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The Orthodox Church Today

*A National Study
of Parishioners
and the
Realities of Orthodox
Parish Life in the US*

PATRIARCH
ATHENAGORAS
ORTHODOX
INSTITUTE

*Tradition for
Tomorrow*



The Orthodox Church Today is a national study of laity in the two largest Orthodox Churches in the United States: the ***Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA)*** and the ***Orthodox Church in America (OCA)***. Nearly 1000 parishioners from 103 GOA and OCA parishes situated in various parts of the US completed our questionnaires.

The Orthodox Church Today is part of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute’s ongoing “Parish Life Project.” It complements and evolves the earlier (2006) study of American Orthodox parish clergy - “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America.”

The Orthodox Church Today addressed three questions:

- To what extent do the social and religious attitudes of ordinary parishioners reflect those of their parish priests?
- What do members think about everyday patterns of Church life in their local parishes?
- What do laity think about various Church related issues, such as the future of Orthodox Christianity in America, the role of the laity in the Church, ordination of women, etc?

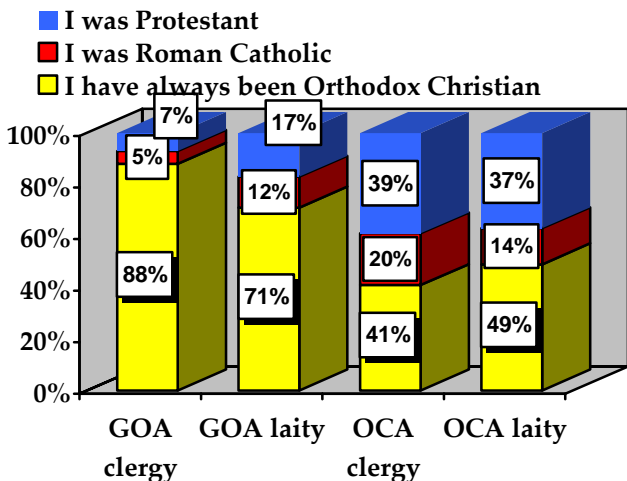
The Orthodox Church Today study was made possible through a grant from the Louisville Institute.

The full study report is available online at:

www.orthodoxinstitute.org/parish_needs.html

More than half of OCA clergy and laity are converts to Orthodoxy.

What was your Church affiliation before you became an Orthodox Christian? (% of respondents)

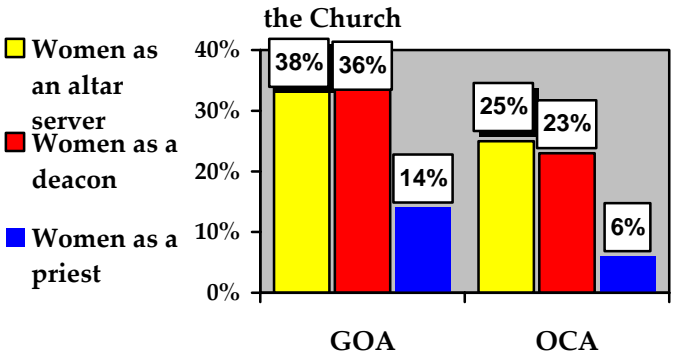


Note: the data on clergy provided in this booklet are from the 2006 “Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood” study.

The laity expressed only very modest support for women in the ministry.

Would you support or oppose women in the following roles in the Church?

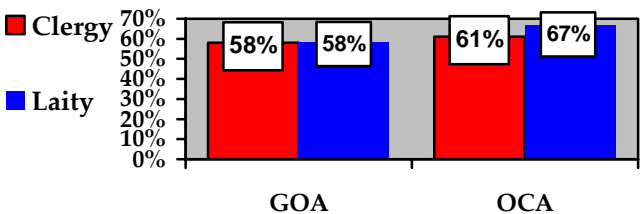
% of GOA and OCA laity who WOULD SUPPORT women in the following positions in the Church



Most clergy and laity agree that priests should have final authority in a parish.

“In the case of disagreements with laity, priests should have the final authority in the parish.”

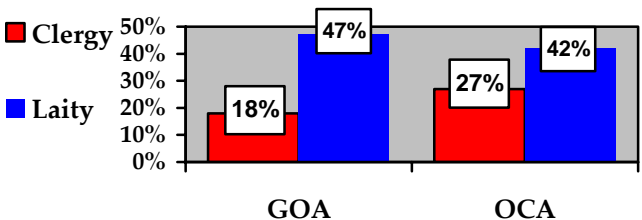
% of clergy and laity who AGREED with this statement



Clergy and laity have a different vision for the process of selection of parish priests.

“I think it is a good idea if Orthodox parishes were to choose their own priest from among available clergy”

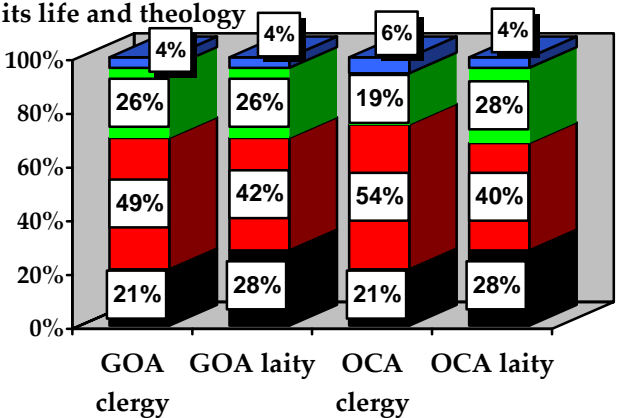
% of clergy and laity who AGREED with this statement



The vast majority of both clergy and laity identify their approach to Church life as either “conservative” or “traditional.”

When you think about your theological position and approach to church life, which word best describes where you stand? (% of respondents)

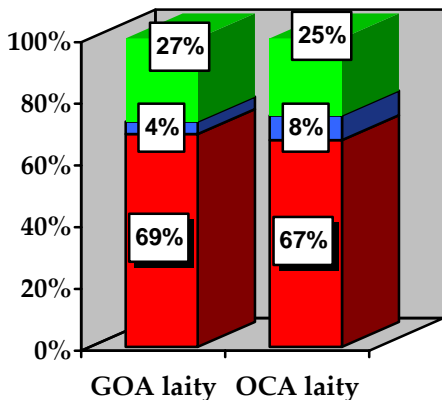
- Liberal. I am willing to initiate and promote new developments in the Church
- Moderate. I accept new developments and changes in the Church depending on local circumstances
- Traditional. Any changes in the Church should be evolutionary.
- Conservative. Orthodox Church should avoid changes in its life and theology



Most of GOA and OCA laity prefer parishes where all members hold the same views.

Which type of parish do you prefer? (% of respondents)

- A parish where people hold different views and openly discuss them
- A parish where people hold different views, but keep them to themselves
- A parish that requires uniformity of belief and practice



The laity speak out on the urgent issues facing the Orthodox Church:

- ***Youth leaving the Church is seen as the most important issue by both the GOA and the OCA members***
- ***Religiously mixed marriages are a much more urgent problem among GOA than among OCA members***
- ***Very few wanted open discussion on the ordination of women***

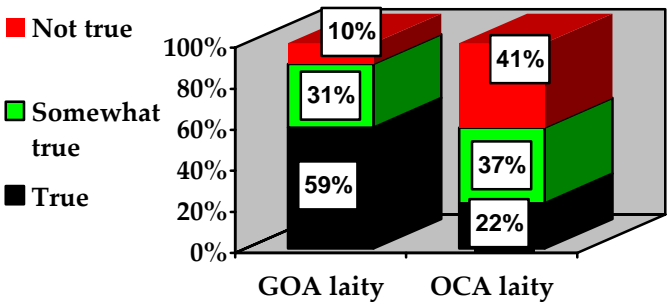
“Numerous issues relating to Church life are being discussed today and may also have an impact on your parish. In your opinion, how important would an open discussion be in the Church in the following areas?”

% of parish members who said that the following subjects are “VERY IMPORTANT” to be openly discussed in the Church.

| | GOA | OCA |
|--|------------|------------|
| Issue of youth and young adults leaving the Church | 84% | 77% |
| Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church | 63% | 54% |
| Representation of the local parish at decision making on the diocesan and national levels | 46% | 44% |
| The issue of “ethnic” versus “American” parishes | 45% | 40% |
| Issue of interfaith (Orthodox – non-Christian) marriages | 53% | 30% |
| Issue of mixed (Orthodox – non-Orthodox) marriages | 51% | 25% |
| The relationship between American Orthodox Churches and the Mother Churches in the Old World | 39% | 31% |
| The process of selecting bishops | 25% | 34% |
| Recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy | 32% | 25% |
| Sharing ministry with laity | 32% | 22% |
| The lack of clear professional standards for priests | 28% | 23% |
| Ordination of women | 13% | 8% |

The GOA and OCA members describe the strength of the ethnic heritage of their parishes in a very different ways.

“How well does the statement ‘Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve’ describe your parish?”



The need for “more money,” “more volunteers and enthusiastic people,” “clearer vision of the parish future” and “more youth involvement” are seen as the most urgent issues by both GOA and OCA laity.

“What is most needed for your parish to strengthen and to grow?”

% of parish members who said that the following is “VERY URGENT” for our parish in order to strengthen and to grow

| | GOA | OCA |
|---|-----|-----|
| More money | 41% | 27% |
| More volunteers and enthusiastic people | 34% | 26% |
| Clearer vision of the parish’s future | 29% | 24% |
| More youth involvement | 27% | 25% |
| More agreement and unity among parishioners | 21% | 14% |
| More effective lay leadership | 21% | 12% |
| More active congregational participation in the Liturgy | 15% | 12% |
| Better organized religious education programs | 14% | 11% |
| Better organized social activities, fellowship groups | 13% | 9% |
| More effective pastoral leadership | 10% | 8% |
| Innovative approach to liturgical life | 10% | 6% |

The members of both the GOA and the OCA are divided among themselves over issues of the “future for the Orthodox Church in the US” and “Orthodox Unity in America.”

“Of the following, which ONE best describes your opinion of the present and future directions for the Orthodox Church in the US?”

(% of GOA and OCA members)

| | GOA, % | OCA, % |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| We need to get back to the way we did things in the past | 7 | 5 |
| We are faithfully maintaining our traditions and we should continue to do so | 48 | 41 |
| The Orthodox Church in the US is currently in the process of numerous changes and I feel optimistic about this | 28 | 29 |
| I feel that we are too strongly “tied” to our past. We need to rethink where we are now and decide about new directions | 17 | 25 |

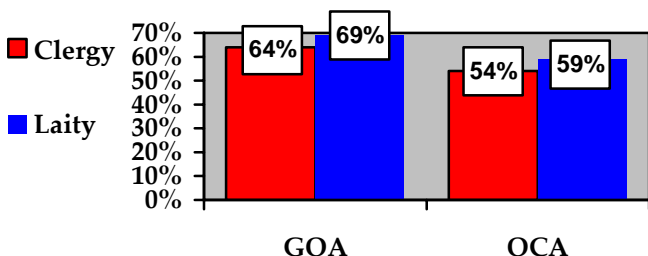
“The subject of ‘Orthodox Unity’ in America has been discussed for a long time. What do you think about the current situation and possible future developments?” (% of GOA and OCA members)

| | GOA, % | OCA, % |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| I think that the question of Orthodox unity is unnecessarily overemphasized in our Church life: there are many other issues which are more important and urgent . | 15 | 10 |
| I think that we are on the right path. Orthodox unity in the US will be eventually achieved through the increasing co-operation among the various American Orthodox jurisdictions – the way it goes now | 51 | 40 |
| I think that very little has been done so far to achieve this goal. We need more consistent efforts and should act more intentionally | 34 | 50 |

Most clergy and laity agree that Orthodox priests in the USA need to be more socially involved than they are now.

“Priests today need to be more involved with broad social and moral issues beyond their own parish’s level”

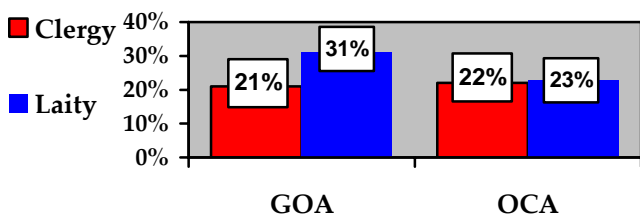
% of clergy and laity who AGREED with this statement



Only a small proportion of both clergy and laity support the separation of religion and public education

“It is important that public schools at all levels keep religion and religious issues ‘out of classrooms”

% of clergy and laity who AGREED with this statement



The Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute (PAOI) is an affiliate member of the Graduate Theological Union, an ecumenical consortium of nine independent seminaries and eight affiliated centers based in Berkeley, California (www.gtu.edu). Our goal is to educate, communicate and promote the traditions, teachings and culture of Orthodox Christianity. For further information on PAOI’s “Parish Life Project” and other programs visit our website at: www.orthodoxinstitute.org.

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