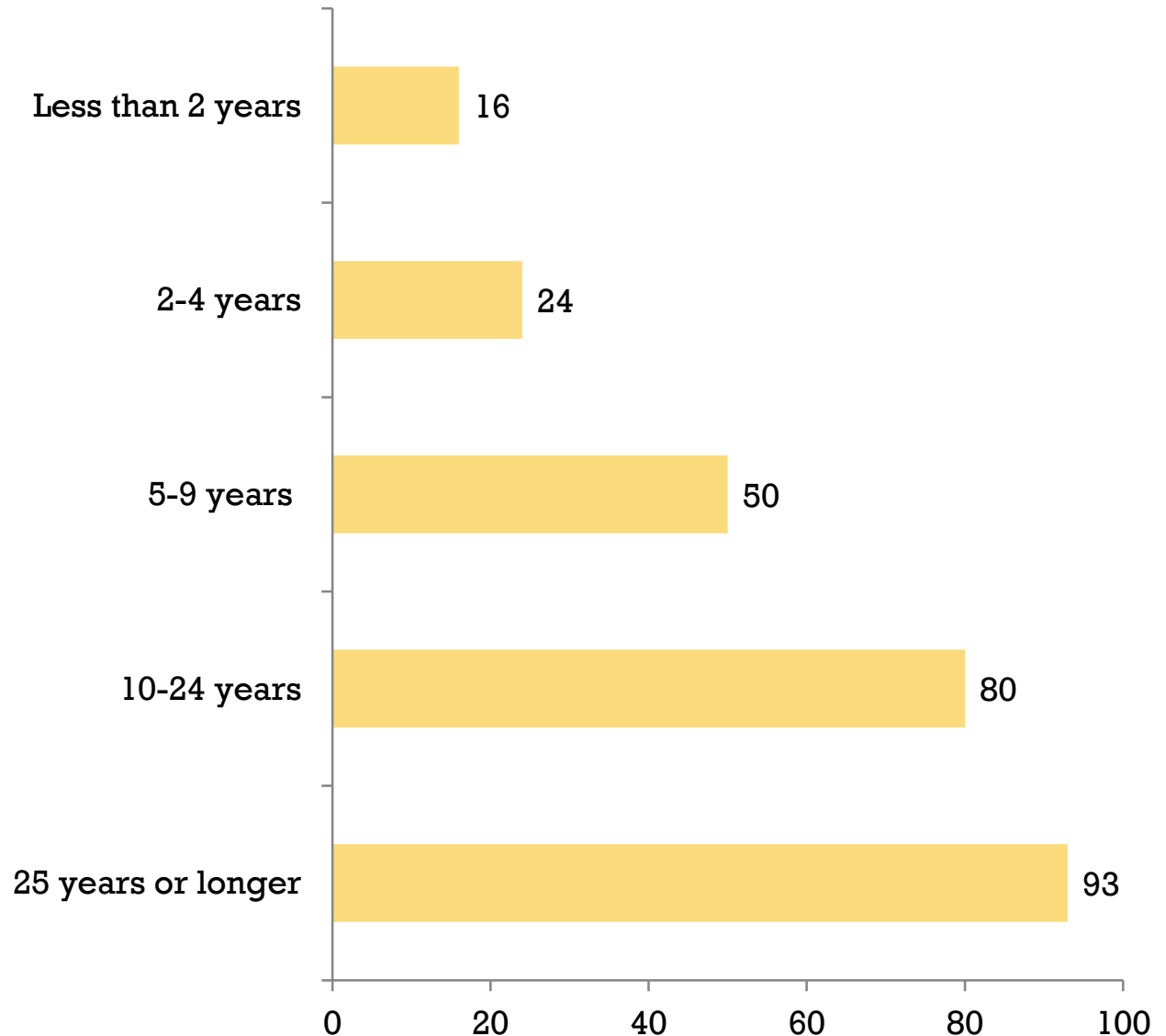
# Q3: FOR HOW LONG HAVE YOU ATTENDED THIS CHURCH?

**263 responses**

Just over 1/3 of all respondents had attended their church for 25 years or longer.

Another 1/3 of respondents had attended their church for 10-24 years.

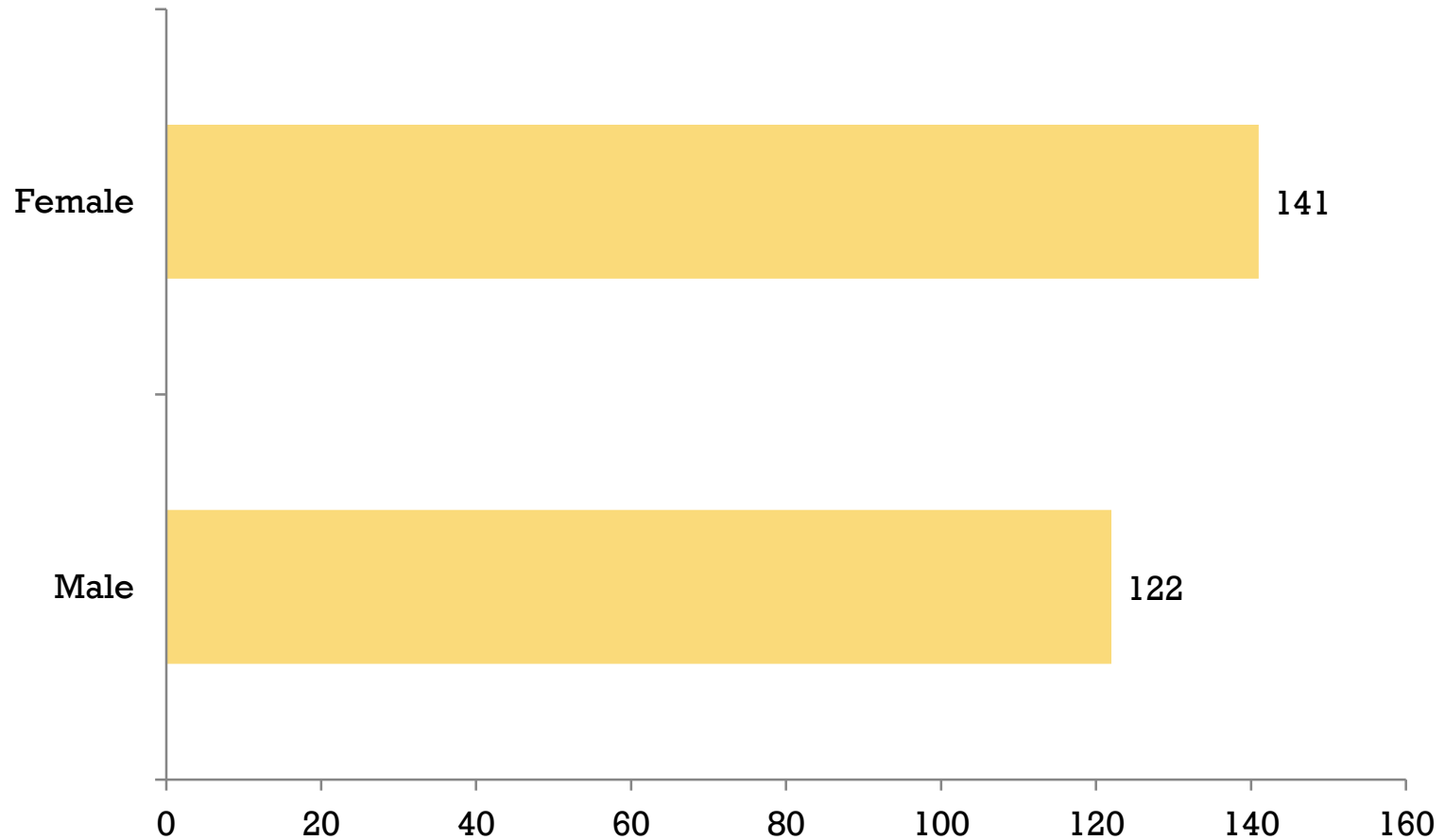
The final third is a near-even split between those who have attended less than 5 years, and those who have attended between 5-9 years.



## Q4: WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?

**263 responses**

Gender distribution was nearly equal, with females slightly outnumbering males at 54%.

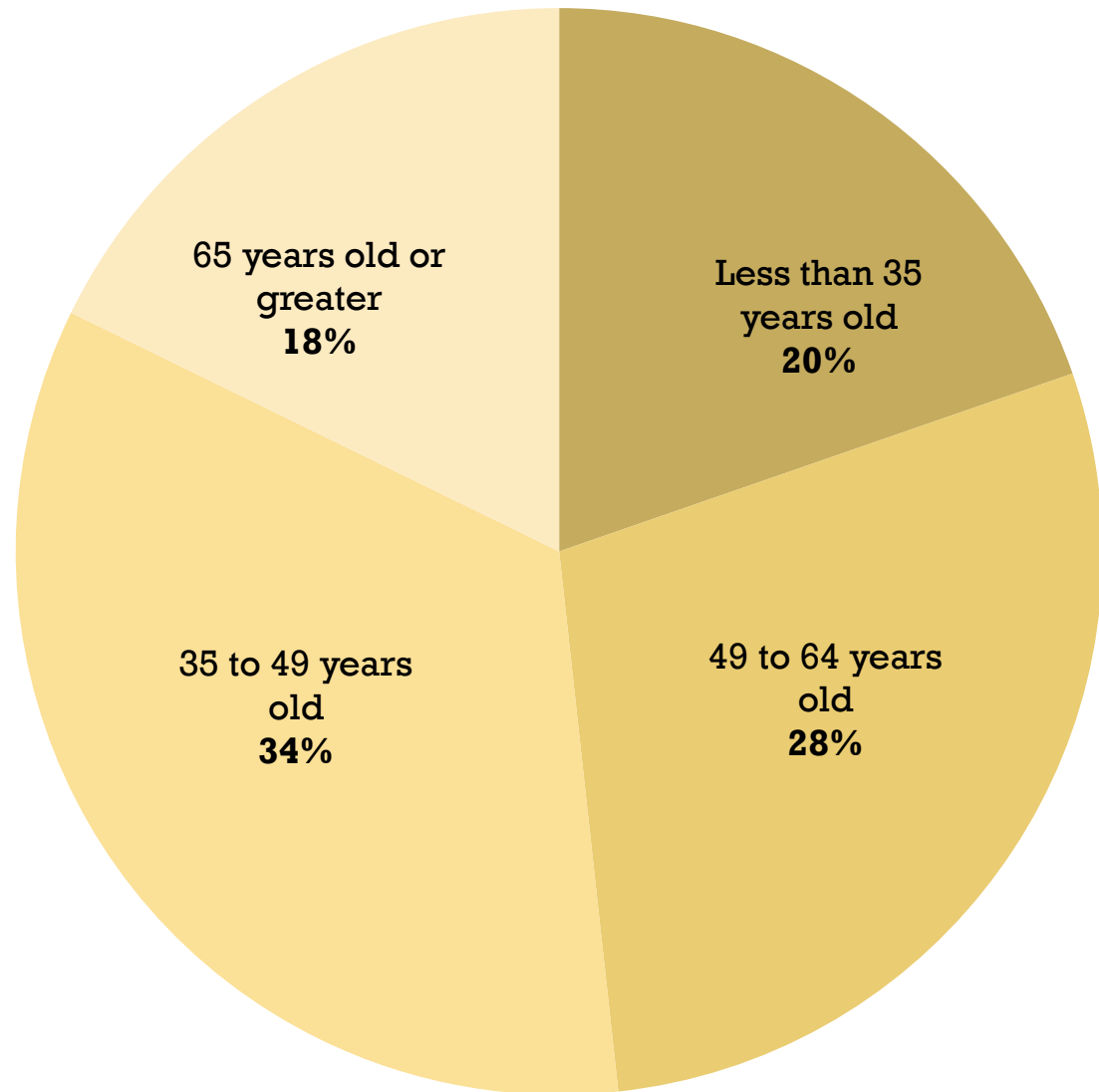




## Q5: IN WHAT YEAR WERE YOU BORN?

**259 responses**

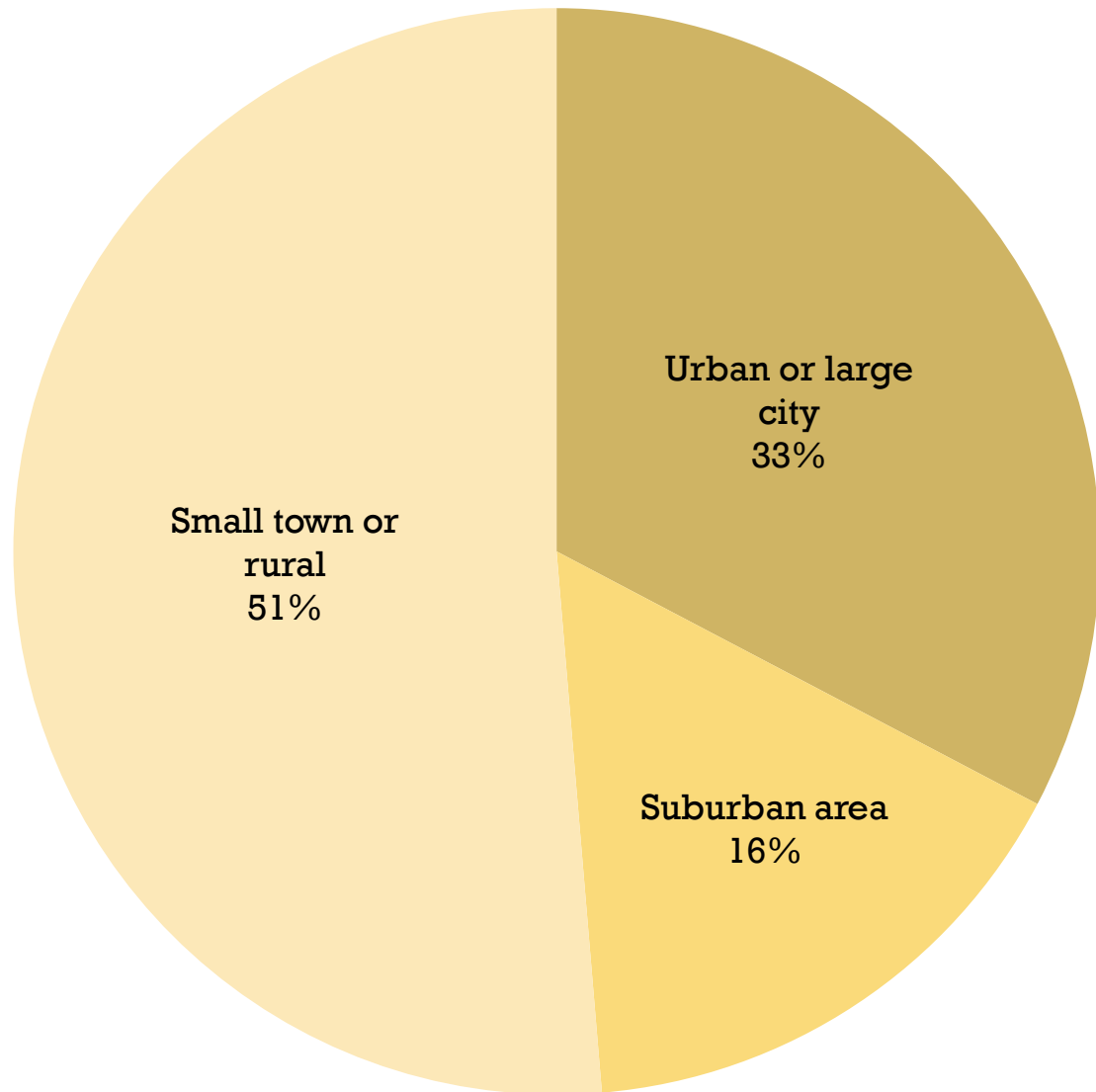
The average (mean) age of respondents was 49.7 years. The median age was 51.0.



## Q6: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES WHERE YOU LIVE?

**263 responses**

Approximately half of respondents say that they live in a small town or rural area, and half say that they live in an urban or suburban area.

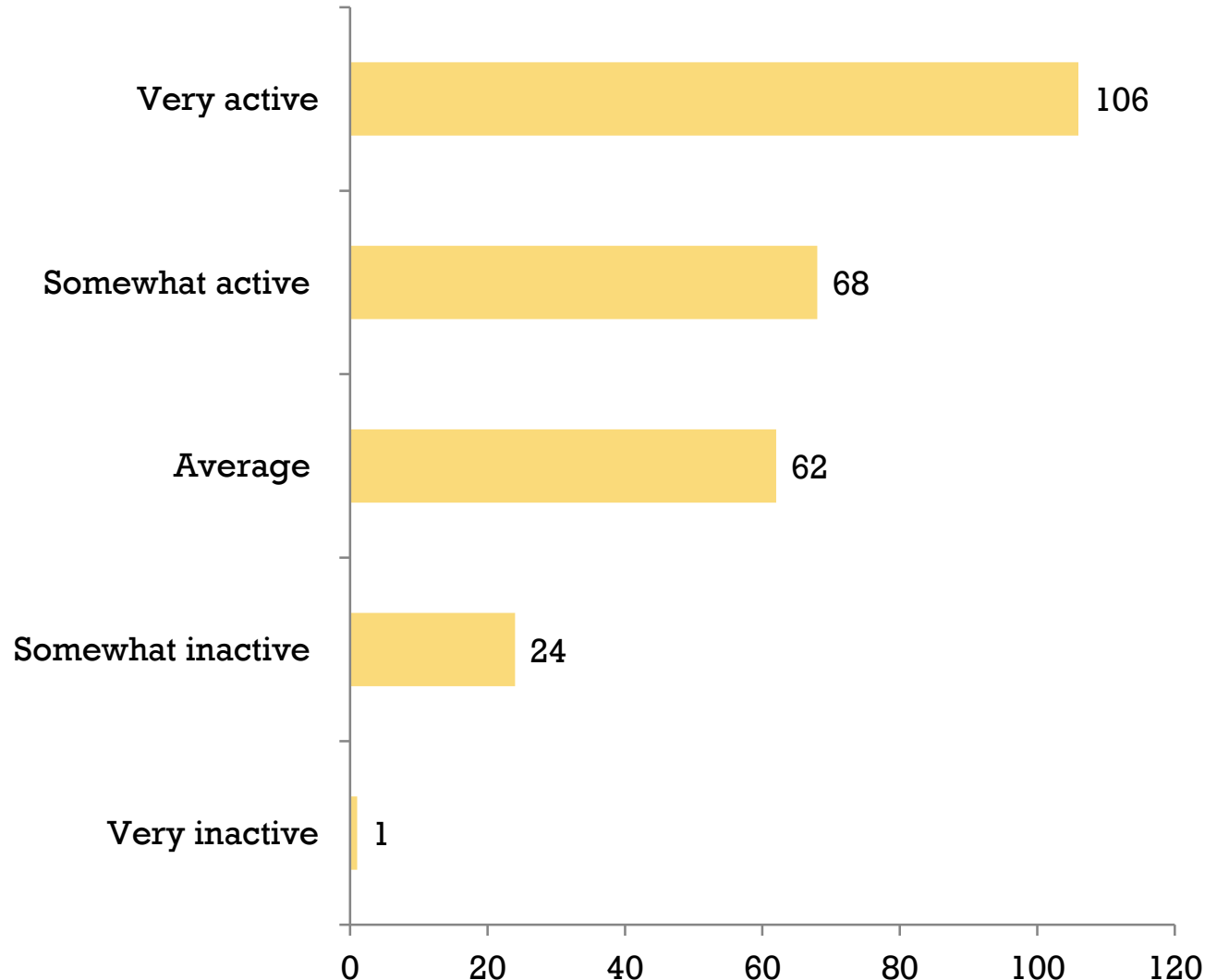


# Q7: HOW ACTIVE IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE?

**264 responses**

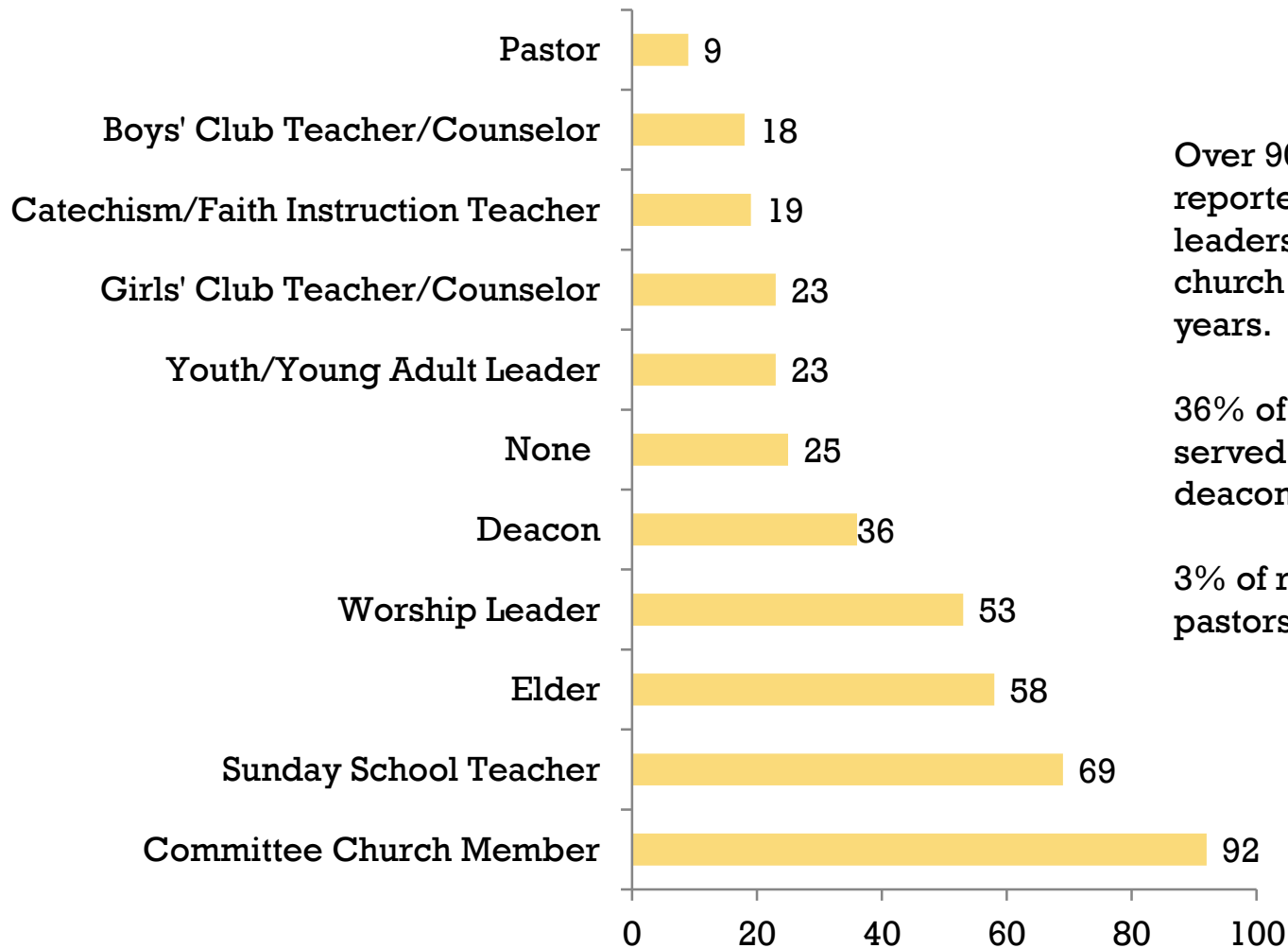
Two-thirds of respondents considered themselves to be somewhat or very active in the life of their congregation.

Less than one quarter considered their activity level to be average, while another 9% considered themselves to be somewhat inactive.



**Q8: WHAT TYPE OF SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP ROLES HAVE YOU HAD IN YOUR CONGREGATION OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? (PLEASE INDICATE ALL THAT APPLY)**

**262 responses**



Over 90% of respondents reported having a leadership role in their church in the last five years.

36% of respondents had served as elders or deacons.

3% of respondents were pastors.

**Q8: WHAT TYPE OF SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP ROLES HAVE YOU HAD IN YOUR CONGREGATION OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS? (PLEASE INDICATE ALL THAT APPLY)**

**262 responses**

In addition to the leadership categories provided, survey participants listed several “other” leadership roles worth mentioning (>10 responses):

- 11 respondents: audio/visual (e.g. sound, projection, etc.) as part of worship service
- 22 respondents: leading an adult Bible study or ministry (small groups, bible study, Friendship)
- 12 respondents: other staff positions or volunteer administrative positions (e.g. admin staff, janitor, librarian)

## Q9: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ETHNO-RACIAL IDENTITY?

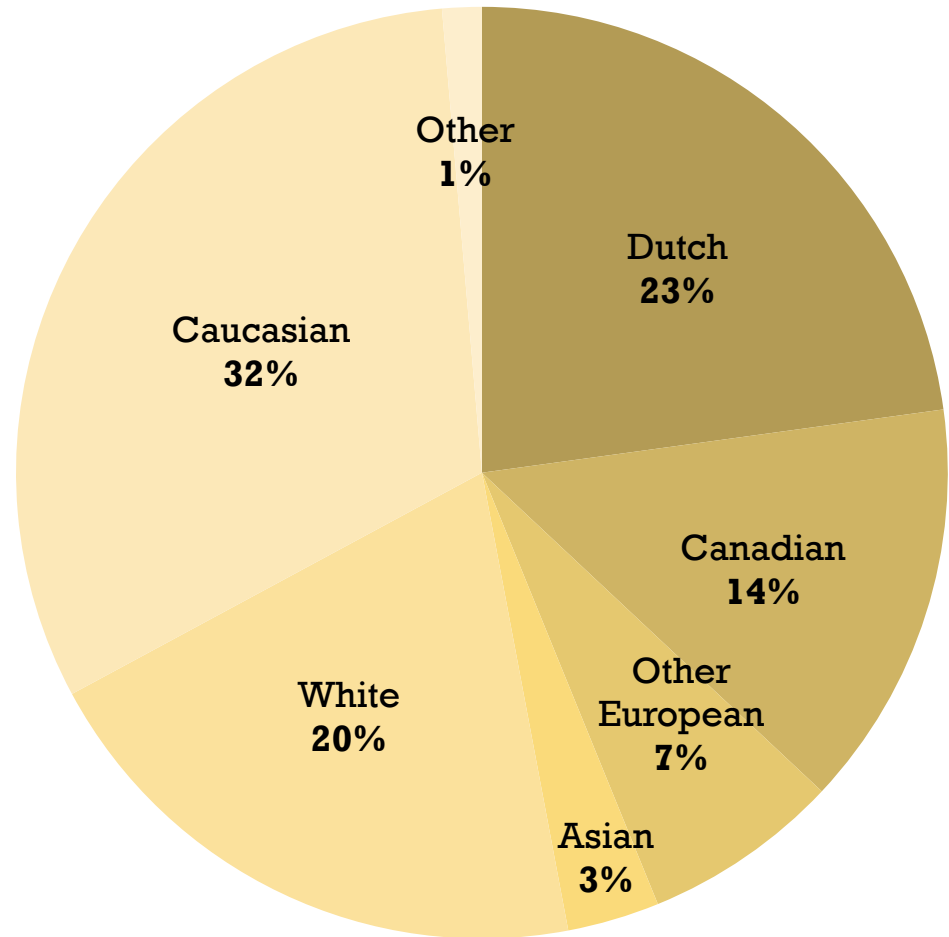
### 236 responses

Self-reported ethno-racial identity revealed a relatively homogenous sample: 81% of respondents identified Caucasian, White, Dutch, or other European as their primary ethno-racial identity.

Another 14% reported Canadian as their primary ethno-racial identity.

Three percent of respondents (7) reported an Asian ethno-racial identity, with 4 participants reporting “Chinese” or “Chinese-Canadian.” Only one respondent identified an Indigenous ethno-racial identity.

In total, only 4% of respondents specified a non-European primary ethno-racial identity.

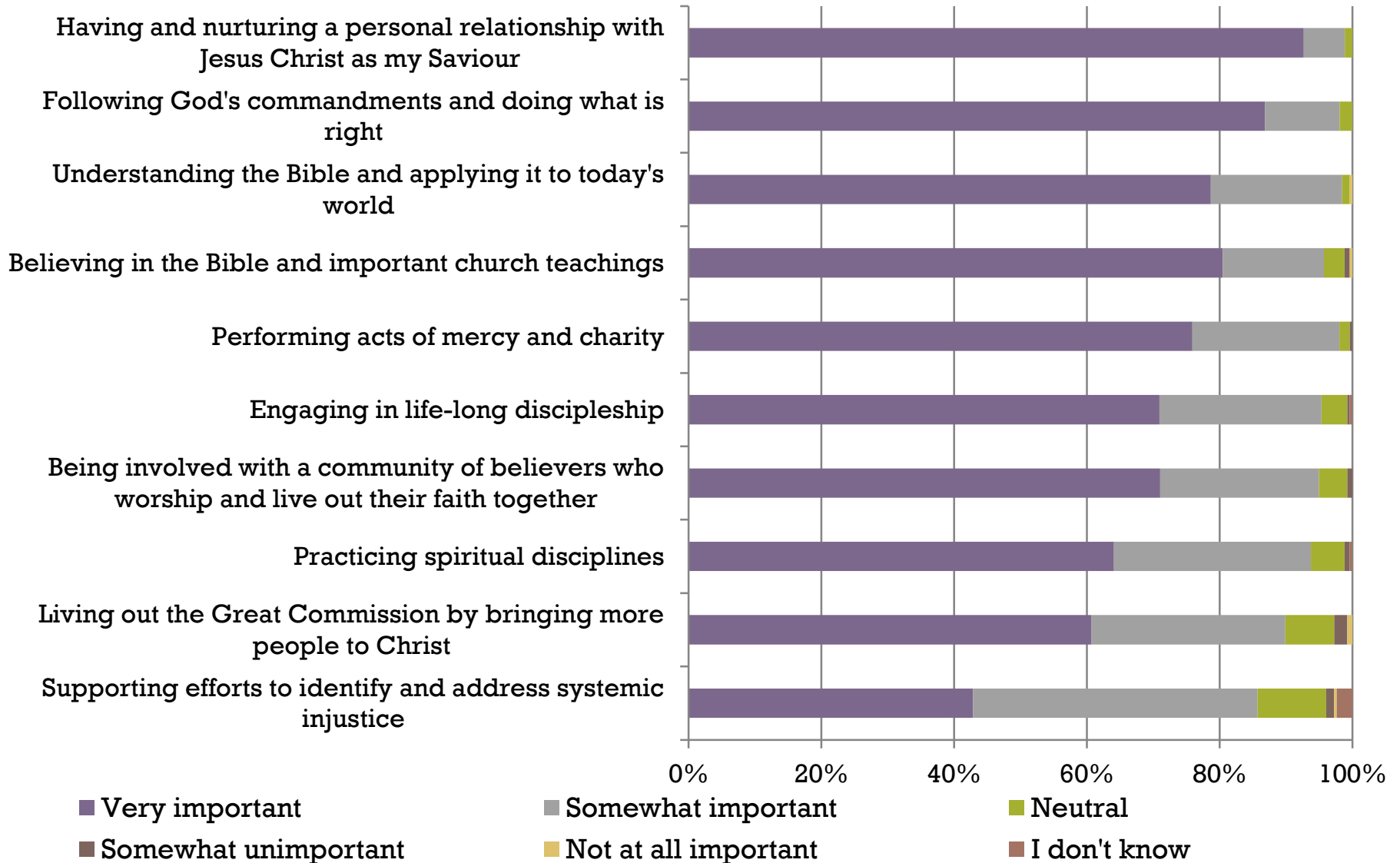


Self-reported primary ethno-racial identity

## **SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING FAITH**

# Q10: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT TO CHRISTIAN FAITH?

264 responses

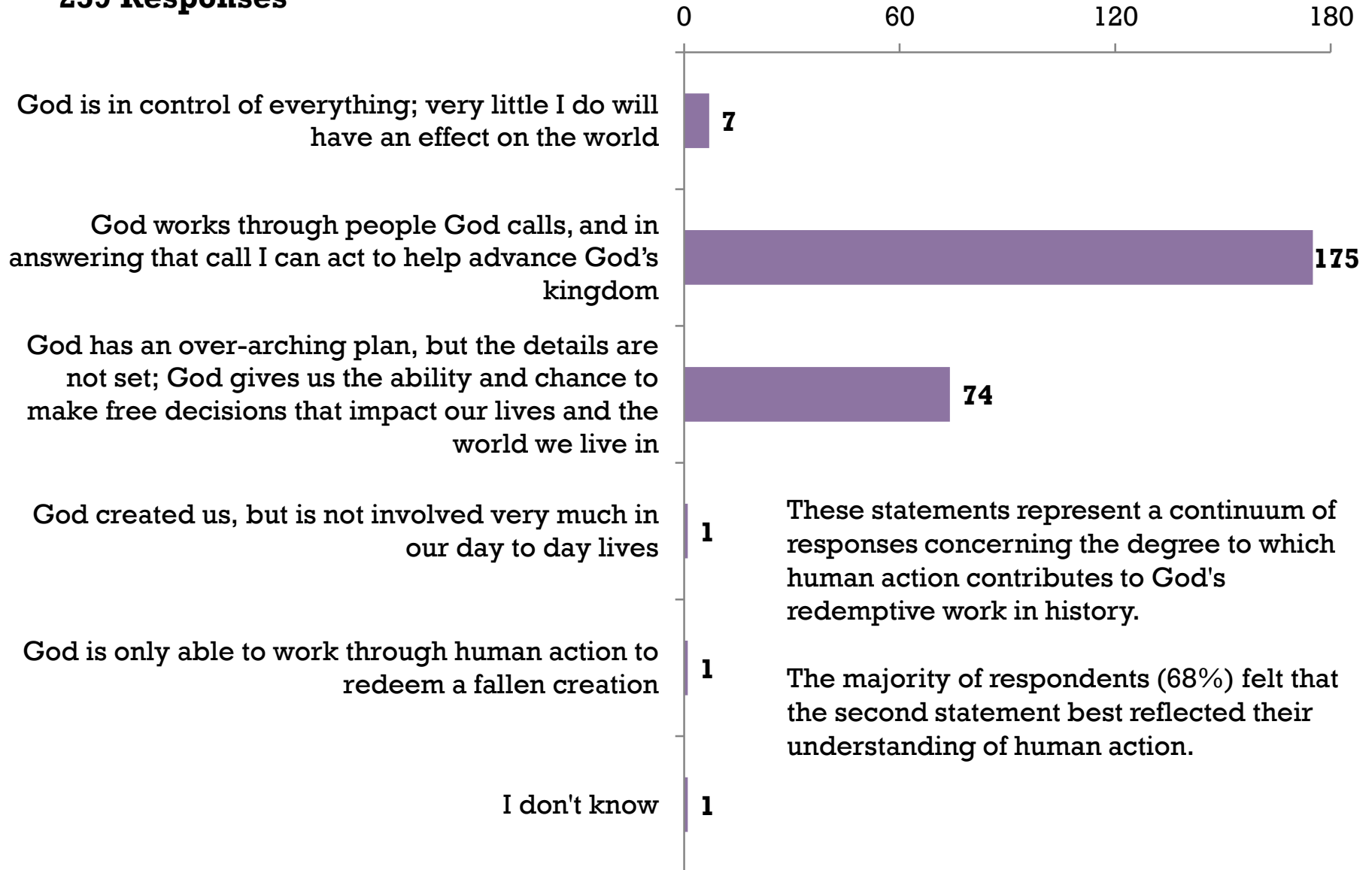


RANK ORDERED



# Q11: WHICH PHRASE BEST REFLECTS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN ACTION IN THE CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH? (PLEASE SELECT ONE)

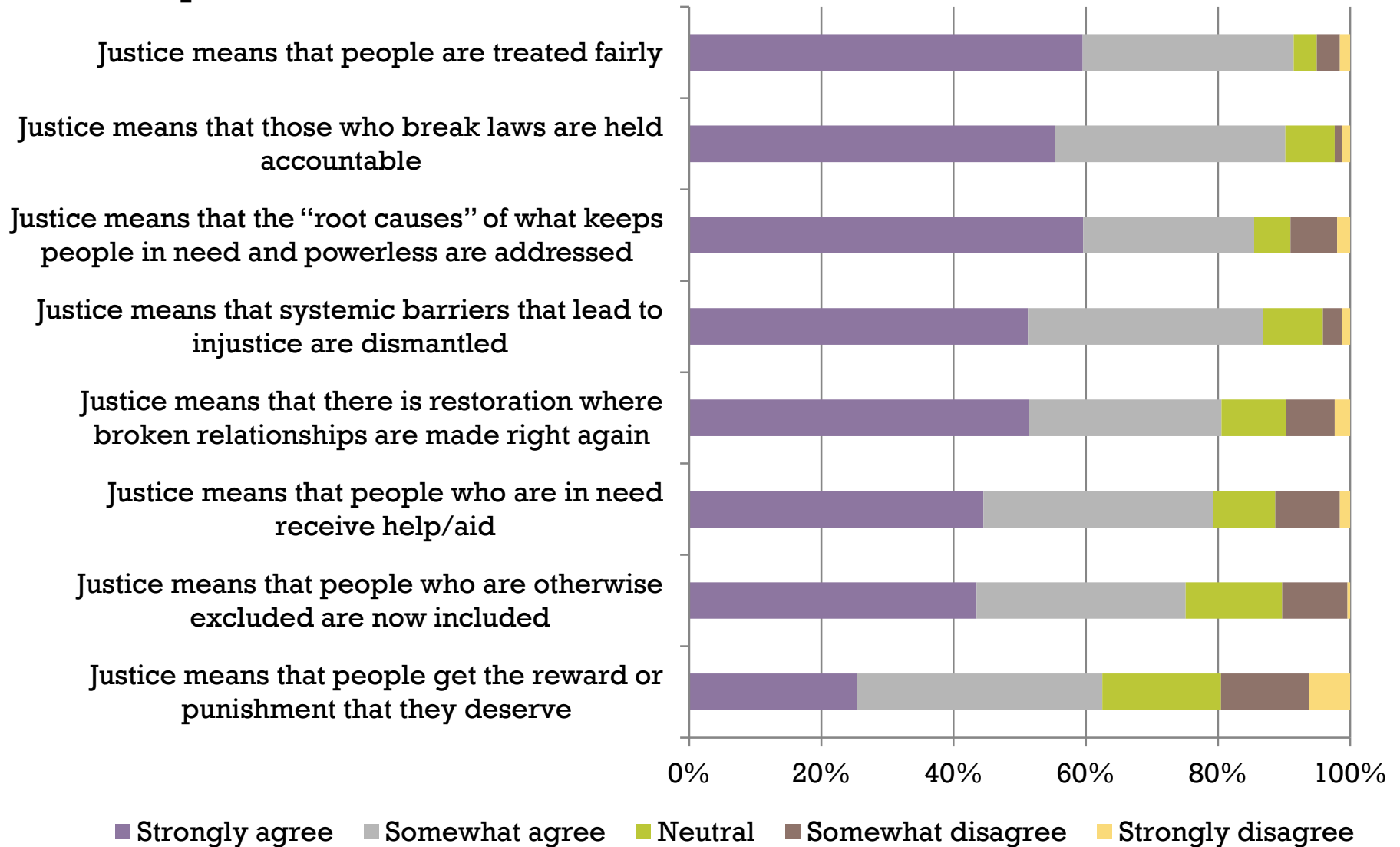
**259 Responses**



## **SECTION 3: UNDERSTANDING JUSTICE**

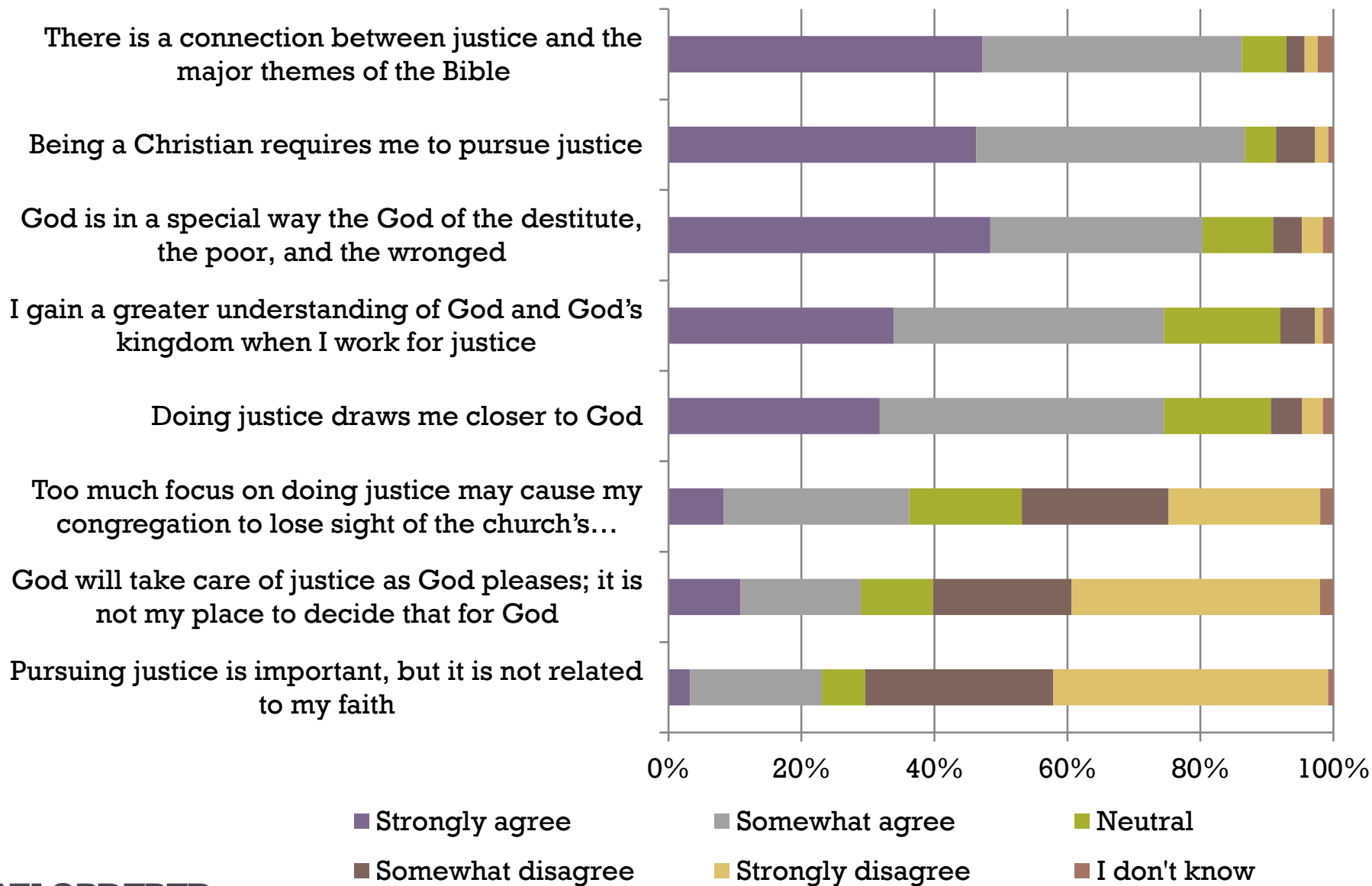
# Q12: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE MEANING OF JUSTICE?

258 Responses



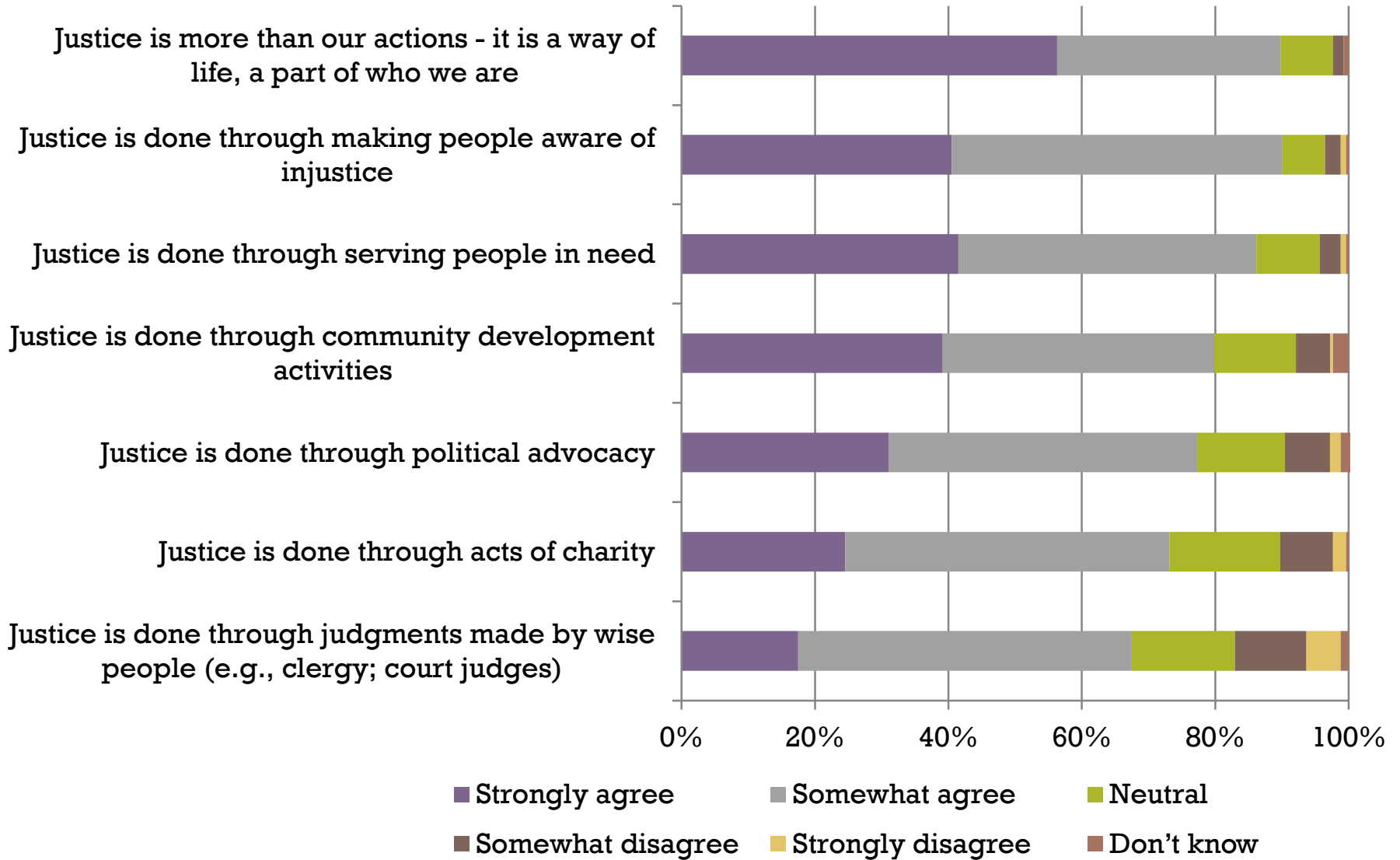
# Q13: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

**257 Responses**



# Q14: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

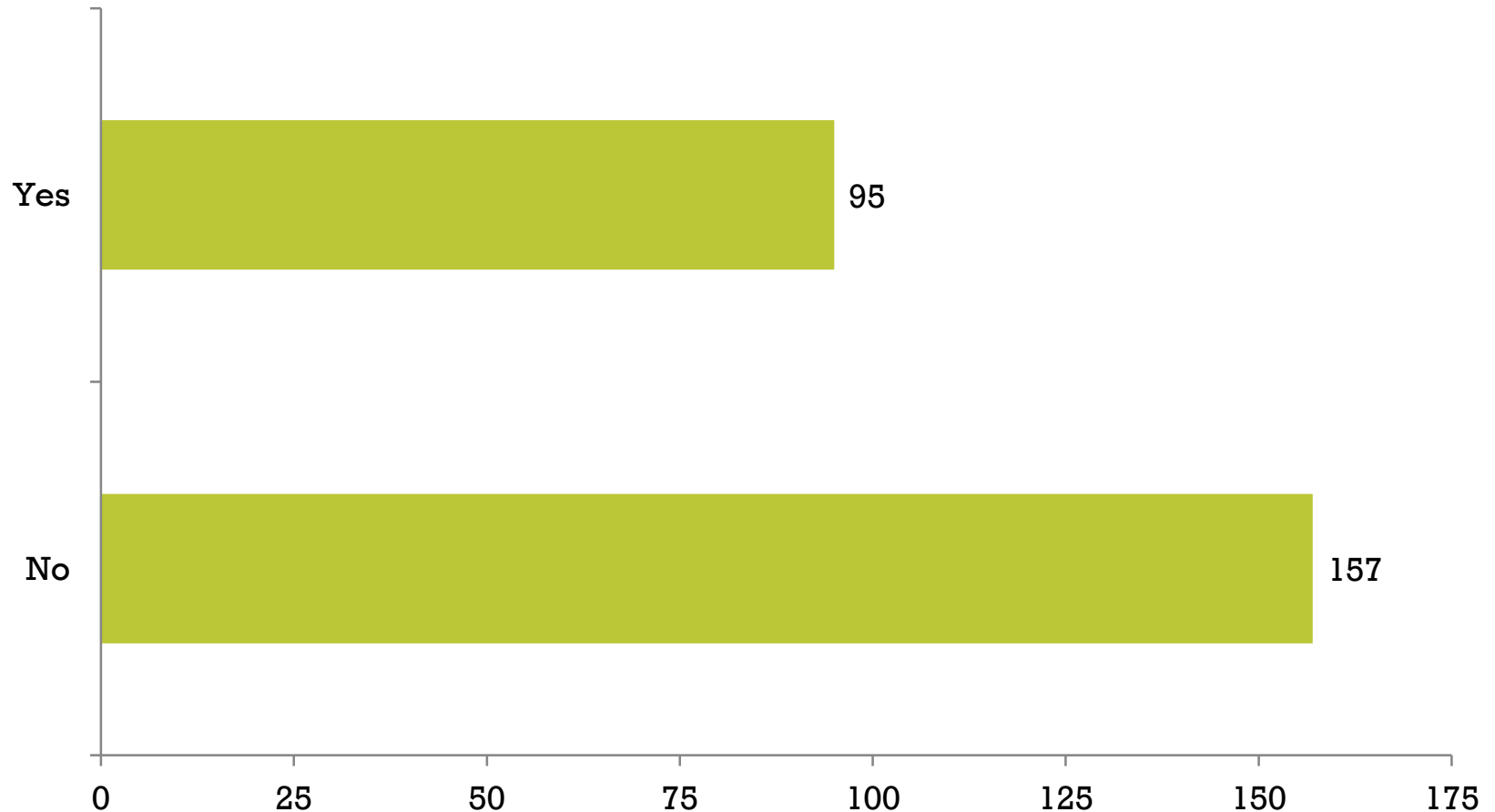
**258 Responses**



# Q15: HAVE YOU IN THE PAST LOOKED FOR RESOURCES TO HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND JUSTICE?

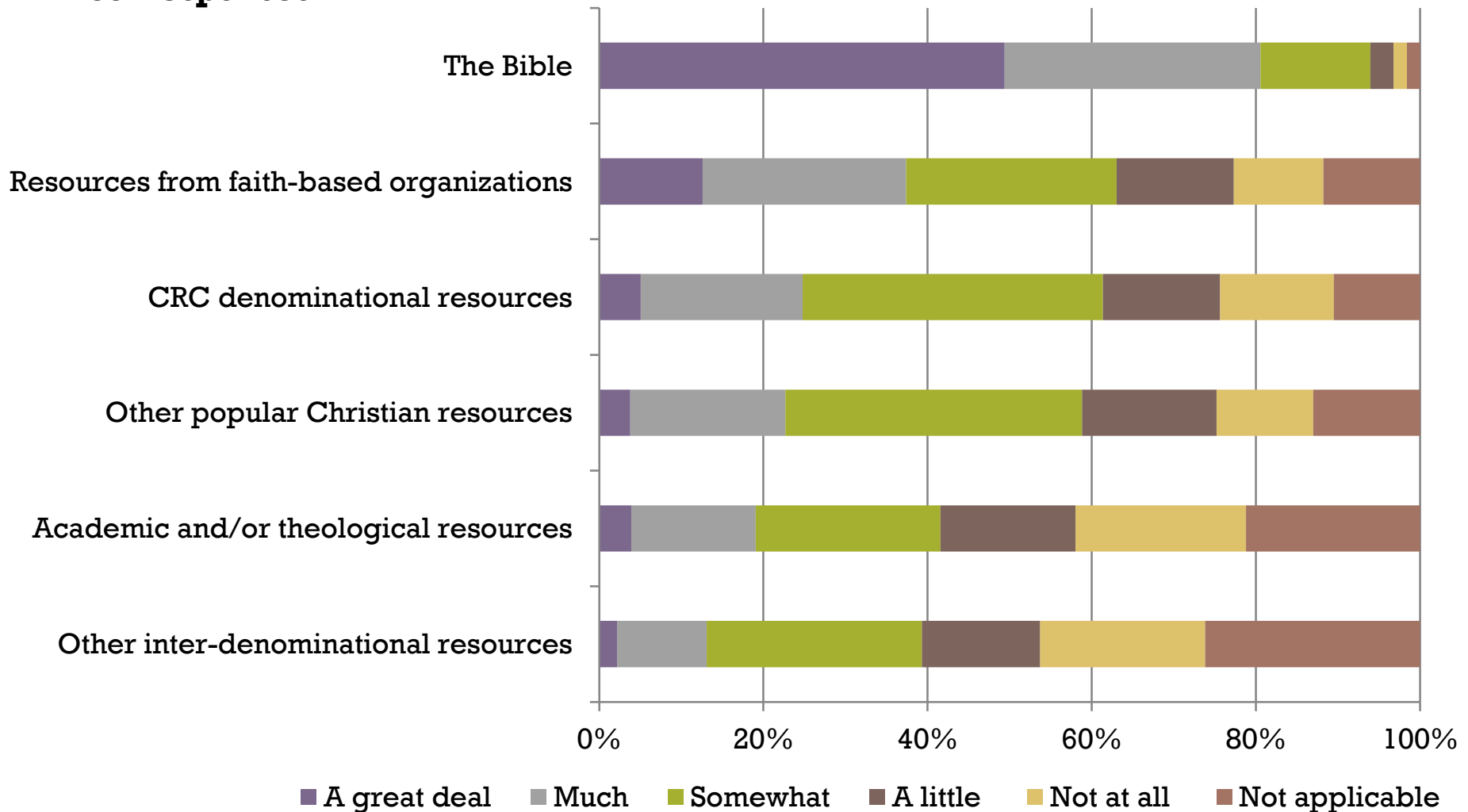
**252 responses**

63% of respondents had not previously looked for resources to help them better understand justice.



# Q16: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE WRITTEN RESOURCES LISTED BELOW HELPED YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND JUSTICE? (IF APPLICABLE)

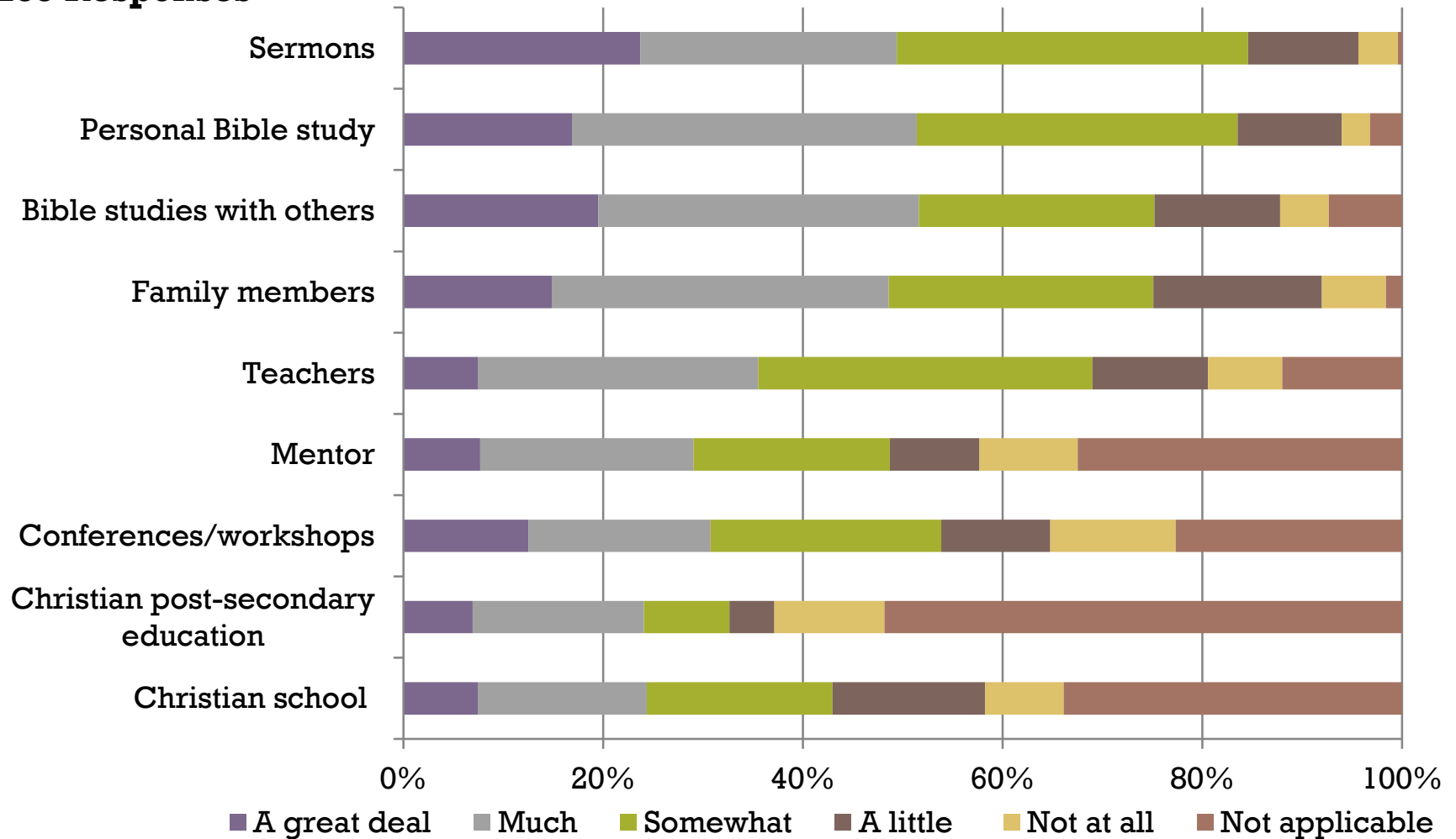
**253 Responses**



Several respondents indicated that other sources such as the news, internet, and other media that are not specifically Christian or faith-based are also valuable and reliable resources for helping them to better understand justice.

# Q17: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THESE OTHER AVENUES HELPED YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND JUSTICE?

255 Responses

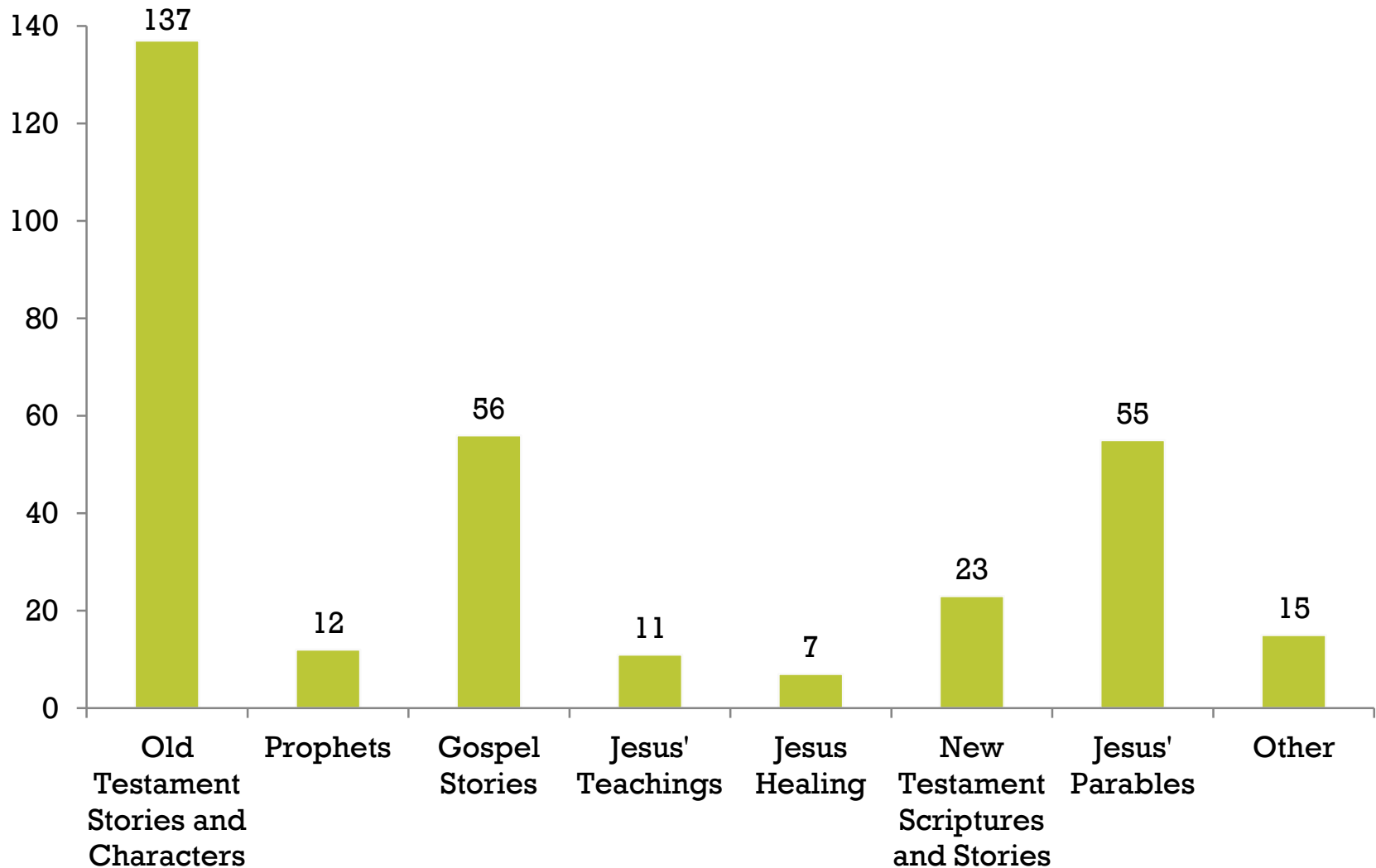


As in question 16, several respondents indicated that they learn about justice from sources that are not specifically Christian or faith-based, such as work, public school, media, and non-faith based organizations.



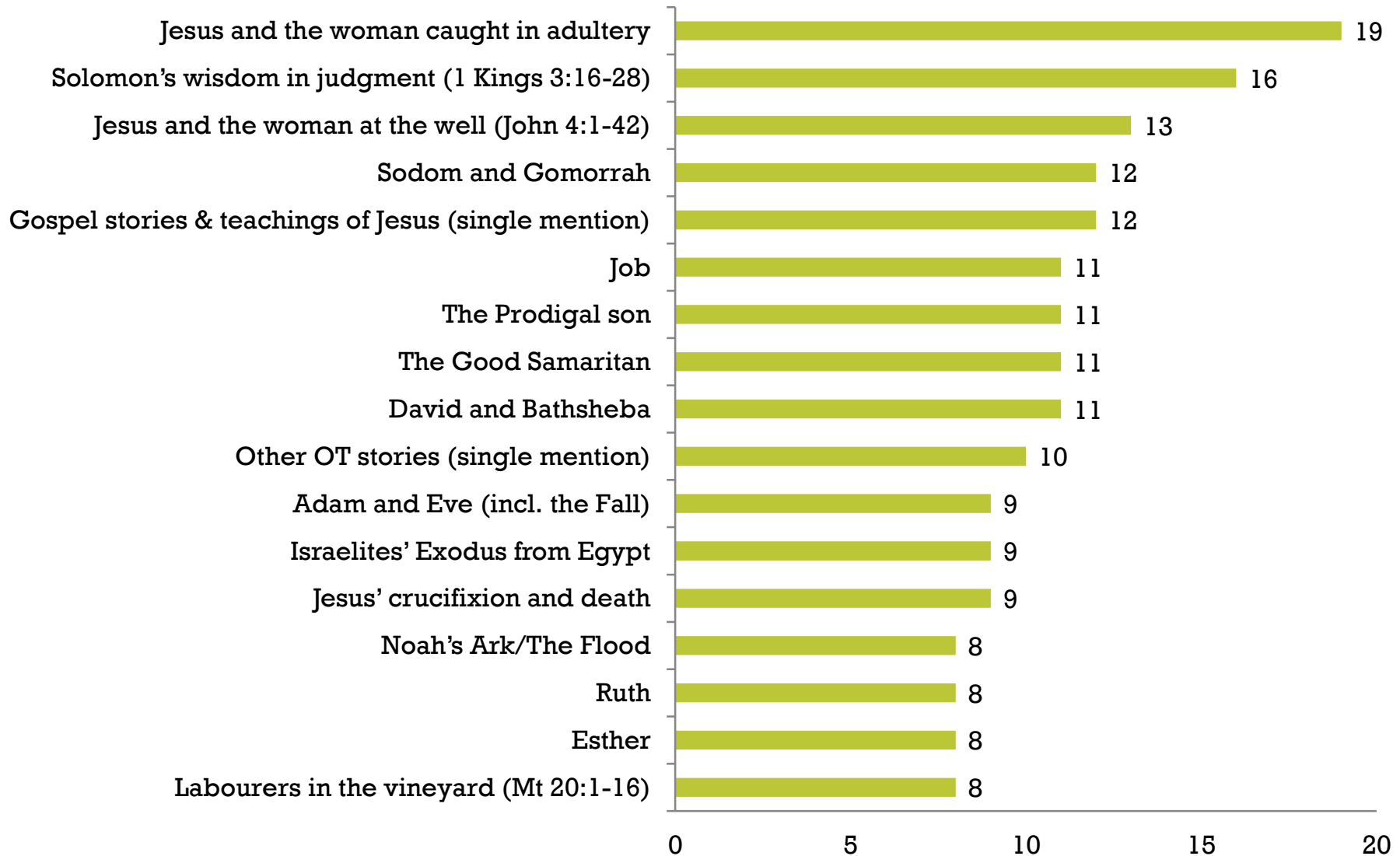
# Q18: BRIEFLY NAME ONE OR TWO STORIES IN THE BIBLE THAT YOU THINK ILLUSTRATE GOD'S UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTICE.\*

## 202 Responses



# Q18: BRIEFLY NAME ONE OR TWO STORIES IN THE BIBLE THAT YOU THINK ILLUSTRATE GOD'S UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTICE.\*

## 202 Responses



\*Reported by incidence of specific reference

## Q19: IF YOU HAD TO WRITE A ONE SENTENCE DEFINITION OF “JUSTICE”, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

### **208 responses**

Responses were coded according to the concept in the definition; each code is a unique concept.

37 responses included multiple concepts and were coded more than once. 18 responses (9%) were unable to be coded, for various reasons.

- Nearly one quarter of all respondents (23%, or 47 respondents) included concepts of **fairness, equity or equality** in their definition of justice. Responses indicated a strong theme of fair or equal treatment without discriminating based on gender, race or ethnicity, or past actions.
- The next highest proportion of respondents (14%, or 29 respondents) defined justice as **doing what is right in God’s eyes, or faithful Christian living** by doing what God requires.
- All other responses gathered less than 8% (16 or fewer) of respondents.

In total, 28 distinct concepts were identified. The chart on the following page shows the top 18 concepts ranked by number of respondents who included it.

# Q19: IF YOU HAD TO WRITE A ONE SENTENCE DEFINITION OF “JUSTICE”, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

**208 responses**

Concept in definition	Number of respondents who mentioned this concept	% of total number of respondents
Fairness, equity, and/or equality	47	23%
Doing what is right before God; faithful Christian living	29	14%
Care for or helping those who are vulnerable to injustice or experiencing injustice	16	8%
Dignity and Respect	15	7%
Righting wrongs; making things right (general)	13	6%
Treating people according to what they deserve, or according to their actions	13	6%
Justice is in God's hands	10	5%
Second greatest commandment (love your neighbour as yourself)	9	4%
Golden Rule (treat others as you would like to be treated)	9	4%
Responsibility and Accountability (especially for one's actions)	8	4%
Love, kindness, caring	8	4%
Restoring all of creation	7	3%
Civic law, including human rights codes	6	3%
Doing what is right	5	2%
Freeing from sin; repentance	5	2%
Rights; receiving one's due	4	2%
Discipleship	4	2%
Imitate Jesus; be Christ-like	4	2%

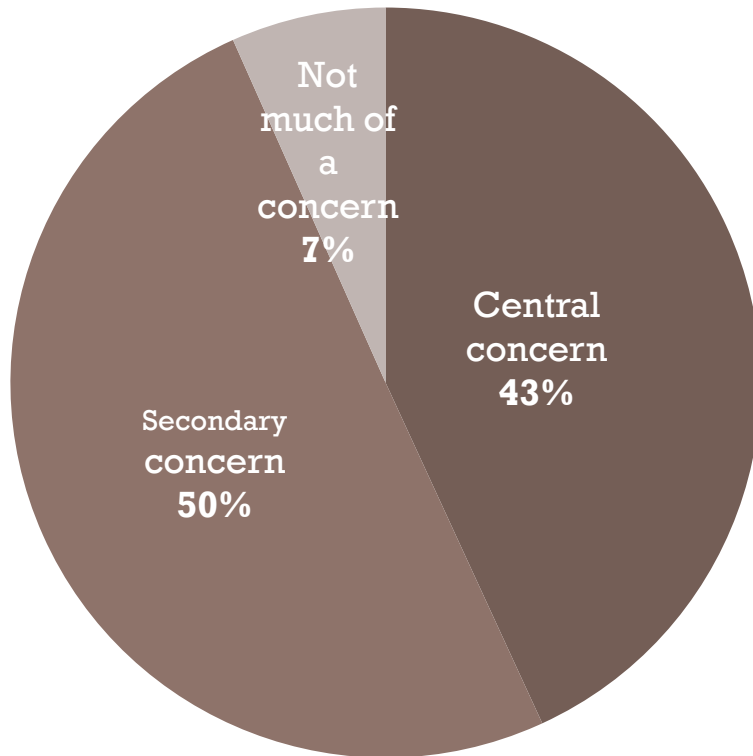


## **SECTION 4: THE PRIORITY OF JUSTICE**

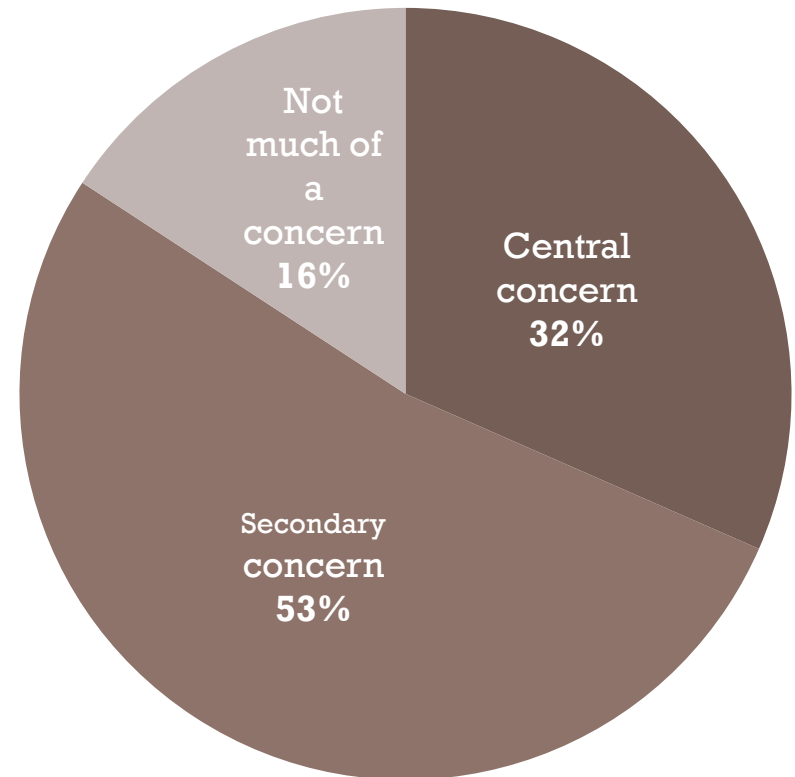
## Q20: TO WHAT EXTENT IS JUSTICE A PRIORITY...

### 257 Responses

...in your own Christian faith and life?



...for people in your congregation?

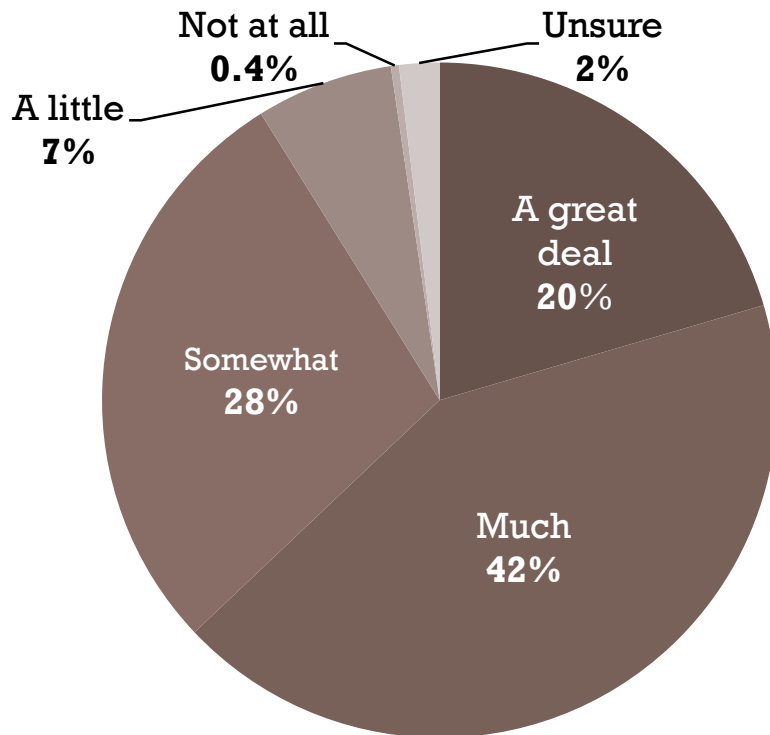


Respondents reported that justice was a higher priority for themselves than for others in their congregation. The majority of respondents consider justice to be a secondary concern.

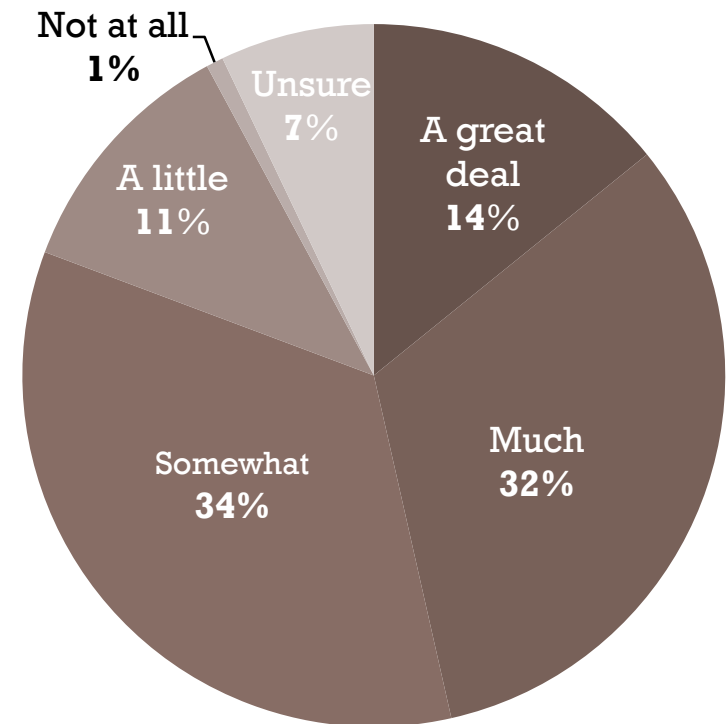
**Q21: THE CRC MISSION STATEMENT SAYS THAT: "AS PEOPLE CALLED BY GOD...WE PURSUE GOD'S JUSTICE AND PEACE IN EVERY AREA OF LIFE." TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS STATEMENT REFLECT...**

**259 Responses**

**...how you live out your Christian life?**



**...how people in your congregation live out their Christian lives?**

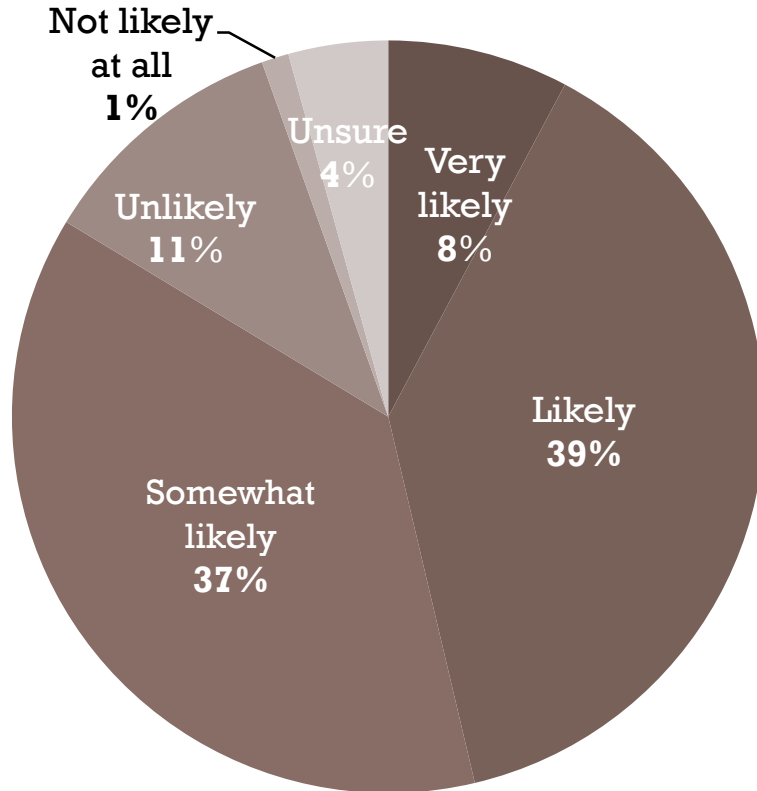


As in question 20, respondents considered this statement to reflect their Christian life to a greater extent than it reflected the lives of their fellow congregation members. A majority of respondents (62%) felt that it reflected their Christian life "a great deal" or "much," while they thought it reflected the lives of fellow congregation members less than half of the time (46%).

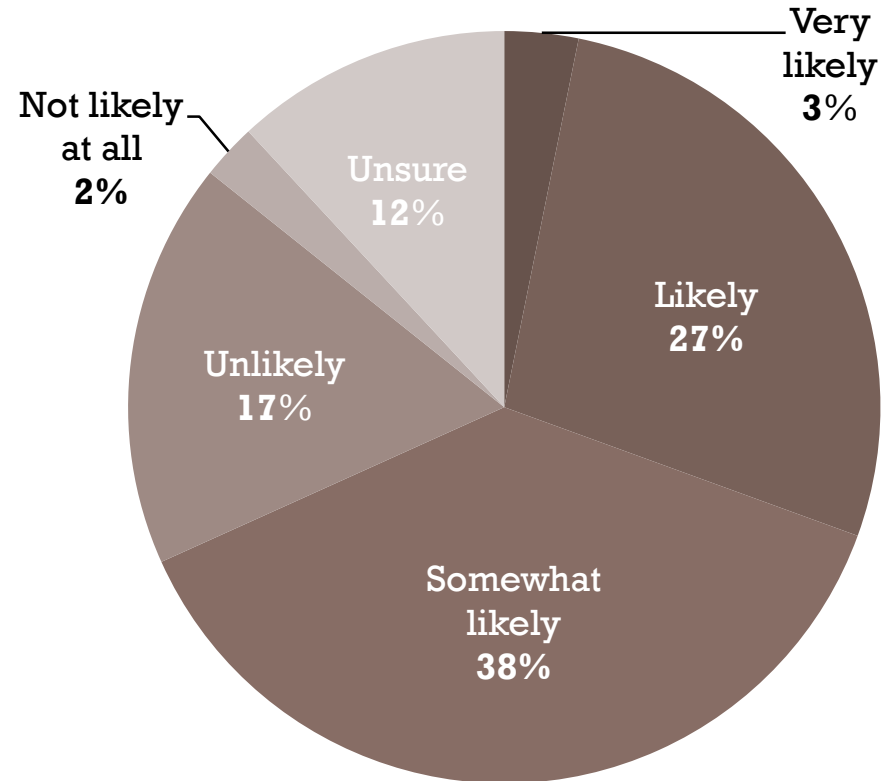
## Q22: HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU SAY IT IS:

259 Responses

**...for you to pursue justice if it meant changing your present lifestyle?**




**...that people in your congregation would pursue justice if it meant changing their present lifestyle?**



Similar to questions 20 and 21, respondents tended to rate their willingness to change their lifestyle higher than their fellow congregants' willingness. Nearly half of respondents (47%) indicated that they would very likely or likely change their lifestyle, whereas less than one third (30%) thought the same of those in their congregation.

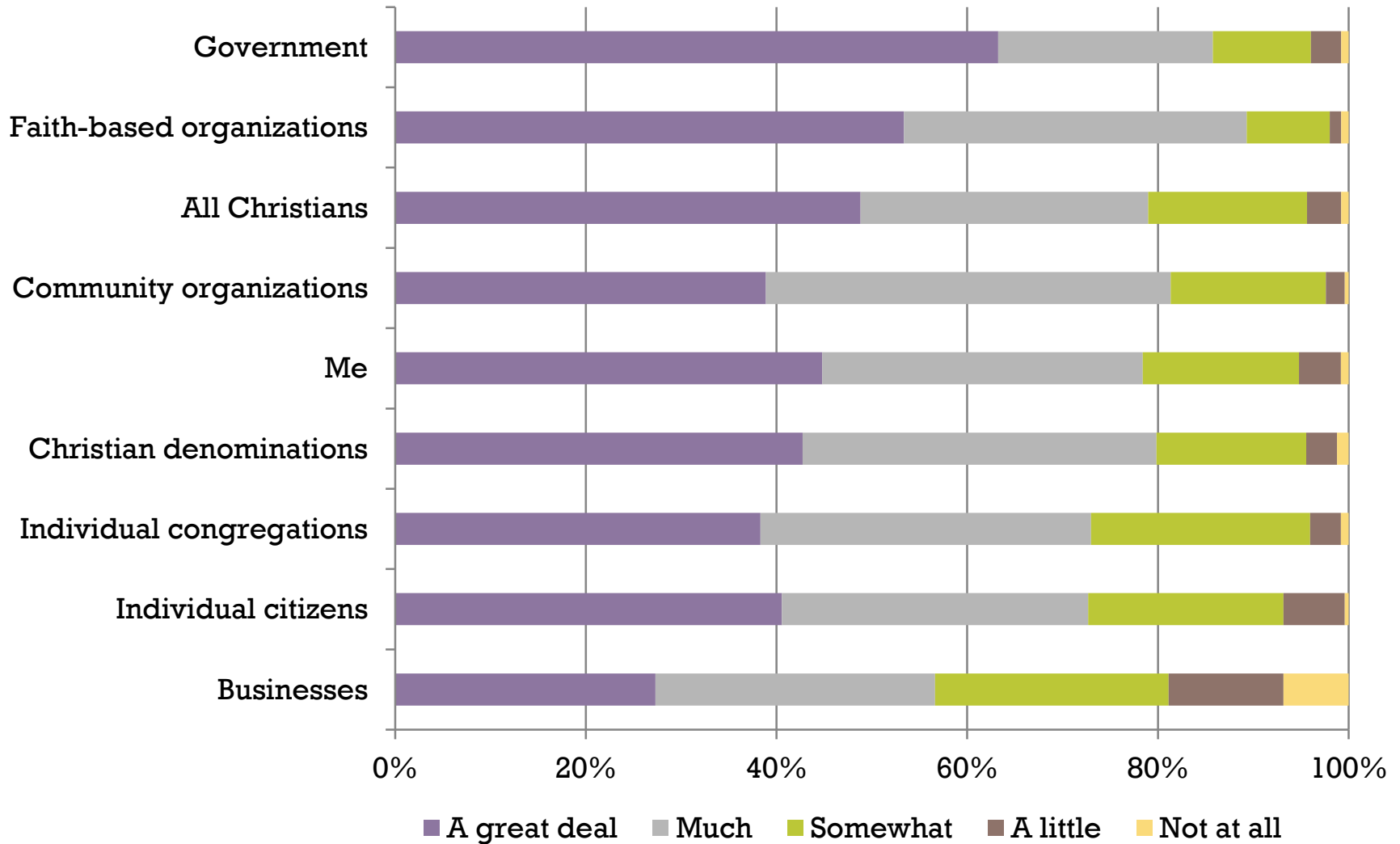




## **SECTION 5: DOING JUSTICE**

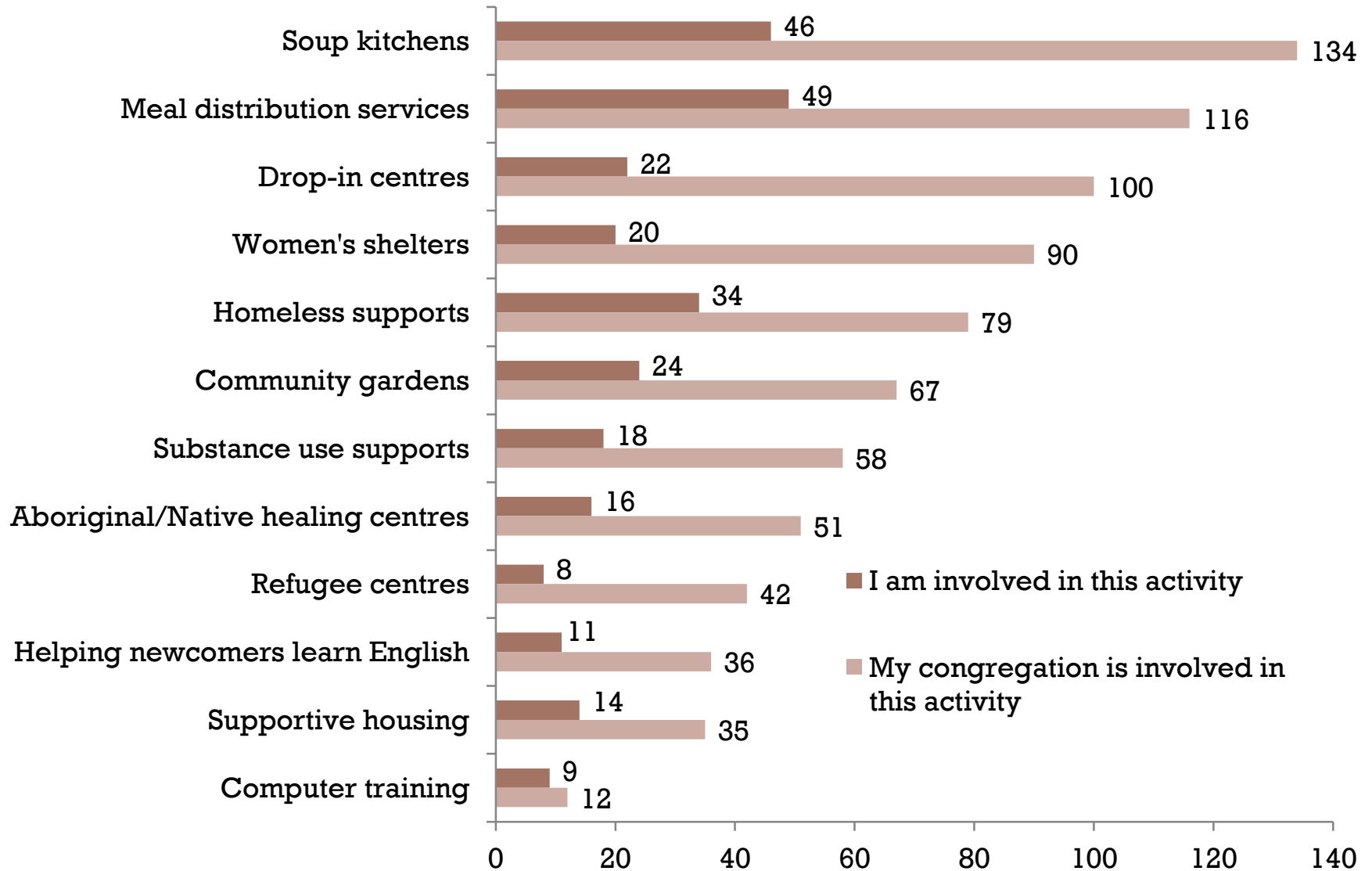
# Q23: BASED ON YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT JUSTICE MEANS, TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE OR GROUPS RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING JUSTICE WORK?

254 Responses



Q24: PLEASE INDICATE WHICH OF THE ACTIVITIES LISTED BELOW YOU AND/OR YOUR CONGREGATION ARE INVOLVED WITH LOCALLY.

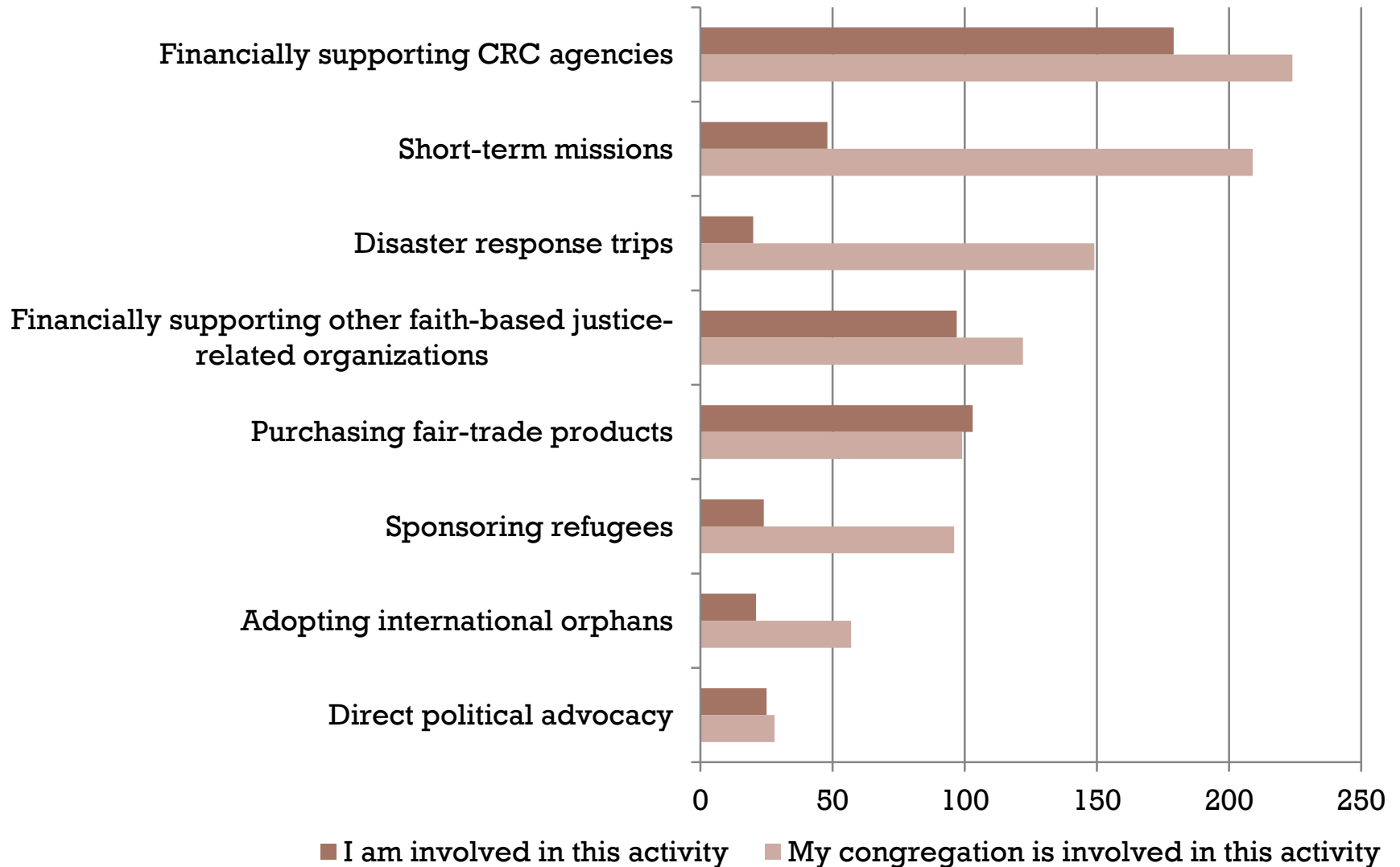
**232 Responses**



RANK ORDERED

Q25: PLEASE INDICATE WHICH OF THE ACTIVITIES LISTED BELOW YOU AND YOUR CONGREGATION ARE INVOLVED WITH NATIONALLY/INTERNATIONALLY.

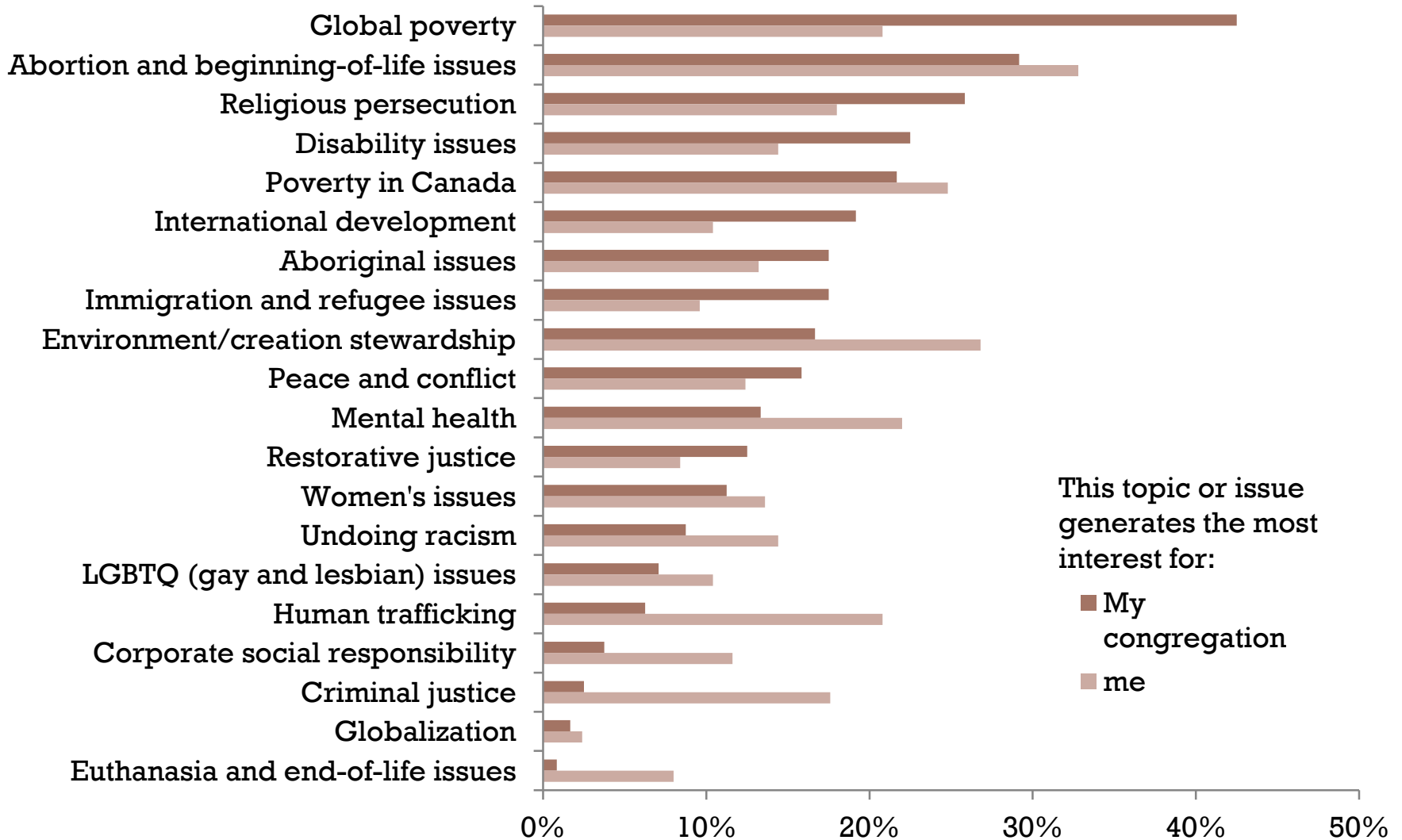
**248 Responses**



**RANK ORDERED**

**Q26 AND 27: SELECT THE TOP THREE TOPICS OR ISSUES THAT SEEM TO GENERATE THE MOST INTEREST AND EXCITEMENT FOR: (Q26) YOU AND (Q27) WITHIN YOUR CONGREGATION.**

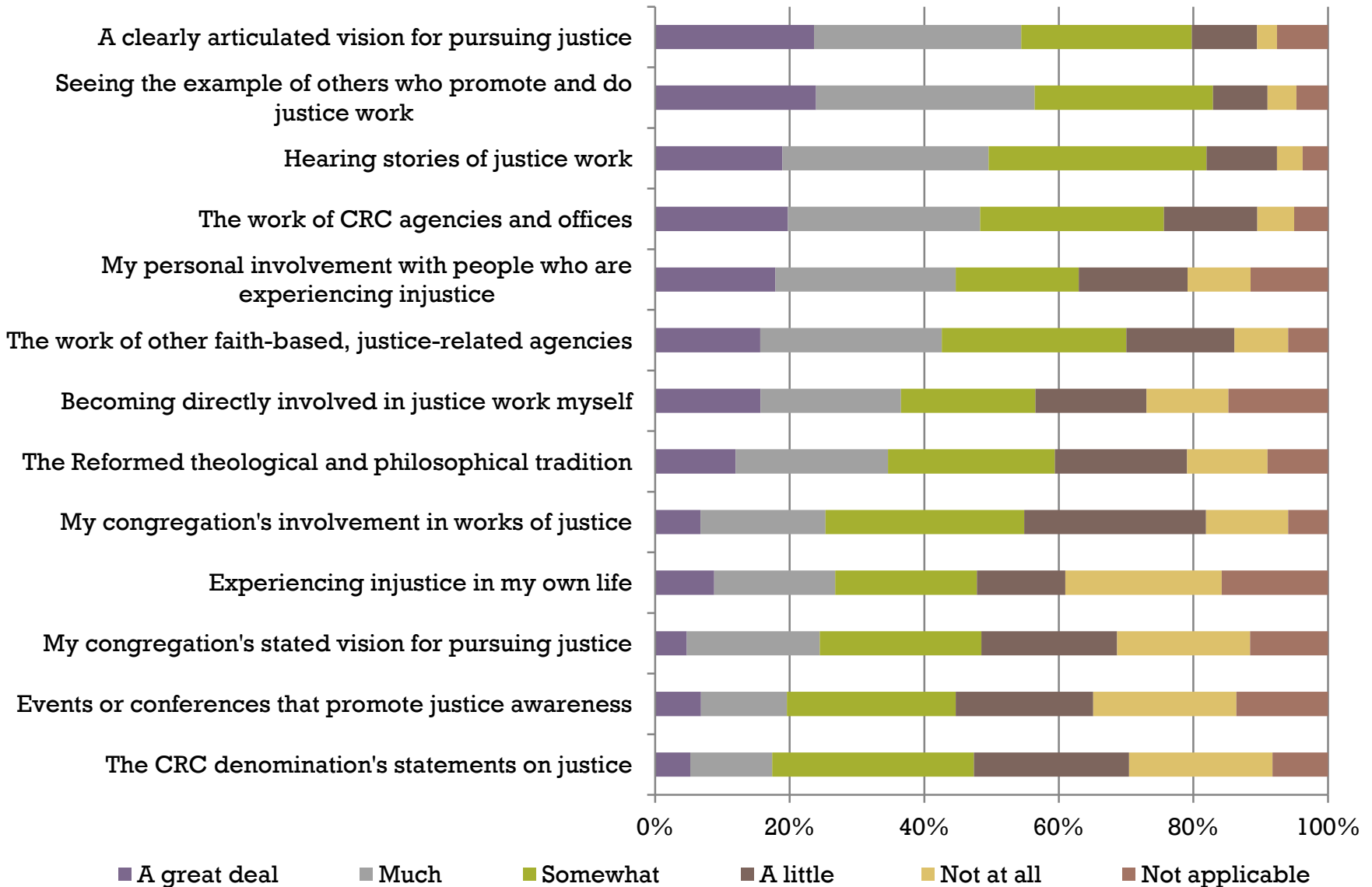
**240 Responses**



**Rank ordered by percentage of respondents who selected each issue for their congregation.**

# Q28: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE FOLLOWING HELPED OR MOTIVATED YOU TO WORK FOR JUSTICE?

249 Responses



RANK ORDERED

## Q29: WHAT ELSE MAKES YOU INTERESTED OR EXCITED ABOUT WORKING FOR JUSTICE?

### 82 responses

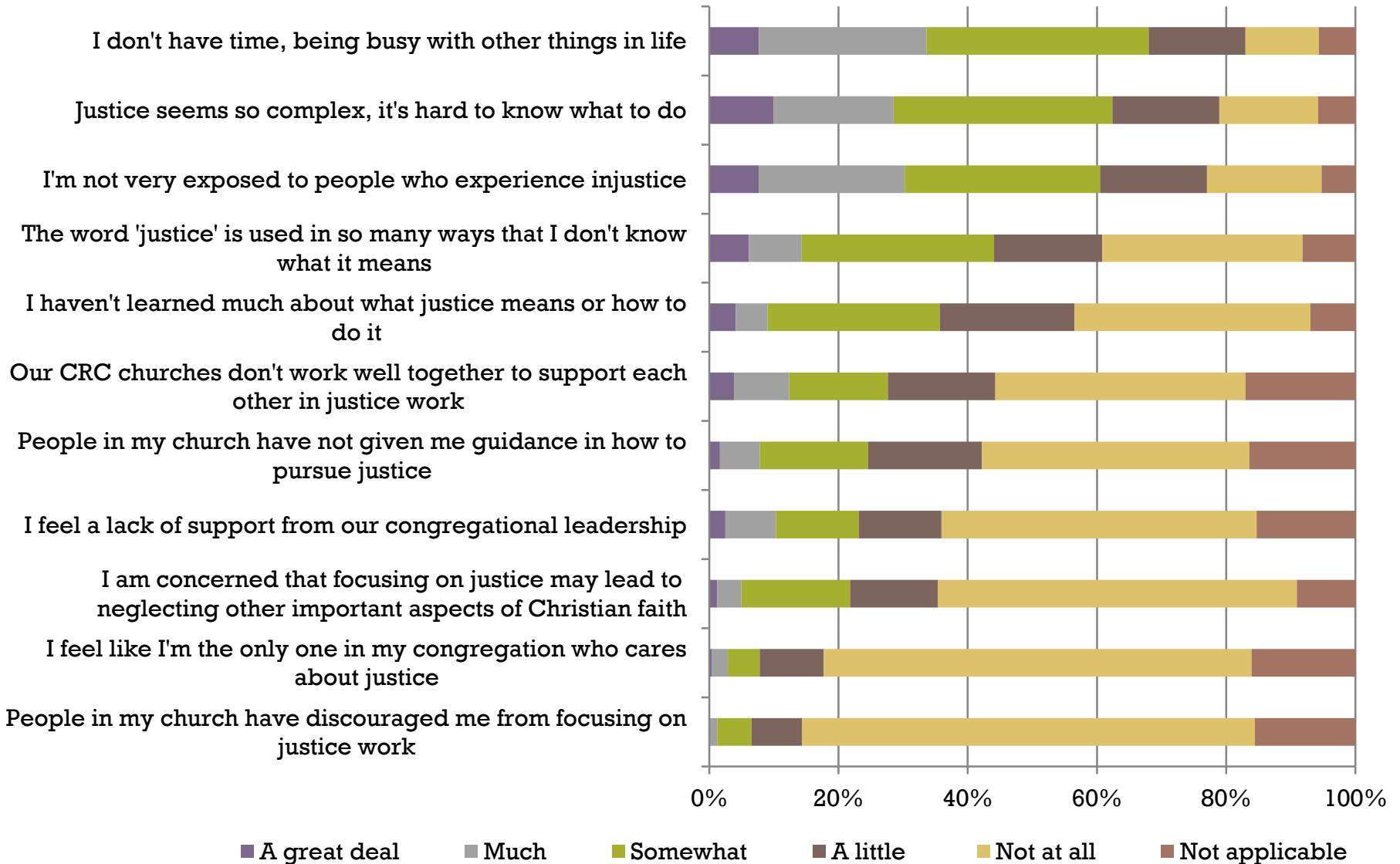
Respondents were asked what else, besides the options in Question 28, interested or excited them about working for justice. Two other enablers of doing justice emerged as strong themes:

- **Doing justice as an expression of faithful Christian living**, or as an act of fulfilling God's call on our lives.
  - “That it is God's work and that we use our gifts to help others”
  - “Knowing that it is part of extending God's kingdom”
  - “I feel it is our calling as Christians to work for justice”
- **Seeing the results of working for justice**, or hearing about the positive impact of justice work.
  - “Seeing and experiencing positive results from it”
  - “Seeing the difference in the lives of those receiving justice”
  - “Seeing other people’s lives changed”

Several respondents also indicated that learning more about injustice or becoming aware of injustice around them encouraged them to become involved in justice work. A few respondents indicated that having something specific to do in response to an injustice motivated them to do justice.

# Q30: TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE THE FOLLOWING PREVENTED YOU FROM WORKING FOR JUSTICE?

**254 Responses**



**RANK ORDERED**



## Q31: WHAT ELSE MAKES YOU HESITANT OR SKEPTICAL ABOUT WORKING FOR JUSTICE?

### 98 responses

Three options that were already presented in Question 30 were mentioned again by a number of respondents:

- **The complexity of doing justice**, and the perceived size or scope of justice issues:  
“Don't know where to start or what to do”  
“The complexity of it and a lack of focus about where to put my energy”
- **They were too busy**, or had other priorities:  
“My church has other priorities”  
“The time involved - such a busy lifestyle that I wonder where can I find the time and energy to help others”
- **A lack of knowledge, awareness, or preparedness** inhibited them from doing justice:  
“We do not hear much about specific needs for justice”  
“Just do not know enough”

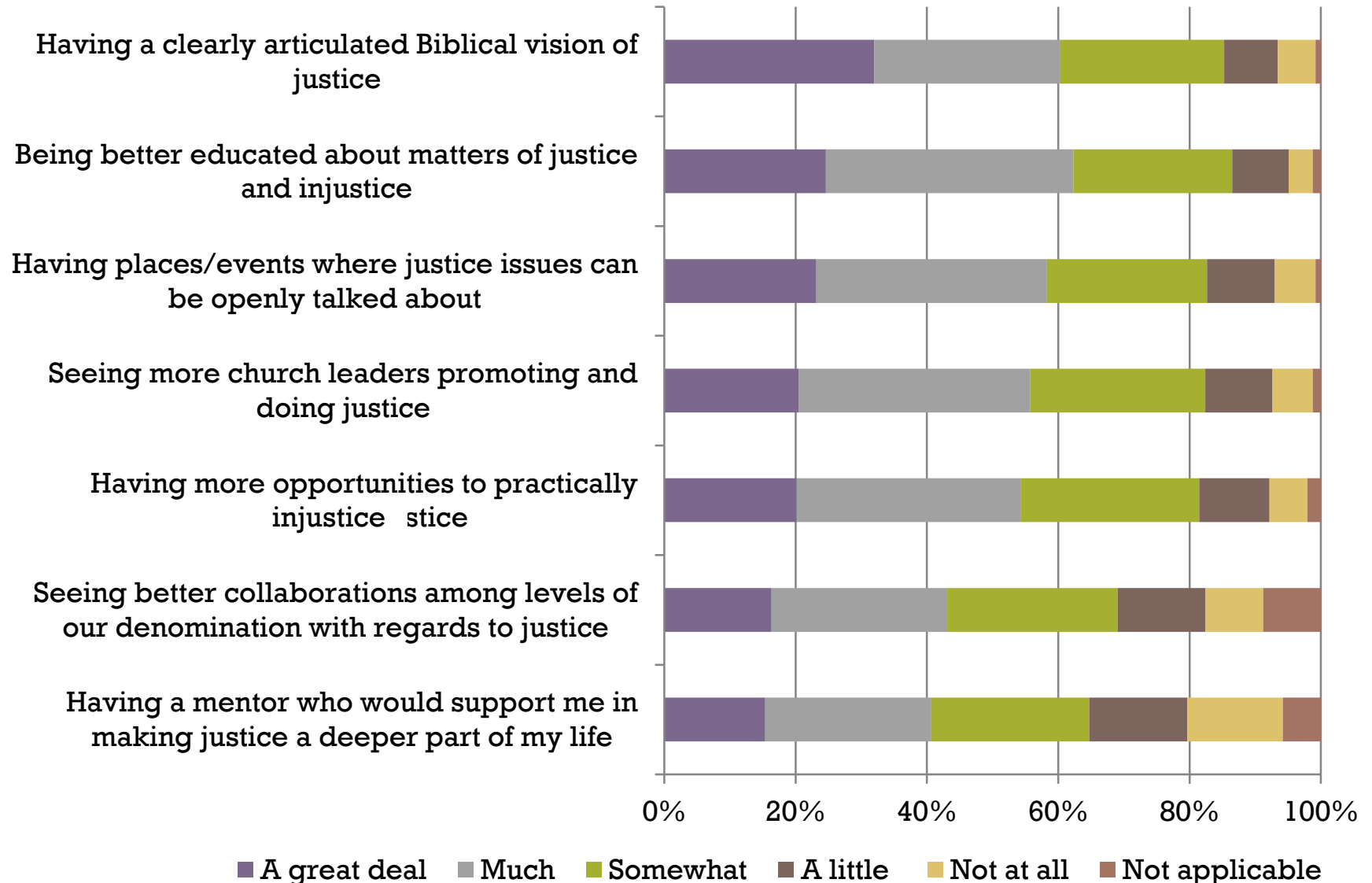
Several respondents stated that not knowing whether justice work would be successful, especially given the amount of effort it takes, presented a barrier to engaging in justice work. A few respondents observed that skepticism about how justice is defined or described, or negative perceptions of the ways in which others work for justice, are barriers to engaging in justice work.



**SECTION 6: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

# Q32: TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD THE FOLLOWING BE OF HELP IF YOU WANTED TO WORK FOR JUSTICE MORE?

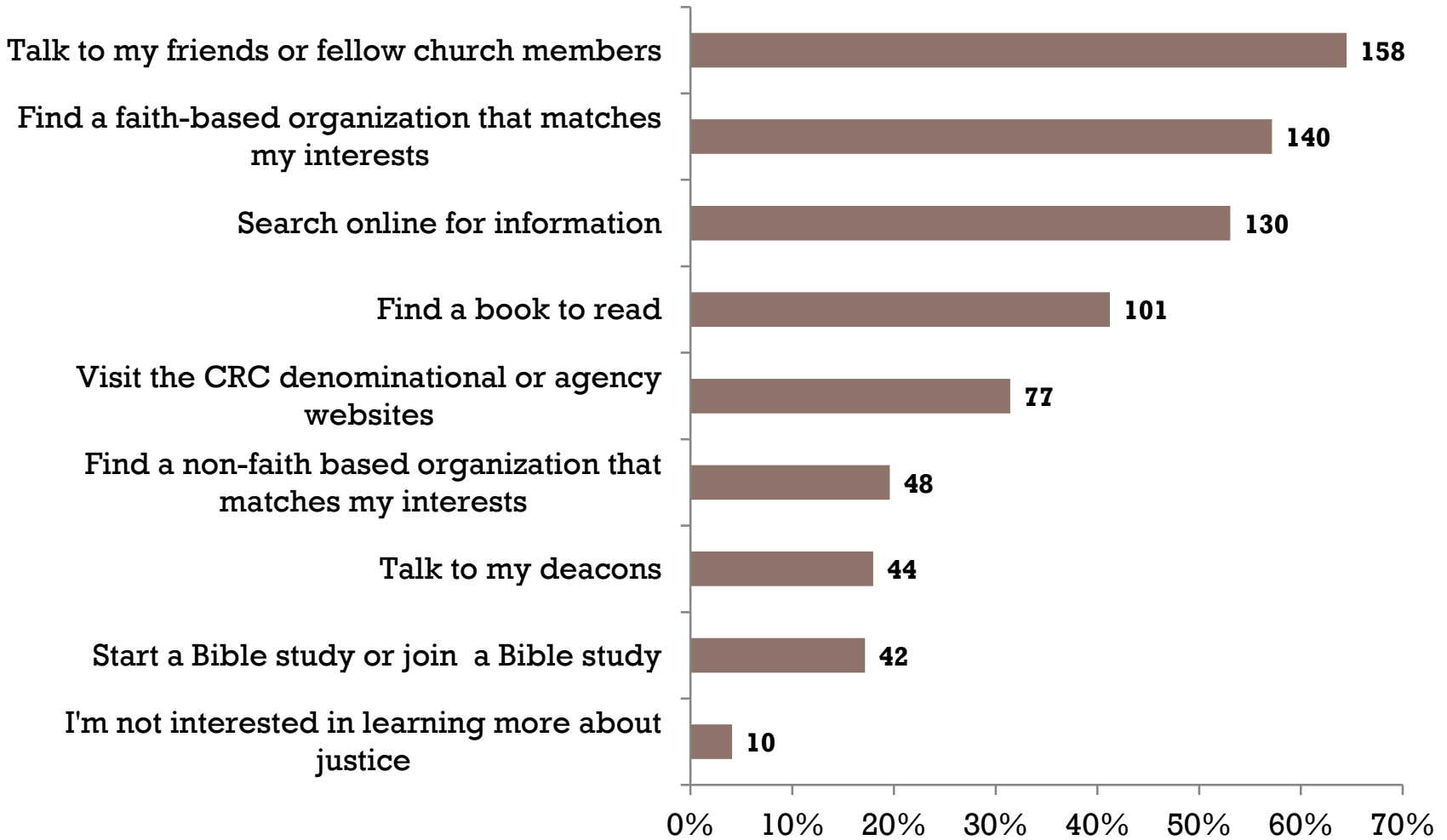
247 Responses



RANK ORDERED

Q33: TO LEARN ABOUT JUSTICE, I WOULD BE MOST LIKELY TO: (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY).

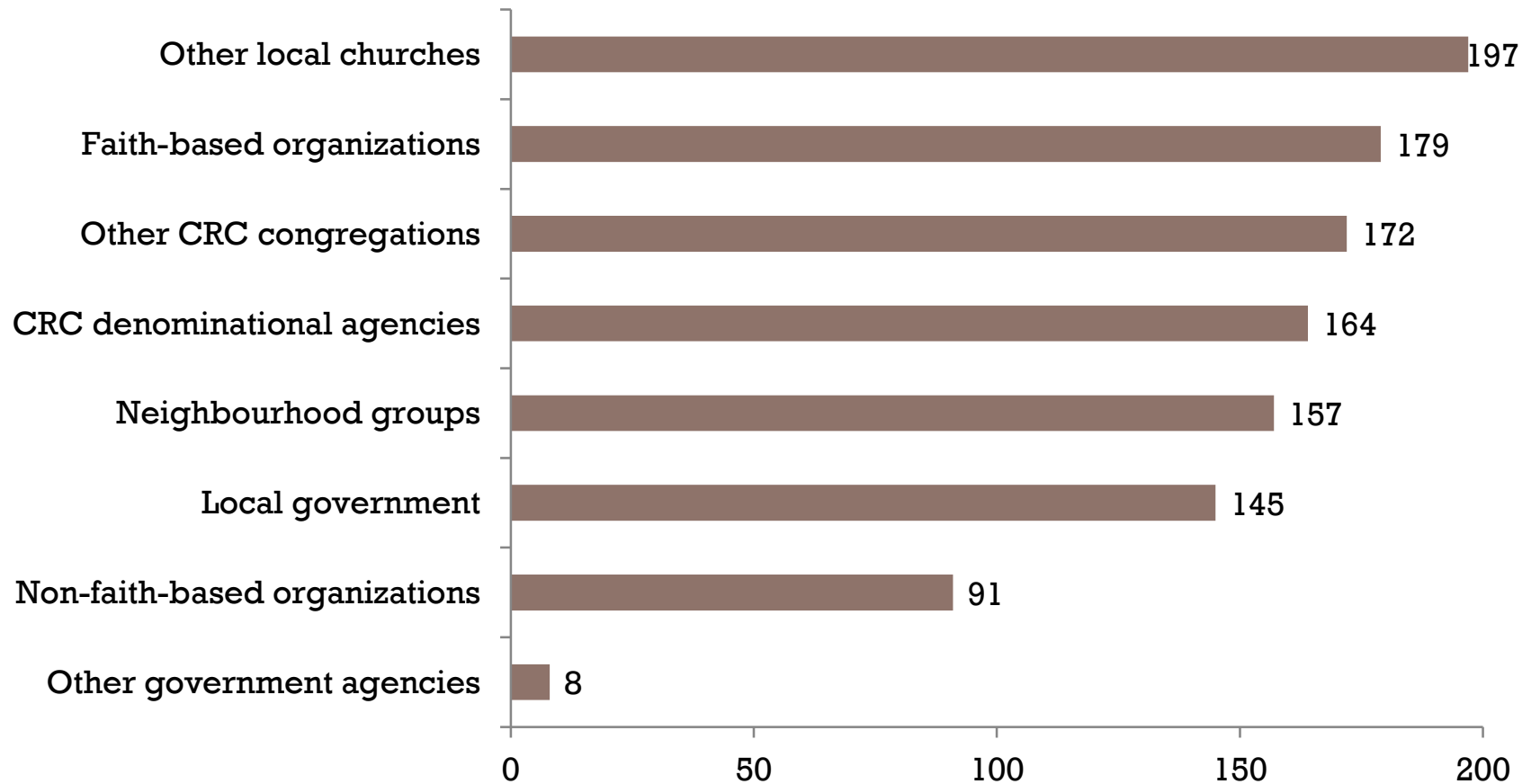
**245 Responses**



More than half of respondents indicated they would talk to friends or fellow church members (64%), find a faith-based organization that matches their interests (57%), or search online for information (53%).

# Q34: WITH WHOM SHOULD YOUR CONGREGATION PARTNER IF THEY WANTED TO WORK FOR JUSTICE? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

**243 Responses**



More than three-quarters of respondents indicated their congregation should partner with other local churches (81%). Almost three-quarters thought that their congregation should partner with faith-based organizations (74%) and other CRC congregations (71%).

## Q35: ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC JUSTICE PROJECTS OR ISSUES THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO GET MORE INVOLVED WITH?

### **89 responses**

Most respondents identified projects or issues of interest that were already listed in questions 26 and 27. No other significant themes arose; any other projects or issues of interest (e.g. religious freedom, housing and homelessness, children and youth issues, care for elderly persons) were named by only a few respondents each.

## Q36: ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC JUSTICE PROJECTS OR ISSUES THAT YOU THINK THE CRC AS A DENOMINATION SHOULD BE MORE INVOLVED WITH?

### **86 responses**

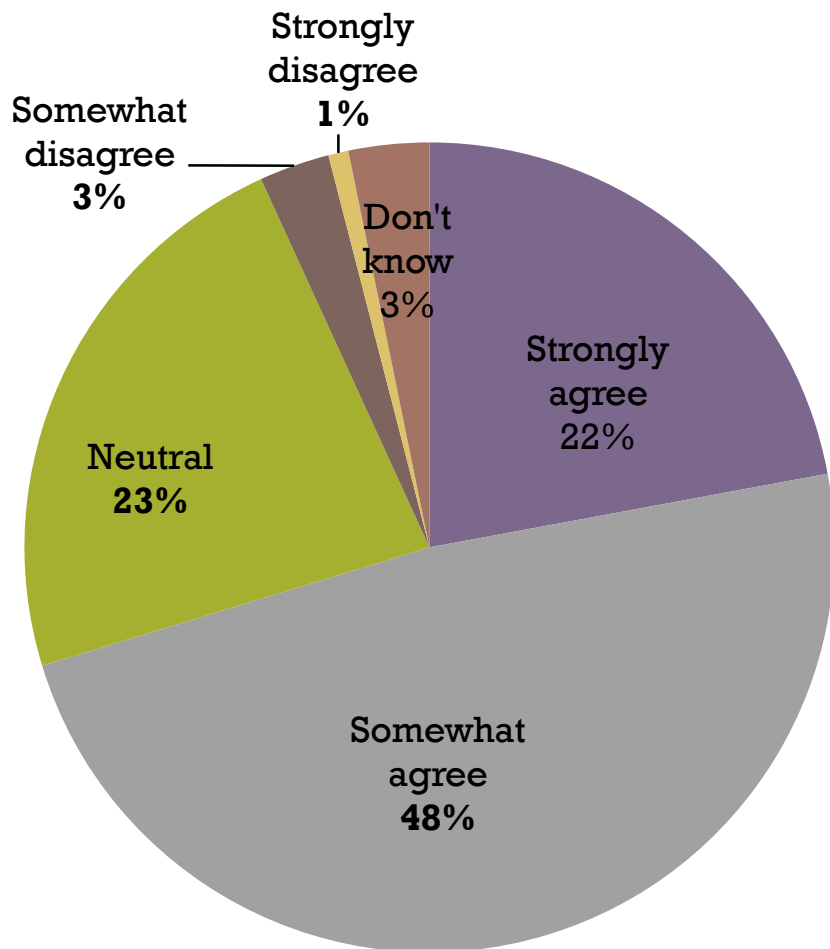
About one quarter of respondents specified that the denomination ought to be more involved locally, whether on a specific issue, or on local justice issues in general.

A number of issues that should be addressed were identified, including local, national and global levels, with no strong themes emerging. Several respondents noted Indigenous issues, while abortion and beginning of life issues, human trafficking, gender and LGBTQ issues, and poverty and homelessness were each mentioned by only a few respondents.

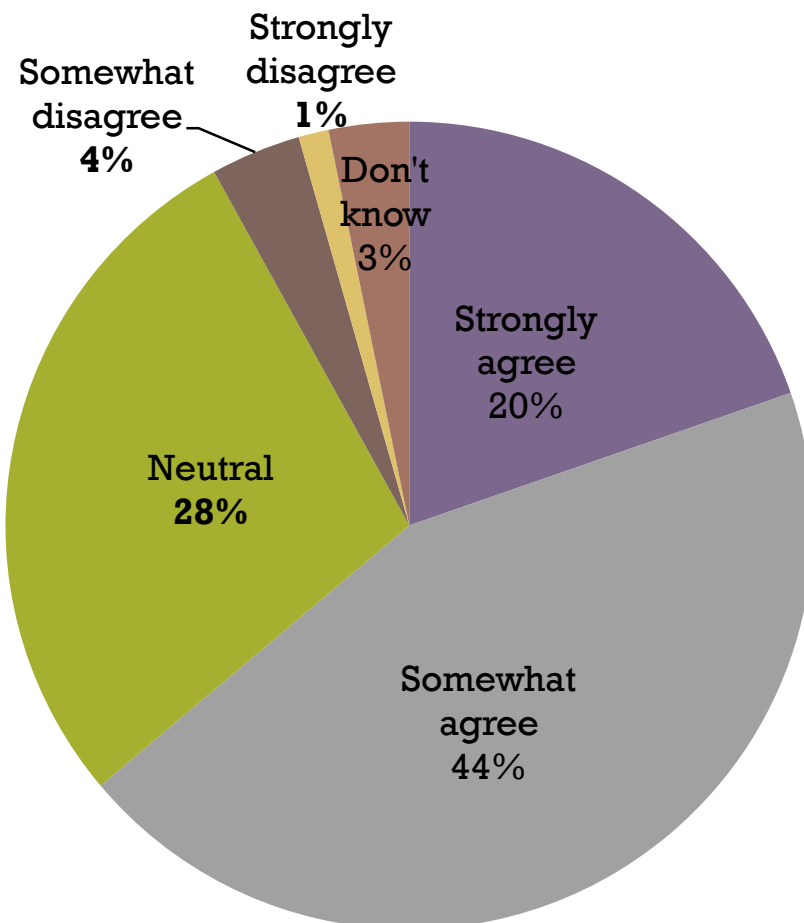
# Q37: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

**250 Responses**

**I would like to learn more about justice and would welcome opportunities to do so.**



**I would like to be more active in doing justice and would welcome opportunities to do so.**



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this report or the Justice and Faith Project, please contact:

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