

Evolving Visions of the Orthodox Priesthood in America

*A First-ever
National Study
of Orthodox Clergy
and the
Realities of Parish Life*

Patriarch
Athenagoras
ORTHODOX
INSTITUTE

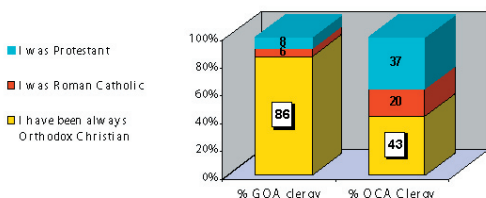
*Tradition for
Tomorrow*

Who Participated in this Study?

From February to April 2006, PAOI sent questionnaires to ALL active parish clergy in the Greek Orthodox Metropolises of Chicago and San Francisco and OCA Dioceses of the West and Midwest. 87% returned a completed questionnaire. The total number of survey participants – 225 (113 GOA and 112 OCA).

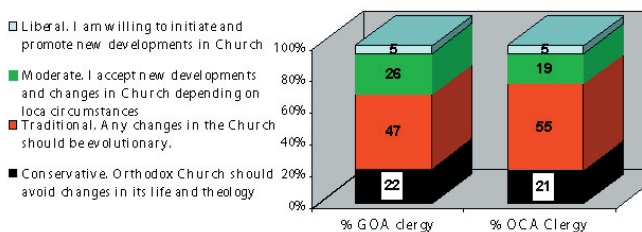
Most GOA Clergy are “Cradle” Orthodox

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



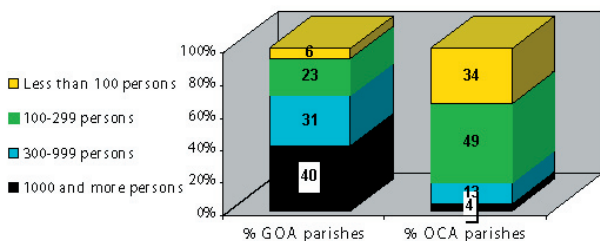
Are clergy liberal or conservative?

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



Great disparity in the size of parishes

The number of persons who are associated in any way with the life of the parish: counting both adults and children, both regular and occasional attendees. According to information provided by parish clergy.” (% of parishes)



What are the Biggest Problems Clergy Face?

More GOA than OCA priests report “over-work” as their greatest problem

More OCA clergy are challenged with providing financially for their families

Twice as many GOA priests report “Apathy among parishioners”

“The way authority is exercised in the Church” is seen as a “great problem” equally among the OCA and GOA priests.

Question

There are many problems which priests face today.

Please, indicate how important the following problems are to YOU on a day-to-day basis.

% of clergy who said the following are a “GREAT PROBLEM TO ME.”

	GOA	OCA
Too much work	33%	20%
Providing financially for my family	29%	45%
Apathy among parishioners	28%	15%
Balancing time and priorities between parish life and my personal family life	25%	17%
Uncertainty about the future of the Church in America	24%	17%
The way authority is exercised in the Church	21%	20%
Lack of opportunity for personal fulfillment and development	21%	5%
Inadequate administrative support: secretaries, Sunday school teachers, etc.	20%	19%
Unrealistic expectations and demands of parishioners	19%	7%
Difficulty of really reaching people today	15%	12%
Inadequate liturgical support: chanters, choir, altar boys, etc.	13%	7%

What should the Church be talking about?

The issue of youth leaving the Church is seen as the most important topic by both GOA and OCA clergy

Family problems, clergy divorce and remarriage of divorced priests are much more urgent for GOA than for OCA priests

The process of selecting bishops raises more questions among OCA than among GOA clergy.

Question

Numerous issues relating to the priesthood are being discussed today and may have impact on your life as a priest. How important would an OPEN DISCUSSION be in the Church in the following areas?

% of clergy who said that the following subjects are “VERY IMPORTANT TO BE DISCUSSED”

	GOA	OCA
Issue of youth and young adults leaving the Orthodox church	78%	70%
Clergy divorces and remarriage of divorced priests	62%	17%
Family problems of the Orthodox priests	55%	25%
Emotional and psychosexual maturity of priests	45%	29%
Relationship between mainstream American culture and traditions and requirements of the Orthodox Church	43%	45%
Problems of sexual misconduct by priests	43%	25%
The issue of “ethnic” versus “American” parishes	39%	31%
The process of selecting bishops	36%	42%
Sharing ministry with laity	36%	26%
Recruiting priests from converts to Orthodoxy	25%	27%
Ordination of women	7%	5%

What do clergy say they need?

“Having more opportunity for personal spiritual development” is most urgent need

Two-thirds of priests are longing for greater feeling of fraternity among clergy;

GOA clergy feel especially strong need to have more time to spend with their families;

The lack of trained deacons is one of the top needs in both GOA and OCA

Question

Would any of the following BE HELPFUL in your priestly ministry?

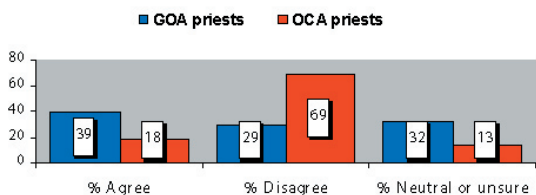
% of clergy who said that the following would be VERY HELPFUL in their parish ministry.

	GOA	OCA
Having more opportunity for personal spiritual development	84%	75%
Having more time available to spend with my family	82%	53%
Having “trained” deacons sharing pastoral duties	70%	56%
Having greater feeling of fraternity among priests	68%	66%
Having more opportunity to share concerns and to communicate regularly with priests in other parishes and dioceses	53%	50%
Having opportunity for training in leadership skills: conflict management, communications, etc.	49%	44%
More opportunity to discuss theological and pastoral issues in a public forum	46%	37%
Having opportunity to be free from involvement in business affairs in a parish, so that I can concentrate on parish’s liturgical life and spiritual needs of parishioners	39%	33%
Having greater opportunity for participation in decision making in my diocese	37%	17%
Having greater freedom to run the parish as I see best	28%	27%
Having opportunity for training in organizational and financial skills: budgeting, investing, insurance, etc.	25%	16%

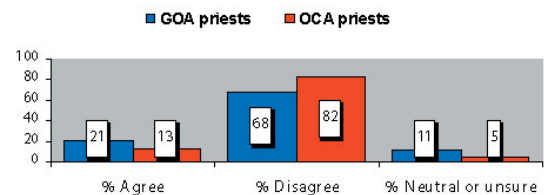
Clergy opinions vary greatly on many issues facing the Church today

% of priests who agreed or disagreed with the following statements

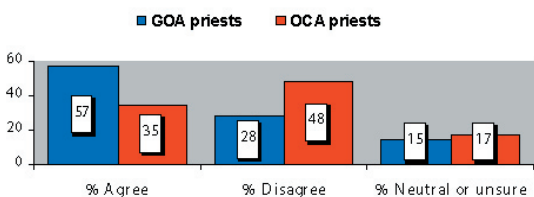
“I think it would be a good idea if priests could re-marry after becoming a widower or after divorce.”



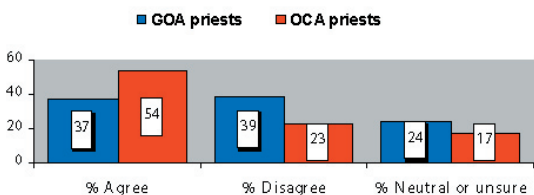
“I think it would be a good idea if marriage could happen after ordination.”



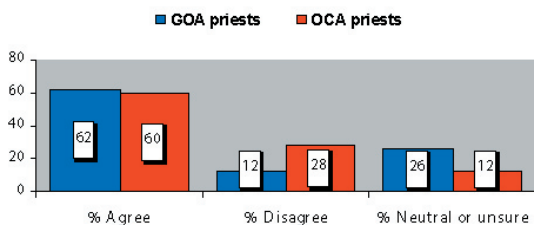
“I think it would be a good idea if bishops could be selected from among married clergy, in addition to celibate clergy.”



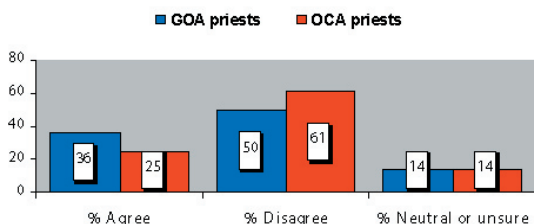
“I think it would be a good idea if the priests in a diocese were to choose their own bishop.”



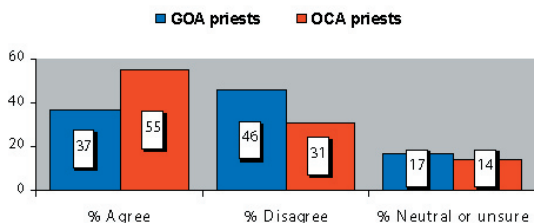
“The Orthodox Church needs to move faster in empowering lay persons in ministry.”



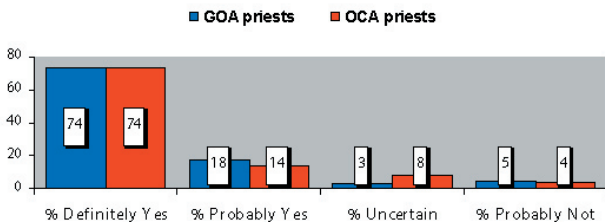
“I think it would be a good idea if women were ordained to diaconate .”



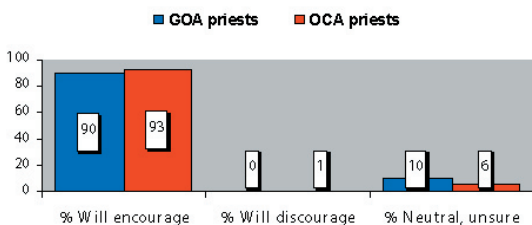
“The only reason for Orthodox clergy to participate in inter-Christian meetings and discussions is to spread the message of Orthodox Christianity and to seek conversion of others into the Orthodox faith.”



If you had your choice again, would you enter priesthood?



Generally speaking, would you rather encourage or rather discourage young men who are considering the priesthood as their vocation? (% of clergy responses)



*For the full study report, visit the Institute's website,
www.orthodoxinstitute.org*

This study was conducted as part of PAOI's Parish Life Project, which has three purposes:

- To research the inner realities of Orthodox parish life in the United States, across the jurisdictions.
- To offer education and training for parish leadership
- To publish and disseminate the results of the studies.

The research was conducted by:

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The Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute was founded in 1981 to educate, communicate, promote, and sustain the traditions, values, teachings and culture of Orthodox Christianity.

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