

## **Eight Facts about Church Attendance in US Orthodox Christian Churches.**

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#### **Eight Facts about Church Attendance in US Orthodox Christian Churches** **p.2**

*Here you will find information about following:*

- About overall rates of church attendance among US Orthodox Christians and among members of individual Orthodox jurisdictions (GOA, OCA, Antiochian Archdiocese, etc.)
- About how differences in the rates of church attendance between Orthodox jurisdictions affect the size of their actual membership
- About relationship between the size of an Orthodox parish and the rates of church attendance
- About state-to-state differences in proportion of Orthodox church members attending services in their parishes on a regular weekly basis
- About possible regions for the future "planting" of the Orthodox parishes

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**Fact 1.** In the 2010 national census of US Orthodox Christian churches each parish was asked two questions:

- How many individual persons total are associated with the life of your parish: including adults and children, regular and occasional attendees, paid stewards and persons who do not contribute financially?
- Approximately, how many persons – including both adults and children – attend liturgy in your parish on a typical Sunday?

In essence, the answer to the first question gives information on the total of *adherents* in each parish – i.e. the total number of persons involved – however loosely – in the life of the local parish community. US nationwide and for all jurisdictions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops combined, the total number of Orthodox Church adherents is 797,600.

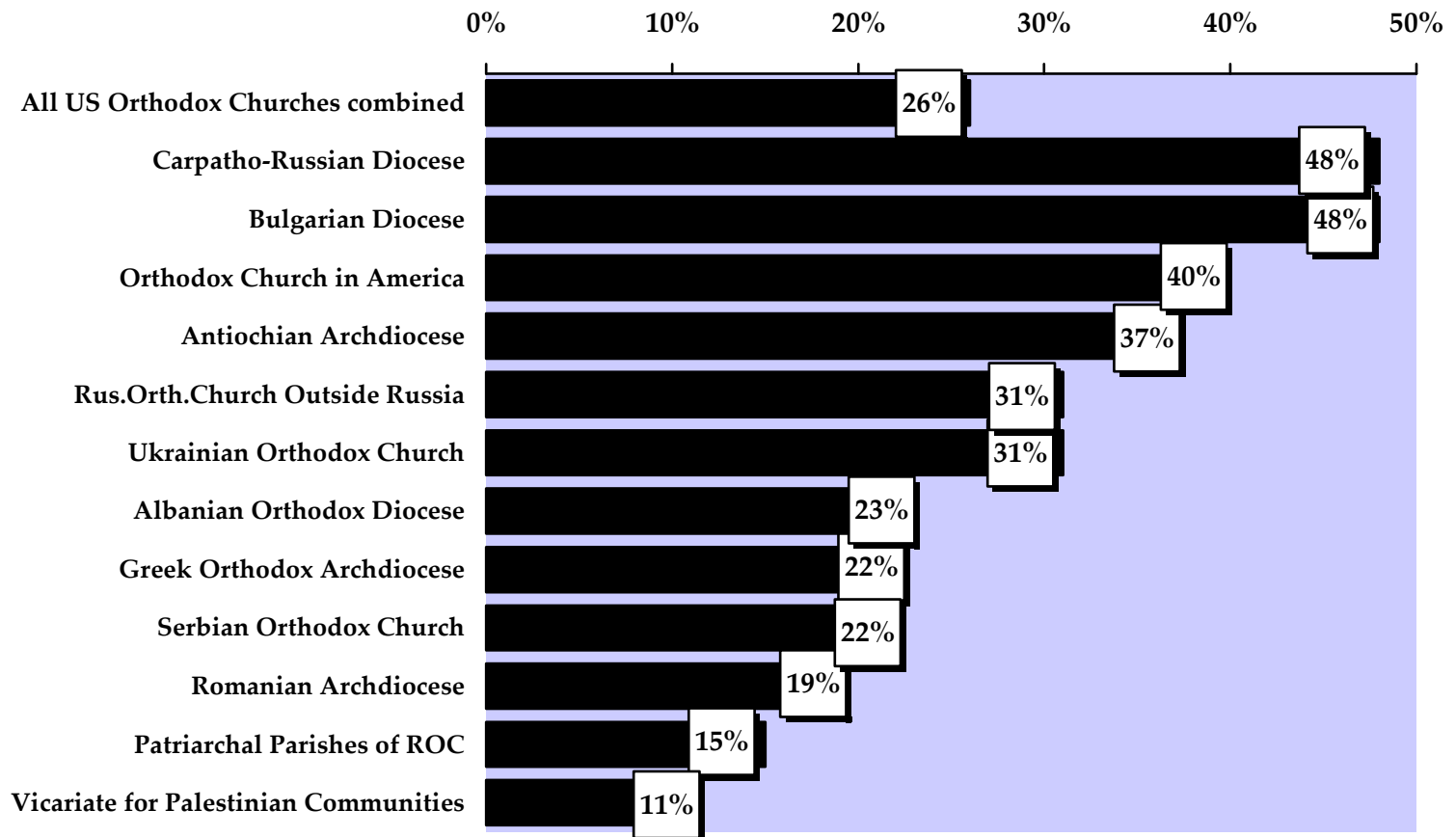
Differently, the answer to the second question indicates the number of parishioners participating in religious life of a parish on a regular basis. US nationwide and for all jurisdictions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops combined, the total number of persons attending Orthodox parishes on a regular weekly basis is 209,000.

The proportion between second (209,000) and first (797,600) figures is 26%. That is, only 26% of all Orthodox Church adherents in America participate in the church life on a regular weekly basis.

**Fact 2.** While 26% of all American Orthodox Church adherents attend church services on a regular weekly basis, this proportion – and, thus, reflecting the strength of church commitment - varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Fig. 1 on the next page shows that in the Orthodox Church in America, Bulgarian Orthodox Diocese and Carpatho-Russian Diocese at least 40% of all adherents attend church services regularly. On the opposite end, in Vicariate for Palestinian Orthodox Communities, Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church and Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese, less than 20% of all members attend church weekly.

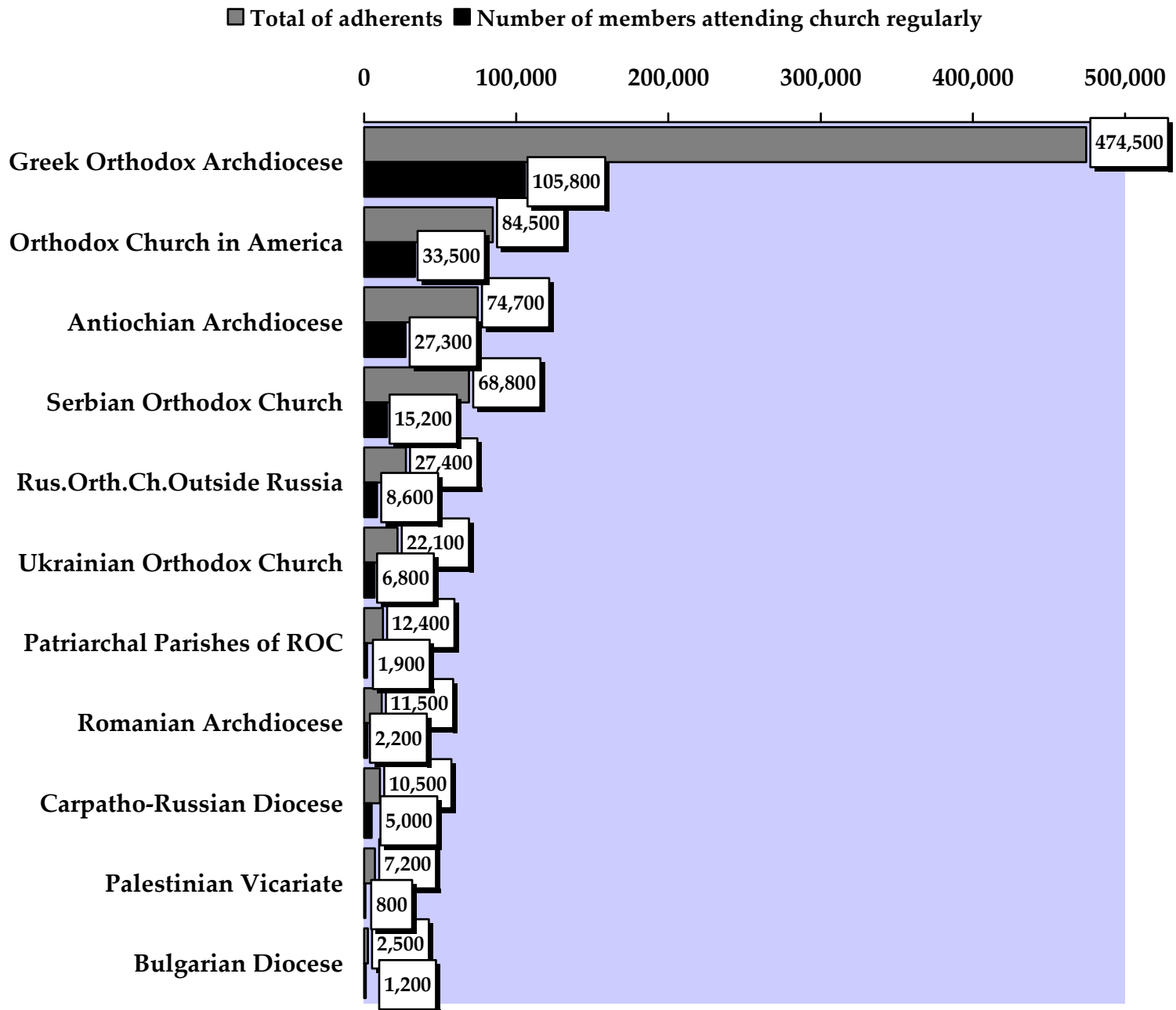
**Fig 1. Church Attendance in Various American Orthodox Jurisdictions:**

**% of parishioners who attend on a regular weekly basis**



The differences in rates of church attendance have significant implications for how the *actual membership* in various US Orthodox jurisdictions can be judged. For instance, Fig. 2 on the next page shows that Greek Orthodox Archdiocese can claim much more adherents than all other Orthodox jurisdictions combined: 474,500 versus 323,100 respectively. However, if the membership would be measured by the number of persons attending church regularly, the difference between the GOA and all other jurisdictions is not as dramatic: 105,800 and 103,200. The number of adherents in the Antiochian Archdiocese and in the Serbian Orthodox Church is similar: 74,700 and 68,800 respectively. But there is a dramatic difference between these two jurisdictions in number of members attending regularly: 27,300 in Antiochian Archdiocese but only 15,200 in Serbian Orthodox Church. Both Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church and Romanian Archdiocese have more adherents than the Carpatho-Russian Diocese. However, because of the very poor rates of attendance in the first two and high rates of attendance in the latter, the Carpatho-Russian Diocese has more regularly participating church members than Romanian Archdiocese and Patriarchal Parishes combined. See Fig. 2.

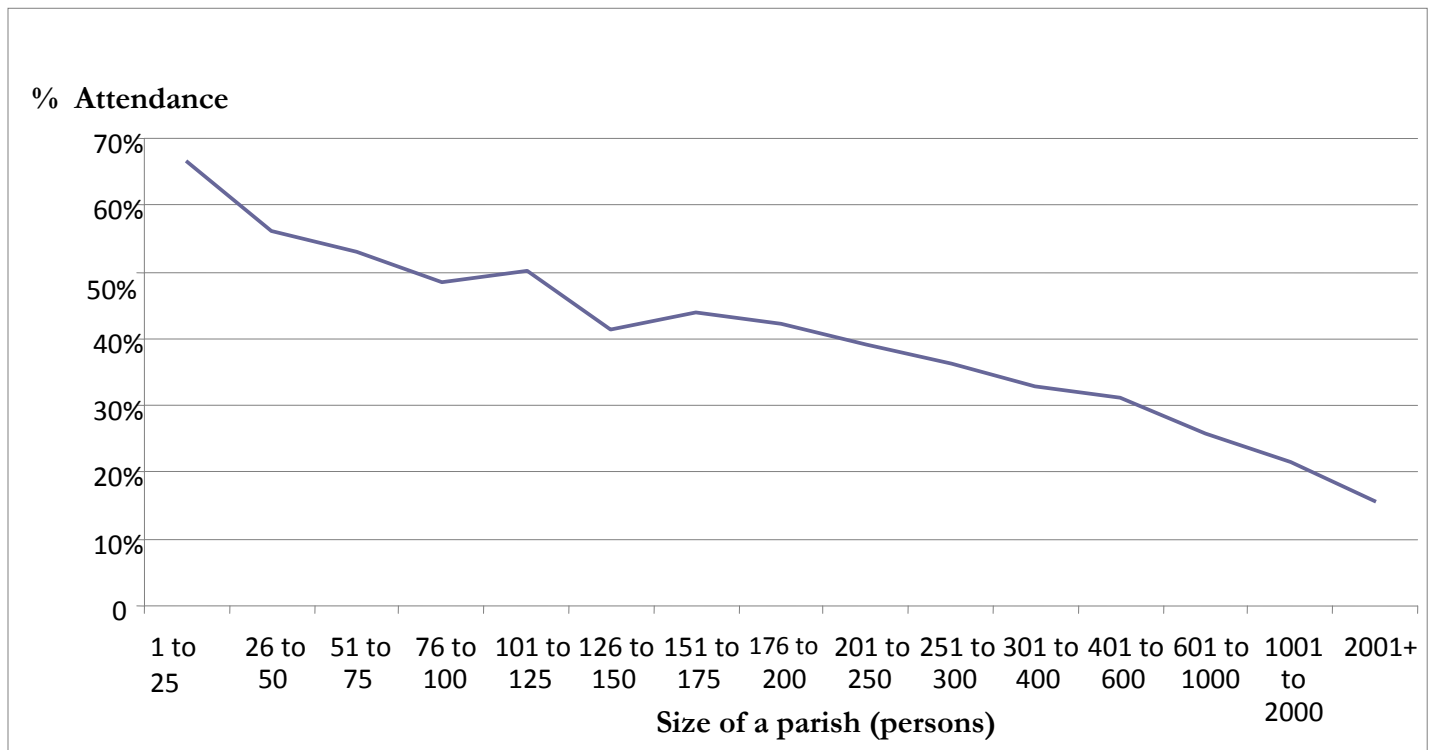
**Fig. 2 Membership in Various American Orthodox Jurisdictions:  
Total of Adherents Versus Number of Members Attending Regularly**



These examples pose a challenging question for Church leadership. What is more important: having more *adherents* – no matter how strong their church commitment is – or having more dedicated members regularly participating in church life?

**Fact 3.** The rates of church attendance depend not only on jurisdiction. The size of a parish is also a significant factor which has strong impact on percentage of parishioners regularly participating in church life. Fig. 3 shows: as the total membership of a parish increases, the proportion of parishioners attending frequently goes down. In simple terms, in very small parish communities a vast majority of members are likely to be in church every Sunday. Quite differently, in large churches relatively few members are present at worship services every weekend.

**Fig. 3 Church Attendance in US Orthodox Parishes versus Size of a Parish:**  
**% of parishioners attending on a regular weekly basis in the parishes of various size**  
**(the parishes of all Orthodox jurisdictions combined)**

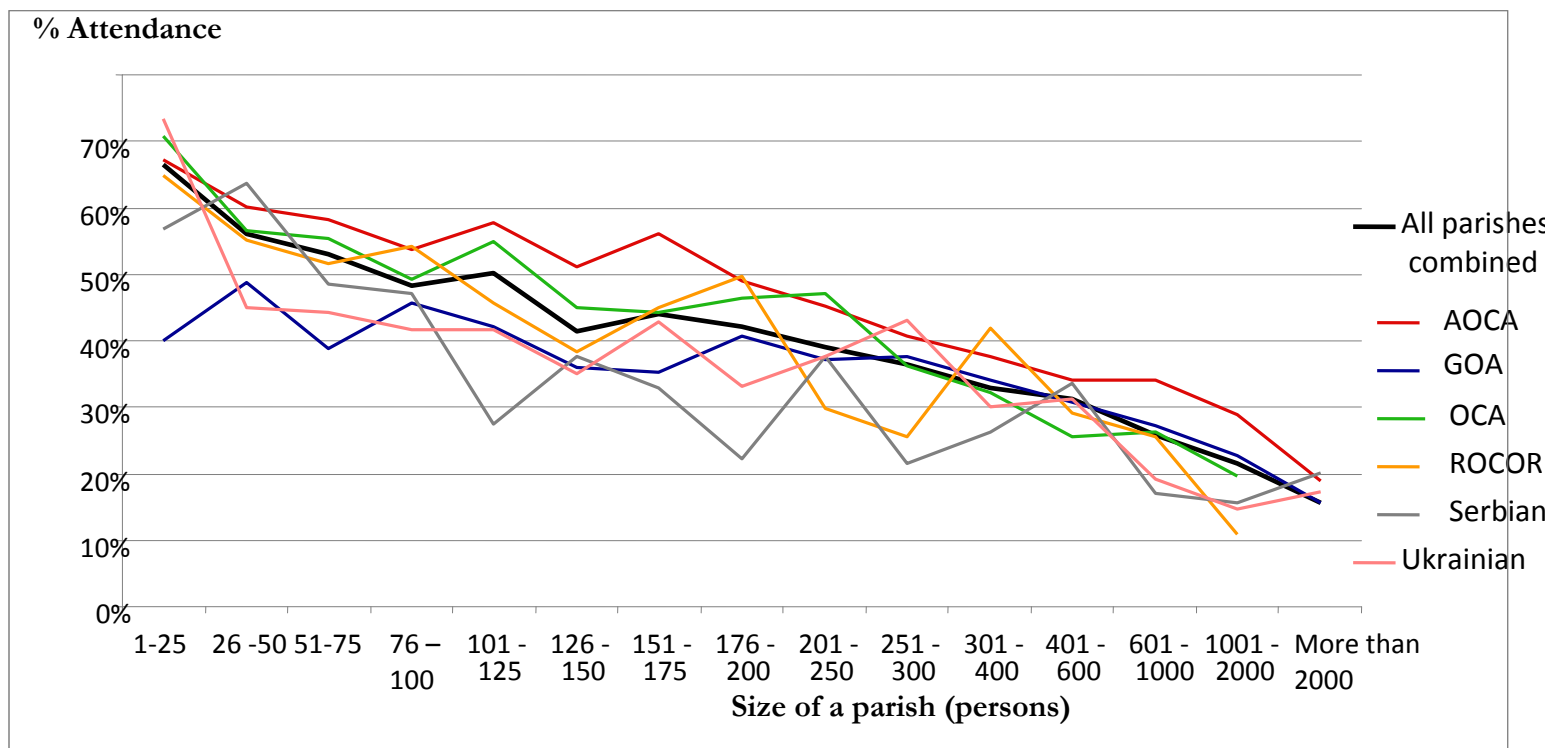


Further analysis of the data revealed an interesting phenomenon. When the total parish population reaches around 150, the Sunday attendance drops significantly. This may be explained by something known as “Dunbar’s number,” which is a theoretical cognitive limit of the number of people with whom one can maintain stable and close social relationships. These are the type of relationships in which an individual knows who each person is, and how each person relates to every other person. When Dunbar’s number is reached, the parish may transform in the perception of the laity from a small family-like community to a more amorphous group of not really well known people. In short, Fig. 3 suggests that the sense of the close-knit community has obvious effect on proportion of parishioners involved regularly in the life of a parish.

**Fact 4.** Fig. 3 presents picture of church attendance for the parishes of all US Orthodox Churches combined. However, the same rule – lower rates of attendance in the larger parish – holds true for the individual jurisdictions as well. See Fig. 4.

One important conclusion can be drawn from Fig. 4. The above discussed fact that such jurisdictions as the GOA or Serbian Orthodox Church have significantly lower rates of attendance than the OCA or Antiochian Archdiocese cannot be simply “blamed” to the much larger average size of GOA and Serbian parishes as compared to OCA or Antiochian churches. Indeed, Fig. 4 shows that GOA (blue line) and Serbian (grey line) churches tend to have lower than national (black line) rates of attendance in almost all parish size categories. Quite differently, the Antiochian (red line) and OCA (green line) churches are likely to be above national average (black line) regardless size of their membership.

**Fig. 4. Church Attendance in the Parishes of Various Jurisdictions versus Size of a Parish:**  
**% of parishioners attending on a regular weekly basis in the parishes of various size**



**Fact 5.** There exist also huge state-to-state variations in proportion of church members attending services in their parishes on a regular weekly basis. Tab. 2 on p.11 and Map 1 on p.13 show that in Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Kentucky more than 40% of all parishioners are frequent church goers, while in Nevada, Washington, California, Utah, Arizona, Alaska, Missouri, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island fewer than 25% of church members attend regularly.

As a general rule, all states with sizeable total Orthodox population have lower rates of church attendance, while the states with the relatively small numbers of Orthodox Church members have higher rates of attendance. There is one remarkable exception from this rule: the state of Pennsylvania. Being the fourth largest state by total number of Orthodox Church members living there (after New York, California and Illinois), Pennsylvania also has the rates of church attendance well above national average: 36% versus 26%.

**Fact 6.** One can ask a very reasonable question with regard to state-to-state differences in the rates of attendance: could these differences be possibly explained by the fact that each state has unique combination of parishes of various jurisdictions and size categories? In simple terms, can one assume that the states with the lower rates of attendance simply have more of the large parishes (in which less people attend frequently) and which belong to the jurisdictions with typically lower attendance? However, this assumption - though logical and easy – does not quite explain geographic variations in the rates of church attendance.

Indeed, for each state we calculated a statistical projection called “expected church attendance.” “Expected church attendance” is the figure of what church attendance will be, if the rates of attendance in each parish would fully correspond with the national average rates of attendance which are typical for the parishes in each jurisdiction and in each size category.<sup>1</sup>

Map. 2 on p.14 and Tab. 2 on p.11 show that in certain states significantly more church members attend services regularly than predicted by statistical model. These states are Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Oklahoma. On the opposite end, some states have much lower rates of actual attendance than they “should have” based on statistical model. These states include Nevada, Alaska, Missouri, Wyoming, South Dakota, Maine, Arkansas, Iowa and Vermont.

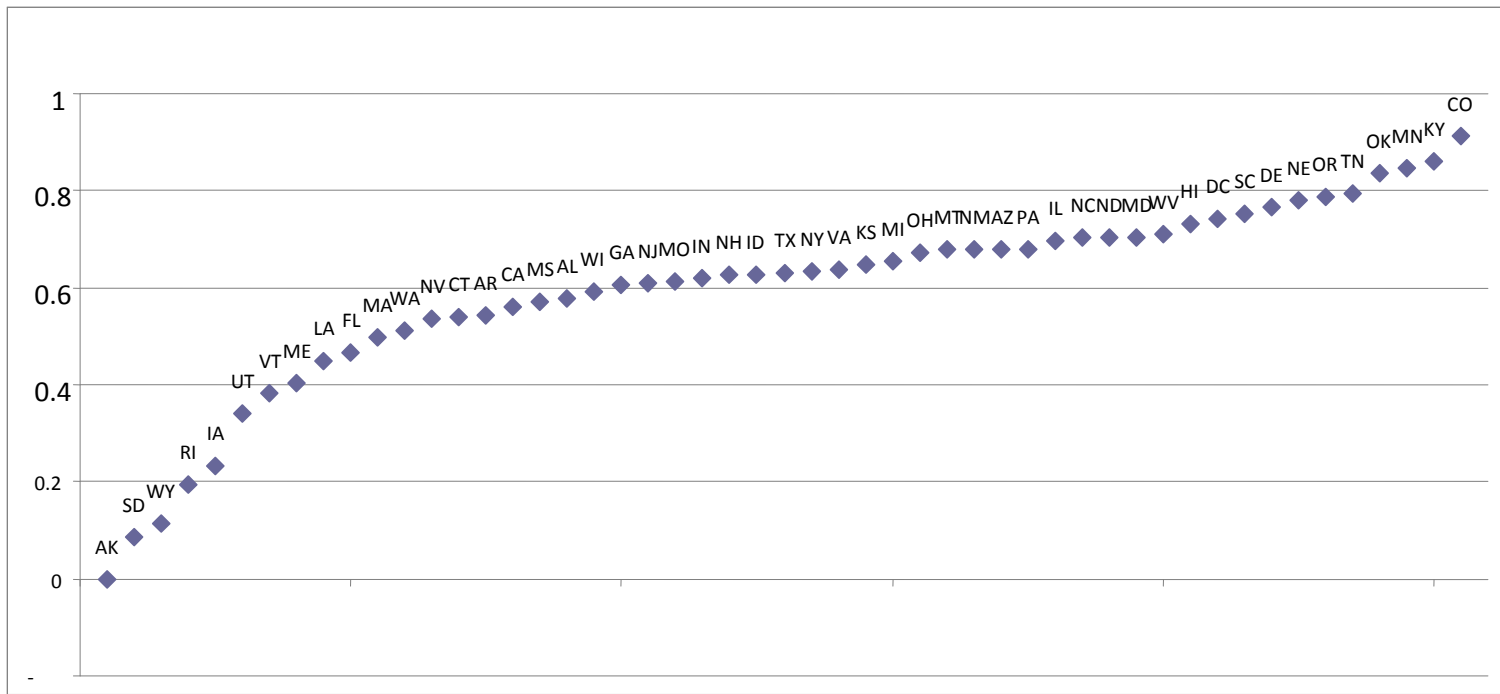
More research is needed to address this finding and to look at possible reasons behind very good (i.e. higher than predicted) and not-so-good (i.e. lower than predicted) church attendance in the listed above states.

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<sup>1</sup> The national average rates of attendance typical for the parishes of various jurisdictions and in each size-category are provided in Tab.1 in appendix.

**Fact 7.** For each state, we used differences between actual and expected church attendance in combination with consistency of these difference from parish to parish and created “index of church attendance.” In simple terms, the “index of church attendance” shows how good real church attendance in each state is compared to what statistical model suggests it “should be.” The index of church attendance varies from 0 to 1.<sup>2</sup> The higher index of church attendance indicates the states where more parishioners attend regularly than predicted by statistical model. The lower index of attendance indicates states where fewer church members attend regularly than predicted by statistical model. Fig. 4 below and Map 3 on p.15 show how different states are faring in terms of the index of church attendance with the states of Colorado, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Minnesota being the “best” and the states of Alaska, South Dakota, Wyoming and Rhode Island being the “worst.”

**Fig. 4 Index of Church Attendance by State**



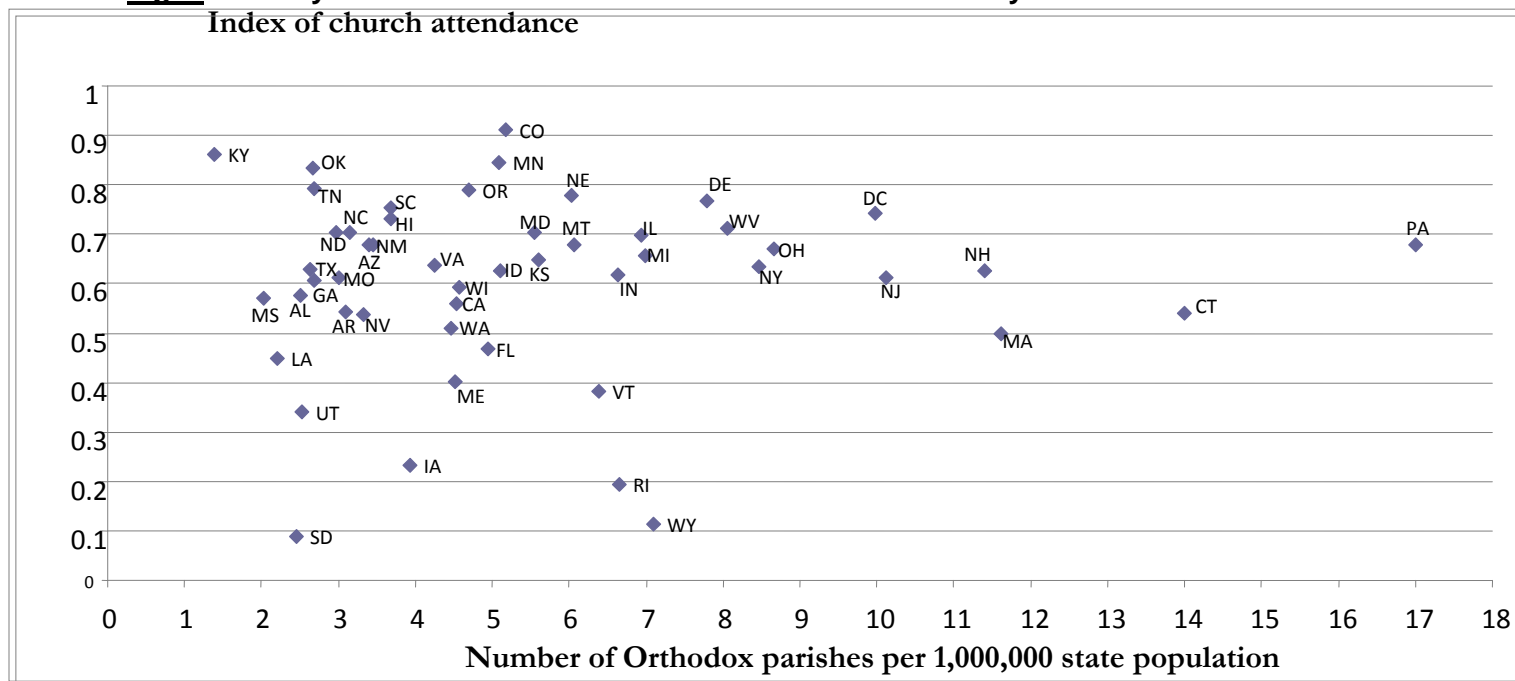
<sup>2</sup> The index of church attendance for each state is provided in Tab. 3 in appendix.



**Fact 8.** Are there any practical implications that Church leadership can use or any practical lessons that can be learned from the index of church attendance? The answer to this question is “yes.” Fig. 5 shows relation between index of church attendance and density of the Orthodox parishes (number of parishes per 1,000,000 general population) in each state.

The states in the upper left corner (Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, South Carolina, etc.) present an interesting situation. Here, a relatively small number of currently existing Orthodox parishes is combined with very high index of church attendance suggesting that these states could be good “candidates” for planting new Orthodox missions and parishes. .

**Fig. 5 State-by-State Index of Church Attendance versus Density of Orthodox Parishes**



## Appendix.

**Tab. 1 US Average Rates of Church Attendance (\*) for the Parishes in Various Jurisdictions and in Different Size Categories**

Size of a parish: persons	1 to 25	26 to 50	51 to 75	76 to 100	101 to 125	126 to 150	151 to 175	176 to 200
Jurisdiction								
Albanian Diocese								
Antiochian Archdiocese	67%	60%	58%	54%	58%	51%	56%	49%
Bulgarian Diocese	93%	58%	64%	38%	48%	36%		
Carpatho-Russian Diocese	65%	55%	55%	47%	53%	46%	47%	44%
GOA	40%	49%	39%	46%	42%	36%	35%	41%
Parishes of ROC (MP)	50%	43%	62%	49%	42%	40%	51%	45%
OCA	71%	57%	55%	49%	55%	45%	44%	46%
Vicariate for Palestinian Orth. Christ. Communities	20%				28%			
ROCOR	65%	55%	52%	54%	46%	38%	45%	50%
Romanian Archdiocese		59%	64%	23%	33%	26%		24%
Serbian Orthodox Church	57%	64%	49%	47%	27%	38%		22%
Ukrainian Orth. Church	73%	45%	44%	42%	42%	35%	43%	33%
<b>US average for all jurisdictions combined</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>42%</b>

**Note: (\*)** - “Church Attendance” is percentage (%) of parishioners who attend church services on a regular weekly basis.

Size of a parish: persons	201 to 250	251 to 300	301 to 400	401 to 600	601 to 1000	1001 to 2000	2001+
Jurisdiction							
Albanian Diocese			26%				
Antiochian Archdiocese	45%	40%	38%	34%	34%	29%	19%
Bulgarian Diocese				40%			
Carpatho-Russian Diocese	42%	55%	45%	44%	47%		
GOA	37%	38%	34%	31%	27%	23%	16%
Parishes of ROC (MP)	36%		25%		14%		3%
OCA	47%	36%	32%	26%	26%	20%	
Vicariate for Palestinian Orth. Christ. Communities	18%				16%		8%
ROCOR	30%	26%	42%	29%	27%	11%	
Romanian Archdiocese	20%	43%	20%		17%		7%
Serbian Orthodox Church	38%	22%	26%	34%	17%	16%	20%
Ukrainian Orth. Church	38%	43%	30%	31%	19%	15%	17%
<b>US average for all jurisdictions combined</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>16%</b>

**Note: (\*)** - “Church Attendance” is percentage (%) of parishioners who attend church services on a regular weekly basis.

**Tab. 2 State-by-State Actual Church Attendance and “Expected” (\*) Church Attendance in Orthodox Parishes which belong to the Assembly’s Jurisdictions**

<b>State</b>	<b>Actual church attendance (%)</b>	<b>Expected attendance (%)</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Actual church attendance (%)</b>	<b>Expected attendance (%)</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	33%	33%	<b>Nebraska</b>	49%	42%
<b>Alaska</b>	22%	39%	<b>Nevada</b>	14%	20%
<b>Arkansas</b>	32%	38%	<b>New Hampshire</b>	31%	33%
<b>Arizona</b>	25%	25%	<b>New Jersey</b>	23%	25%
<b>California</b>	25%	25%	<b>New Mexico</b>	30%	30%
<b>Colorado</b>	31%	27%	<b>New York</b>	21%	21%
<b>Connecticut</b>	28%	30%	<b>North Carolina</b>	25%	25%
<b>Delaware</b>	50%	40%	<b>North Dakota</b>	58%	57%
<b>Florida</b>	21%	25%	<b>Ohio</b>	26%	26%
<b>Georgia</b>	21%	25%	<b>Oklahoma</b>	46%	40%
<b>Hawaii</b>	64%	46%	<b>Oregon</b>	31%	29%
<b>Idaho</b>	50%	48%	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	36%	33%
<b>Illinois</b>	26%	22%	<b>Rhode Island</b>	24%	28%
<b>Indiana</b>	27%	26%	<b>South Carolina</b>	35%	32%
<b>Iowa</b>	34%	39%	<b>South Dakota</b>	28%	41%
<b>Kansas</b>	43%	39%	<b>Tennessee</b>	37%	35%
<b>Kentucky</b>	57%	37%	<b>Texas</b>	29%	28%
<b>Louisiana</b>	29%	37%	<b>Utah</b>	21%	23%
<b>Maine</b>	28%	34%	<b>Vermont</b>	38%	49%
<b>Maryland</b>	25%	23%	<b>Virginia</b>	26%	25%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	25%	25%	<b>Washington</b>	24%	28%
<b>Michigan</b>	28%	27%	<b>West Virginia</b>	40%	36%
<b>Minnesota</b>	36%	30%	<b>Wisconsin</b>	31%	25%
<b>Mississippi</b>	40%	43%	<b>Wyoming</b>	40%	38%
<b>Missouri</b>	23%	28%	<b>Wash., DC</b>	19%	17%
<b>Montana</b>	43%	39%	<b>US nationwide</b>	26%	

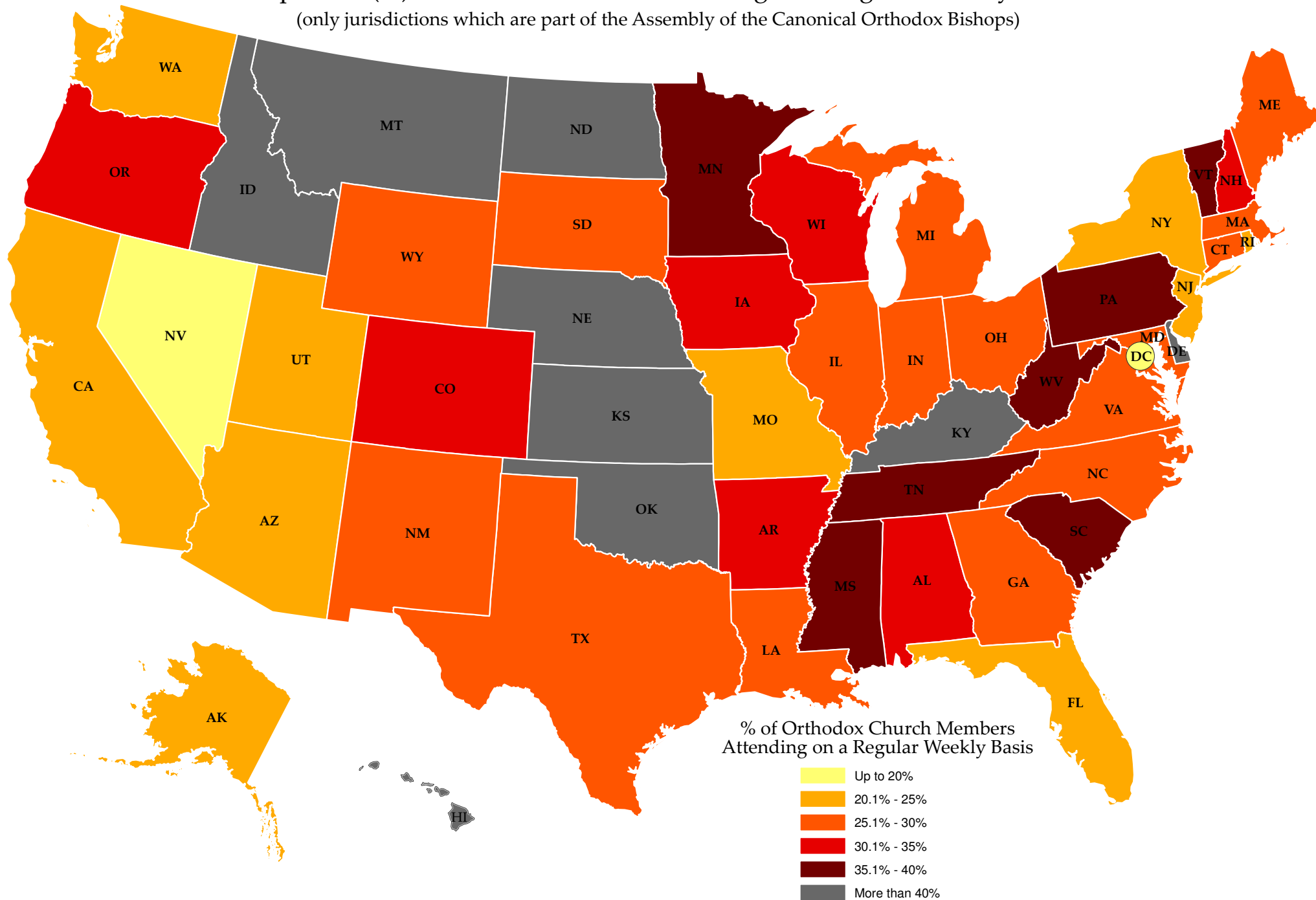
**Note:** (\*) – “Actual Church Attendance” is percentage (%) of all Orthodox Church members in each state who attend church services on a regular weekly basis. **“Expected Church Attendance”** is a statistical projection of what church attendance in each state will be, if the rates of attendance in all parishes would fully correspond with the national average rates of attendance which are typical for the parishes in each jurisdiction and in each size category.

**Tab. 3 State-by-State Index of Church Attendance (\*) in Orthodox Parishes which belong to the Assembly's Jurisdictions**

<b>State</b>	<b>Index of church attendance</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Index of church attendance</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	0.58	<b>Nebraska</b>	0.78
<b>Alaska</b>	0	<b>Nevada</b>	0.54
<b>Arkansas</b>	0.54	<b>New Hampshire</b>	0.63
<b>Arizona</b>	0.68	<b>New Jersey</b>	0.61
<b>California</b>	0.56	<b>New Mexico</b>	0.68
<b>Colorado</b>	0.91	<b>New York</b>	0.63
<b>Connecticut</b>	0.54	<b>North Carolina</b>	0.70
<b>Delaware</b>	0.77	<b>North Dakota</b>	0.70
<b>Florida</b>	0.47	<b>Ohio</b>	0.67
<b>Georgia</b>	0.61	<b>Oklahoma</b>	0.84
<b>Hawaii</b>	0.73	<b>Oregon</b>	0.79
<b>Idaho</b>	0.63	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	0.68
<b>Illinois</b>	0.70	<b>Rhode Island</b>	0.19
<b>Indiana</b>	0.62	<b>South Carolina</b>	0.75
<b>Iowa</b>	0.23	<b>South Dakota</b>	0.09
<b>Kansas</b>	0.65	<b>Tennessee</b>	0.79
<b>Kentucky</b>	0.86	<b>Texas</b>	0.63
<b>Louisiana</b>	0.45	<b>Utah</b>	0.34
<b>Maine</b>	0.40	<b>Vermont</b>	0.38
<b>Maryland</b>	0.70	<b>Virginia</b>	0.64
<b>Massachusetts</b>	0.50	<b>Washington</b>	0.51
<b>Michigan</b>	0.66	<b>West Virginia</b>	0.71
<b>Minnesota</b>	0.85	<b>Wisconsin</b>	0.59
<b>Mississippi</b>	0.57	<b>Wyoming</b>	0.11
<b>Missouri</b>	0.61	<b>Wash., DC</b>	0.74
<b>Montana</b>	0.68	<b>US nationwide</b>	0.592

**Note:** (\*) - “Index of Church Attendance” evaluates the difference between actual church attendance and “expected” church attendance in each state. “Expected” church attendance is a statistically calculated projection of what church attendance would be, if attendance in all parishes would fully correspond with the national average rates of attendance typical for the parishes in each jurisdiction and in each size category. The index of church attendance varies from 0 to 1. The higher index of church attendance indicates the states where more parishioners attend regularly than predicted by statistical model. The lower index of attendance indicates states where fewer church members attend regularly than predicted by statistical model.

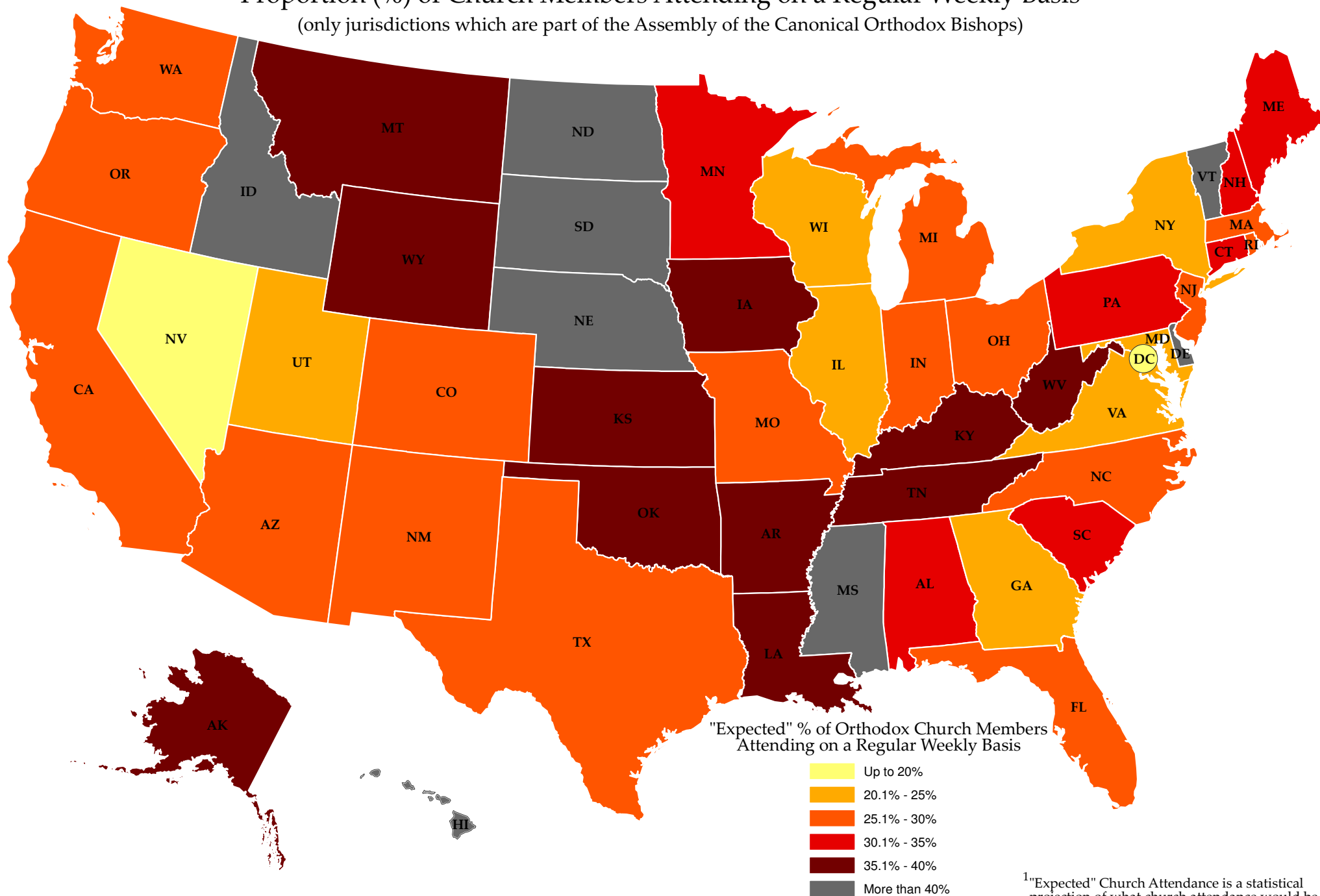
# Church Attendance in Orthodox Christian Churches<sup>1</sup> by State (2010): Proportion (%) of Church Members Attending on a Regular Weekly Basis (only jurisdictions which are part of the Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops)



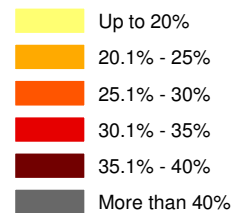
# "Expected"<sup>1</sup> Church Attendance in Orthodox Christian Churches by State (2010):

Proportion (%) of Church Members Attending on a Regular Weekly Basis

(only jurisdictions which are part of the Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops)



"Expected" % of Orthodox Church Members Attending on a Regular Weekly Basis



<sup>1</sup>"Expected" Church Attendance is a statistical projection of what church attendance would be, if the actual attendance in all parishes would fully correspond with the national average attendance which is typical for the parishes in each jurisdiction and in each size category.

# Index<sup>1</sup> of Church Attendance in Orthodox Christian Churches

(only jurisdictions which are part of the Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops)

