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## Fast Questions and Fast Answers about US Orthodox Churches



Greek Orthodox Church of Annunciation in Milwaukee, WI

## **Fast Questions and Fast Answers about US Orthodox Churches**

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**Question 1. Geographically, how widespread are the Orthodox Churches throughout the territory of the United States?**

Out of 3,143 counties and county equivalents on US territory, the Orthodox Churches have their parishes and missions in 626 counties. Map 1 on page 13 shows actual locations of all Orthodox parishes and missions in America.

**Question 2. Where are the areas with the strongest Orthodox Church presence in America?**

Map 2 on page 14 shows the number of the Orthodox Church members in all US counties. The ten top US counties with the largest numbers of the Orthodox Church members are listed in Tab. 1.

**Tab. 1 Top ten US counties by the number of adherents (\*) of the Orthodox jurisdictions which are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops**

Rank	Name of County and State	City or area corresponding with this county	Total of Orthodox Church adherents in this county
1.	Cook county, IL	Chicago	48,114
2.	Queens county, NY	New York: Flushing	28,395
3.	Los Angeles county, CA	Los Angeles	24,211
4.	New York county, NY	New York: Manhattan	16,790
5.	Middlesex county, MA	Cities of Cambridge and Lowell	16,674
6.	Pinellas county, FL	Cities of Clearwater and St. Petersburg	15,345
7.	Cuyahoga county, OH	Cleveland	14,657
8.	Wayne county, MI	Detroit	14,470
9.	Nassau county, NY	New York: Long Island	13,395
10.	Kings county, NY	New York: Brooklyn	13,200

(\*) - "Adherents" include all "full members" (whatever definition of "full members" each Orthodox jurisdiction utilizes), their children and estimated number of persons who are not "full members," but participate – at least occasionally – in the life of the local Orthodox parish.

If measured not by number of members but by the number of Orthodox parishes and missions present in a county, the top three US counties are:

- Cook county, IL (Chicago). It has 49 parishes and missions;
- Los Angeles county, CA (Los Angeles). It has 35 parishes and missions;
- Allegheny county, PA (Pittsburgh). It has 29 parishes and missions.

**Question 3. What is proportion of the Orthodox Church members in US general population? Are there any places on US territory where the Orthodox Churches are "majority religion?"**

Nationwide, the proportion of the Orthodox Church members in the total of US population is rather small: only about 0.3 %. However, there are significant variations between different US counties in this respect. Map 3 on page 15 shows percentage (%) of the Orthodox Church members in the population of all US counties. On the territory of contiguous United States (i.e. Alaska and Hawaii excluded), the three top counties with the highest proportion of the Orthodox Church members in the local population are:

- Lake county, IN (Orthodox Church members constitute 2.1% of the county's population);
- Washington DC (2%);
- Hancock county, WV (1.8%).

There are 7 US counties where American Orthodox Churches are the largest out of all religious groups present in these counties. All of them are in Alaska. Tab. 2 on the next page provides information on these counties and indicates proportion (%) of the Orthodox Church members in the county's total population and county's total of religious adherents.

**Tab. 2 Seven US counties where Orthodox Churches are largest out of all religious groups present in these counties.**

<b>Name of County and State</b>	<b>% of the Orthodox Church members in the total of religious adherents (*)</b>	<b>% of the Orthodox Church members in the total population</b>
Lake and Peninsula Borough, AK	99.6%	70.1%
Aleutians East Borough, AK	80.8%	19.1%
Bristol Bay Borough, AK	77.1%	22.7%
Aleutians West Borough, AK	55.2%	13.6%
Dillingham Census Area, AK	39.5%	20.4%
Kodiak Island Borough, AK	36.7%	10.4%
Hoonah-Angoon, AK	31.6%	9.3%

(\*) Not all population is religiously involved and church affiliated. The data in this column show % of the Orthodox Church members in the total of persons who are affiliated with various religious organizations and churches.

**Question 4. Is there anything remarkable about geography of the Orthodox Churches in the United States?**

First, compared to the general US population, the members of the Orthodox Churches are much more concentrated in certain parts of the country. 45% (almost half!) of Orthodox Church adherents live in just five states: New York (14% of all Orthodox Church members), California (10%), Illinois (8%), Pennsylvania (7%) and Massachusetts (6%). To compare, only 29% of the general US population lives in these five states. Maps 4a and 4b on pages 16-17 help to "visualize" this very uneven distribution of the Orthodox Churches throughout the territory of the United States.

Second, compared to the general US population, the members of the Orthodox Churches are much more concentrated in the urban areas in general and in the large cities in particular. 77% of the Orthodox Church members live in metropolitan areas with the population of more than 1,000,000. To compare, only 54% of the general US population lives in metropolitan areas with a population of more than 1,000,000. The graph on page 18 provides detailed information on the type of the areas (metropolitan, micropolitan and non-metro) where US Orthodox parishes are located and where US Orthodox Church members live.

### Question 5. How large are US Orthodox Churches?

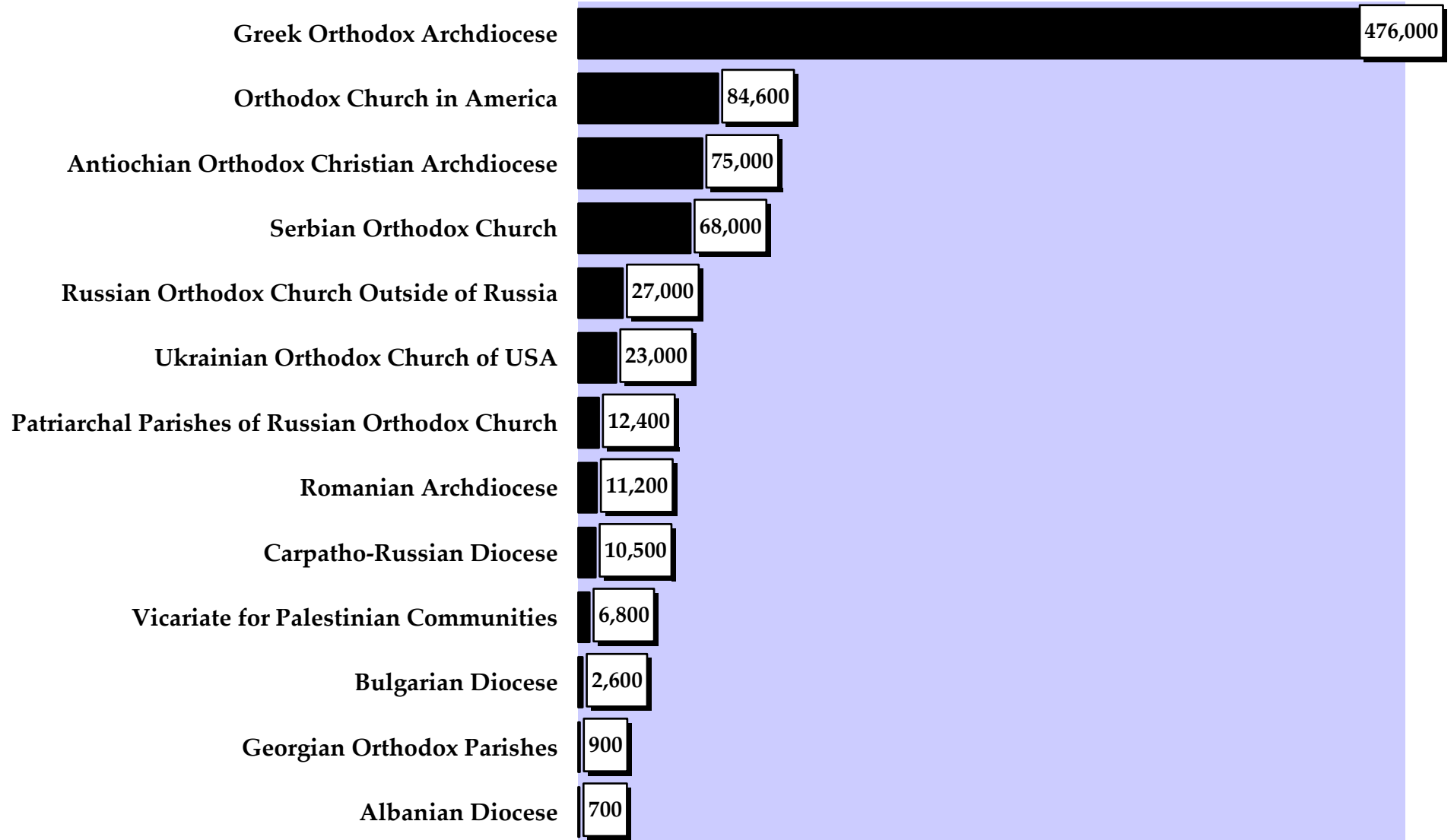
In the 2010 national census of US Orthodox Christian churches sponsored by the Standing Council of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in Americas each Orthodox parish and mission was asked: "How many individual persons total are associated with the life of your parish: including adults and children, regular and occasional attendees, paid stewards and persons who do not contribute financially?"

In essence, the answer to this question gives information on the number of *adherents* in each parish: that is, the number of persons involved in the life of the local parish community. In the United States nationwide and for all jurisdictions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops combined, the total number of persons (including children) participating in the life of the Orthodox Church is 797,500.

Fig. 1 on the next page shows the total membership (number of adherents) for all Orthodox jurisdictions that are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops.

**Fig. 1 Membership in US Orthodox Churches:**

**Total Number of Adherents (including children and occasional participants)**



One can see, of all US Orthodox Churches, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is by far the largest. In fact, by number of adherents, the GOA is larger than all other Orthodox jurisdictions combined.

### Question 6. Are US Orthodox Churches growing?

The answer to this question is "yes." Between 2000 and 2012, the total number of parishes, missions and monastic communities that belong to the various Assembly's jurisdictions increased from 1689 to 1970: that is, +17% growth. The states which grew in parishes most dynamically are: Georgia (+35% increase in number of parishes), Maryland (+39%), Texas (+45%), Kansas (+45%), Arkansas (+50%), Iowa (+50%), North Carolina (+50%), Virginia (+52%), Missouri (+54%), Oklahoma (+57%), Washington (+60%), Delaware (+75%), Kentucky (+75%) and Tennessee (+80%). Map 5 on page 19 provides detailed information on increase or decrease in the Orthodox Church presence for each US county. Between 2000 and now, the US Orthodox Churches "entered" and established their parishes and missions in 140 new counties. Regrettably, during the same period, in 32 counties Orthodox parishes and missions were closed or moved out.

### Question 7. How "ethnic" are US Orthodox Churches?

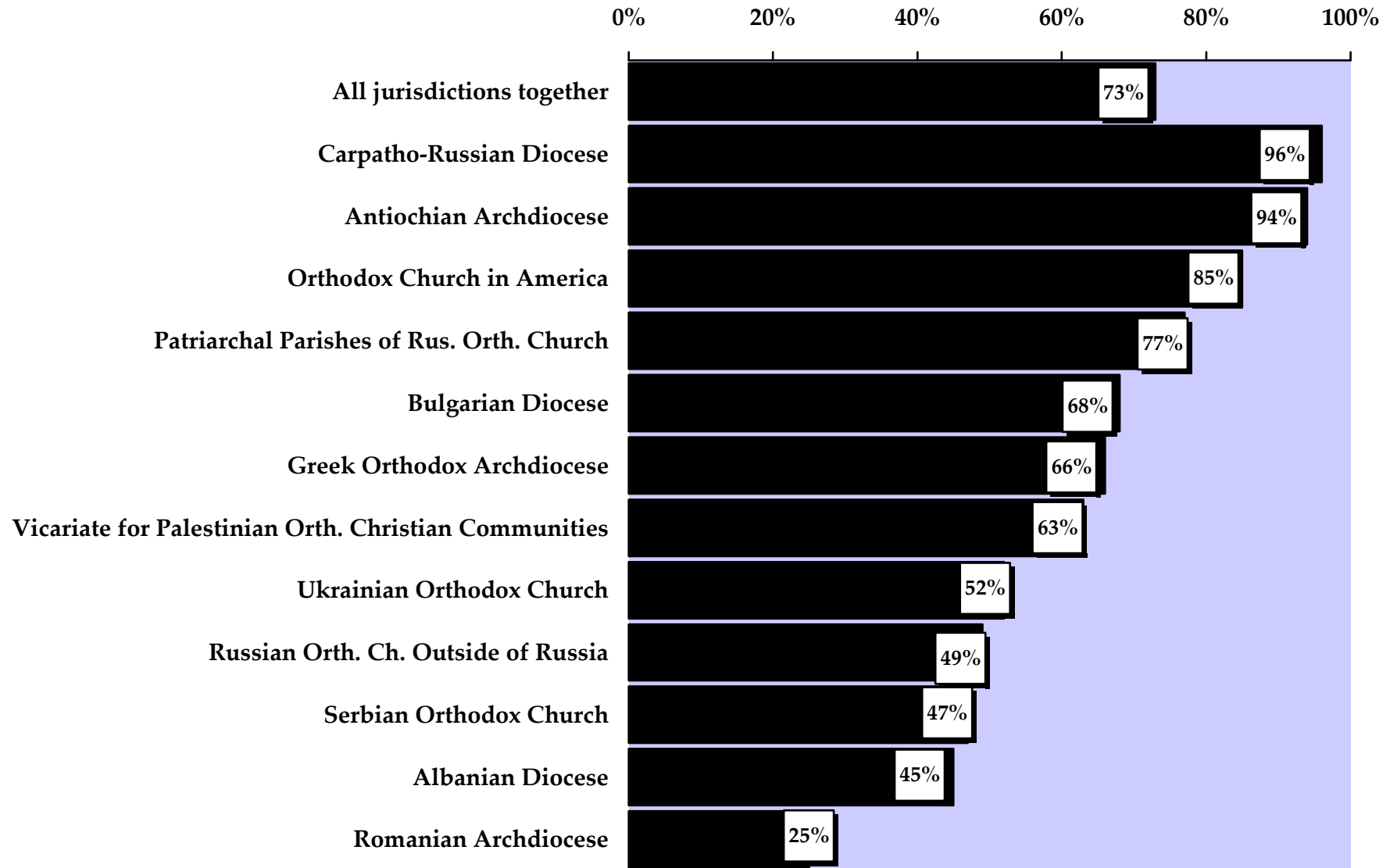
The answer to this question depends on how one will "measure" the strength of the ethnic culture. In the survey of US Orthodox parishes conducted in 2011 under the auspices of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops each Orthodox parish and mission was asked to respond two questions:

- Please, estimate the percentage of the English language used in your parish on a typical Sunday as the *language of the Divine Liturgy* (from 0% - "no English used" to 100% - "exclusively English used");
- Do you *agree or disagree* with the statement "Our parish has a strong ethnic culture and identity that we are trying to preserve?" Please, select one answer: "Strongly agree," "Rather agree," "Neutral / Unsure," "Rather disagree," "Strongly disagree."

Fig. 2 on the next page furnishes information on the usage of the English language in worship services in the parishes of the various Orthodox jurisdictions. Remarkably, on the national level, for all parishes and for all Orthodox jurisdictions combined - English is much more widely used in American Orthodox church life than the other "ethnic" languages. US nationwide, average proportion of English used as language of liturgy is 73%.



**Fig. 2. Usage of English Language in the Parishes of Various Orthodox Jurisdictions:**  
**average % of English used as language of liturgy**



In terms of the usage of English versus non-English languages, all Orthodox jurisdictions in America can be divided in three categories. The first group includes three Churches which use almost exclusively English as the language of liturgy. These churches are: Carpatho-Russian Diocese, Antiochian Archdiocese and Orthodox Church in America (OCA). With regard to the latter, if we exclude from analysis the three “ethnic” OCA dioceses (Romanian Episcopate, Bulgarian Diocese and Albanian Archdiocese), the rates of the usage of English in the territorial dioceses of OCA are actually higher than Fig.1 shows: 95% as language of liturgy.

The second group includes Churches where English dominates in worship services, but other languages also have a significant presence. These jurisdictions are: the Patriarchal Parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church, Bulgarian Diocese, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, and Vicariate for Palestinian Orthodox Communities.

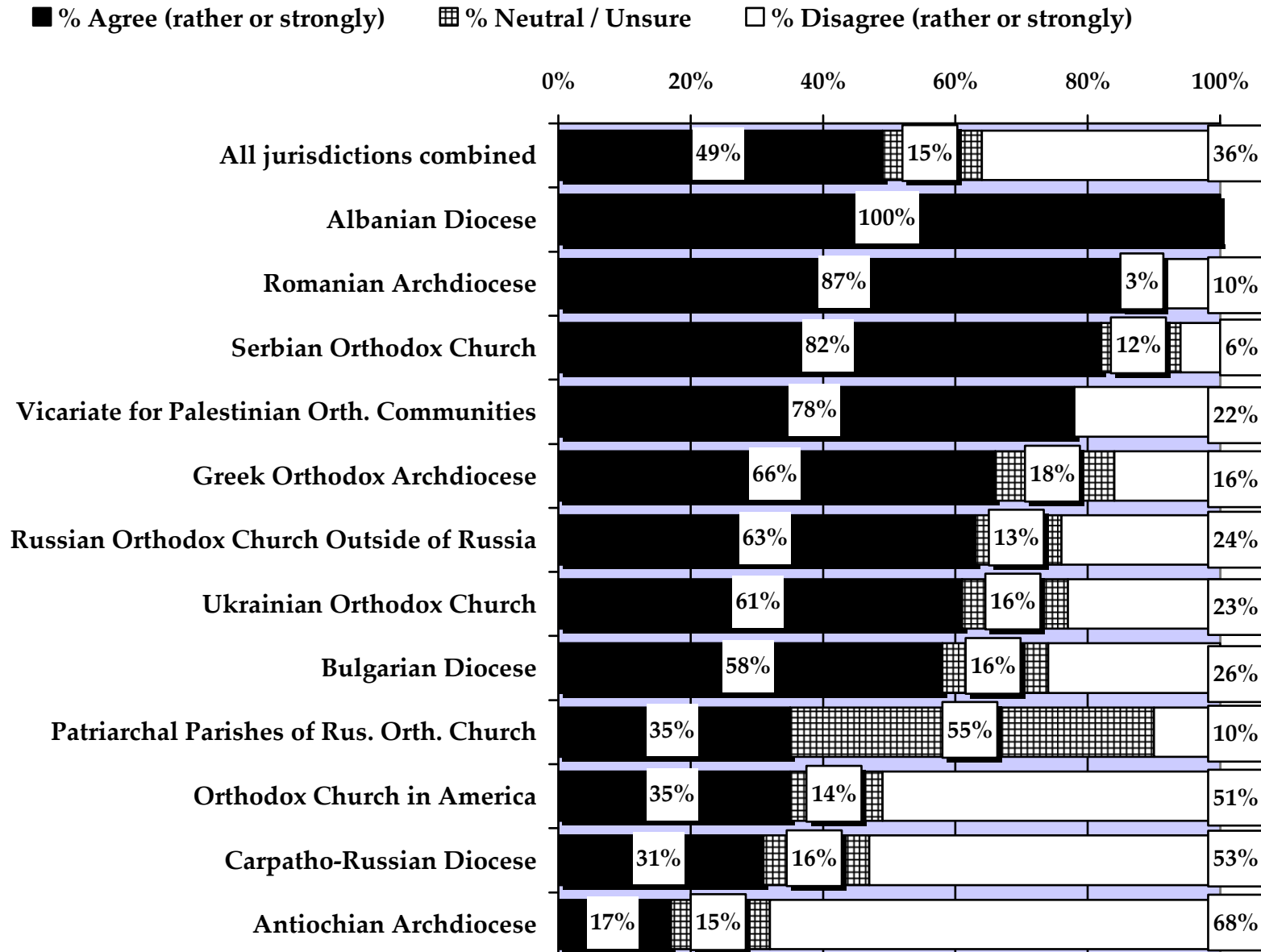
Finally, the third group consists of four jurisdictions where various non-English languages remain at least as important as English or even dominate as the language of liturgy. This is the case of Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, Serbian Orthodox Church, Albanian Diocese, and Romanian Archdiocese.

The fact that the English language dominates in American Orthodox church life may prompt a premature conclusion that a solid majority of American Orthodox parishes can be viewed today as “all American” congregations. However, survey data tell us that this is not quite the case. The second question in the 2011 US national Orthodox parish survey asked: “Do you agree or disagree with the statement ‘Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage and identity that we are trying to preserve.’” In essence, this question asked parishes about how they view themselves in terms of being or being not “ethnically based” and about how important are their “ethnic roots” to them. The answers to this question were given on a five point scale: “Strongly agree,” “Rather agree,” “Neutral / Unsure,” “Rather disagree,” “Strongly disagree.”

Fig. 3 on the next page shows that almost half - 49% - of all US Orthodox parishes agreed with the statement “Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage that we are trying to preserve.” Only 36% of parishes disagreed with this statement and 15% responded “neutral or unsure.”

**Fig. 3. Strength of Ethnic Identity in the Parishes of Various Orthodox Jurisdictions:**

**"Do you agree with the statement 'Our parish has strong ethnic culture and identity that we are trying to preserve'"**



Further, in eight out of twelve US Orthodox Churches, a strong majority of parishes agreed with the statement about “having a strong ethnic heritage and identity.” These jurisdictions are: Albanian Diocese (100% agreement with the statement), Romanian Archdiocese (87%), Serbian Orthodox Church (82%), Vicariate for Palestinian Orthodox Communities (78%), Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (63%), Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (63%), Ukrainian Orthodox Church (61%) and Bulgarian Diocese (58%). By contrast, in only three jurisdictions (Orthodox Church in America, Antiochian Archdiocese and Carpatho-Russian Diocese), an absolute majority of parishes rejected statement about “having a strong ethnic heritage and identity.”

In summary, the strength of ethnic identity (that is, the way how Orthodox parishes view themselves) shows that dominance of English language in most of US Orthodox jurisdictions does not mean that local Orthodox parishes abandon their ethnic “roots” and heritage.

#### **Question 8. How good are Orthodox Church members in terms of the regularity of church attendance?**

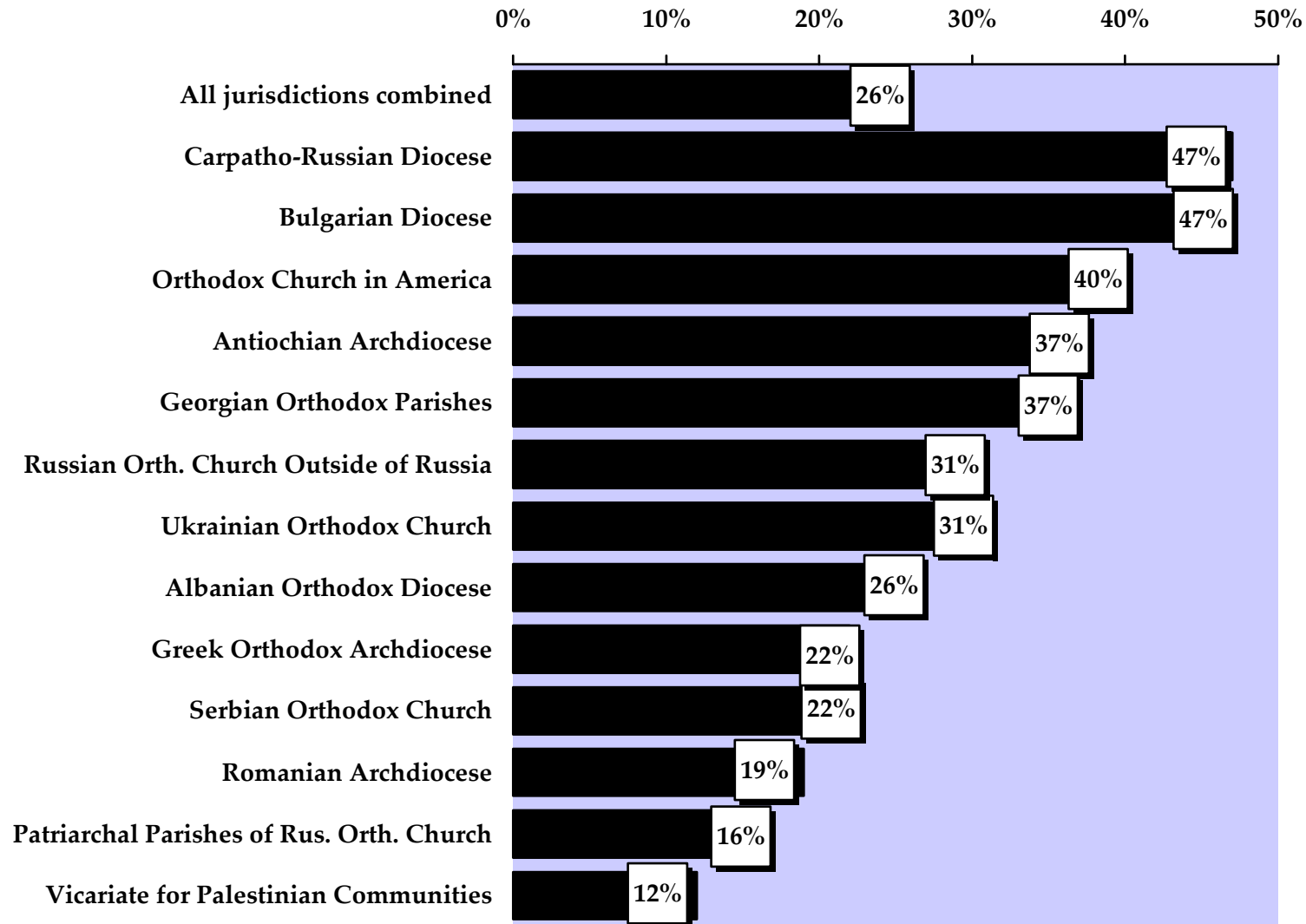
We noted earlier (see question 5), that the total Orthodox Church membership in the United States is about 797,500 persons. But not all of them attend church services regularly and frequently. Therefore, in the 2010 national census of US Orthodox Christian churches each Orthodox parish was also asked the question "Approximately, how many persons – including both adults and children – attend liturgy in your parish on a typical Sunday?"

In essence, the answer to this question indicates the number of parishioners participating in the life of a parish *on a regular basis*. US nationwide and for all jurisdictions of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops combined, the number of persons attending Orthodox parishes on a regular weekly basis is 209,000. The proportion between this figure (209,000) and the total membership in all US Orthodox Churches (797,500) figures is 26%. That is, only 26% of all Orthodox parishioners in America participate in church life regularly.

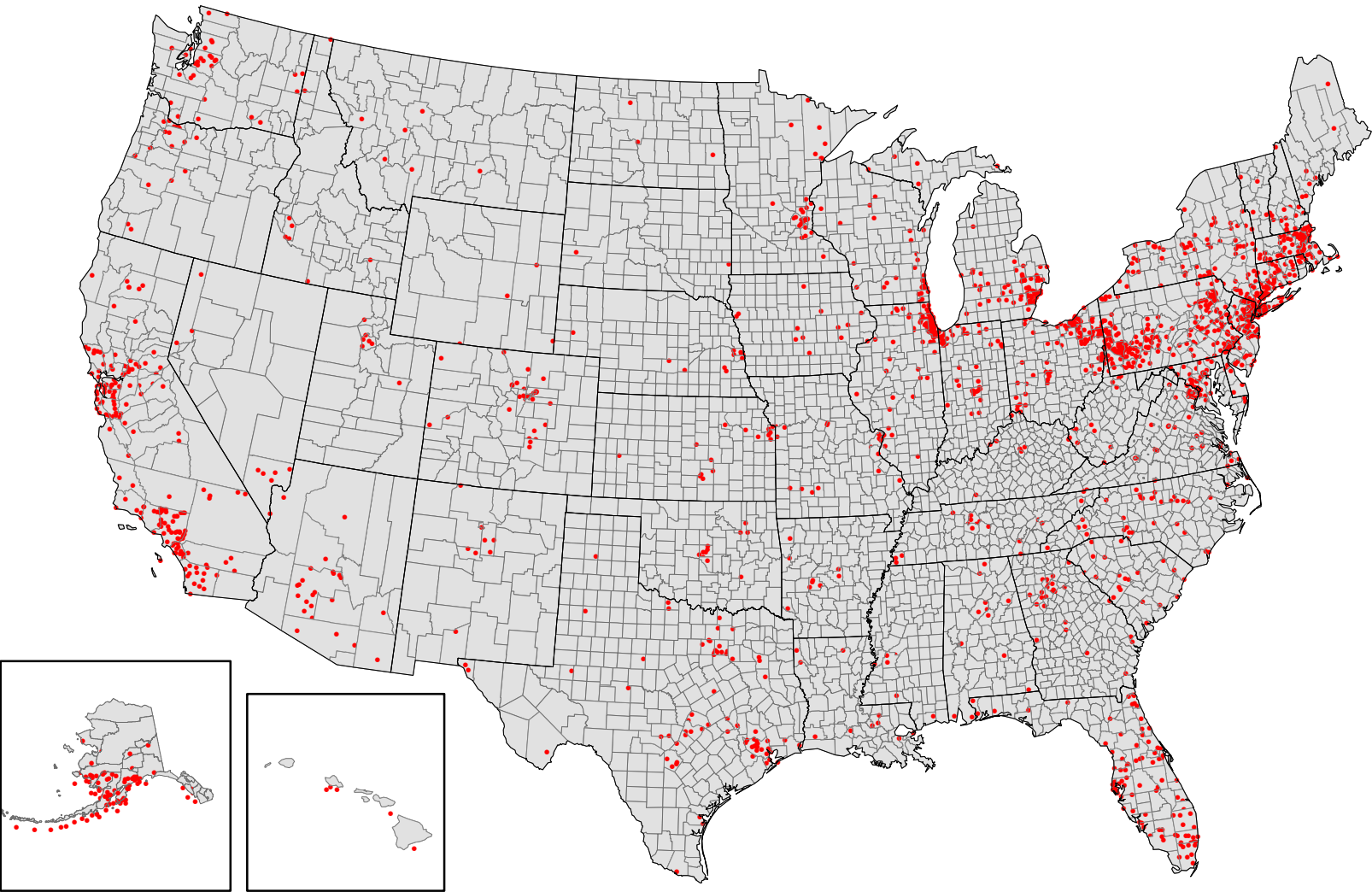
This proportion, however, (which can also be seen as an indicator of the strength of church commitment) varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Fig. 4 on the next page shows that in the Orthodox Church in America, the Bulgarian Orthodox Diocese and the Carpatho-Russian Diocese at least 40% of all parishioners 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. 4. Regularity of Church Attendance in Various American Orthodox Jurisdictions:**

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



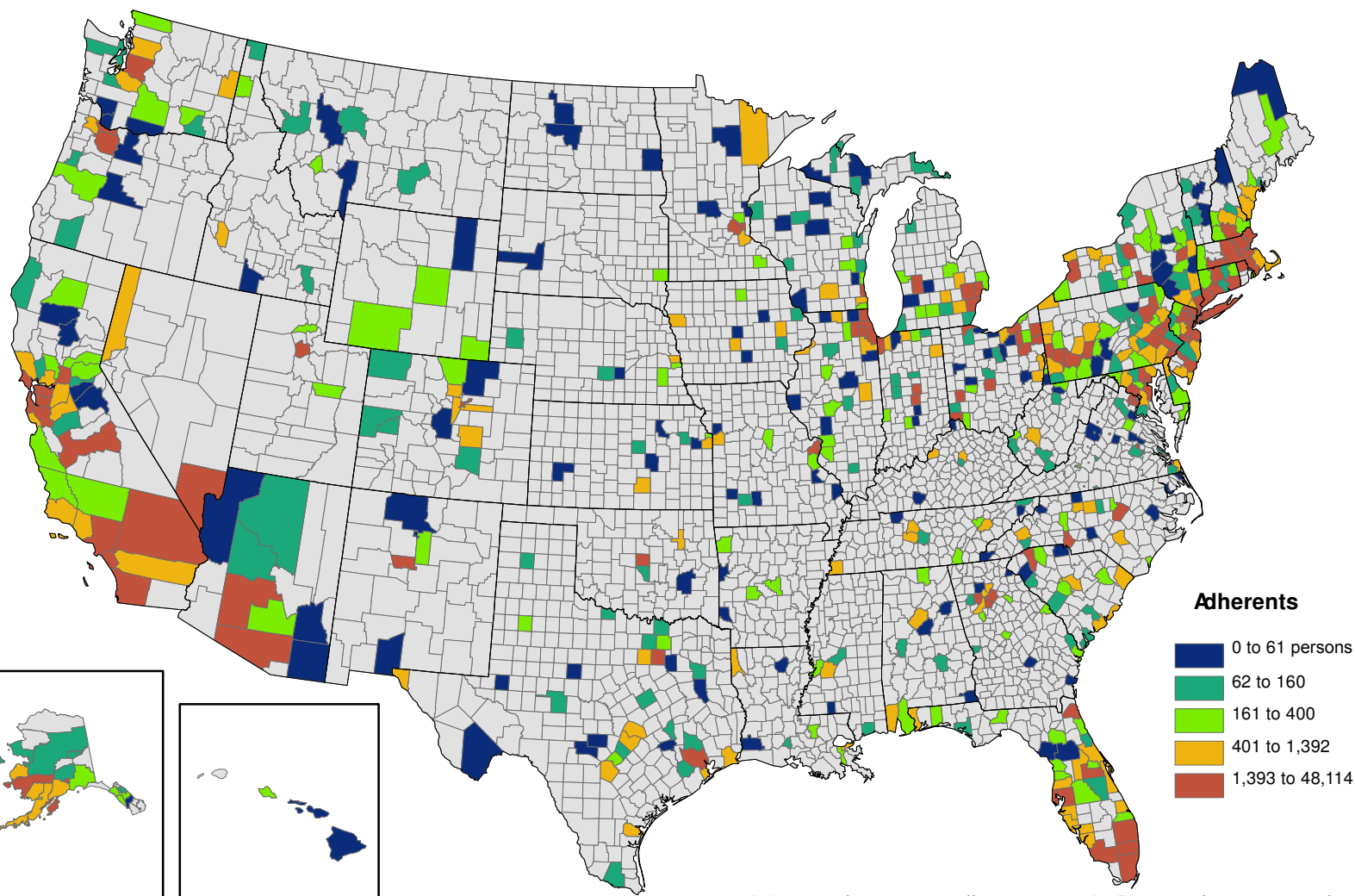
Map 1. Locations of Parishes of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States, 2012



1,900 parishes and 797,500 adherents total. Present in 626 counties

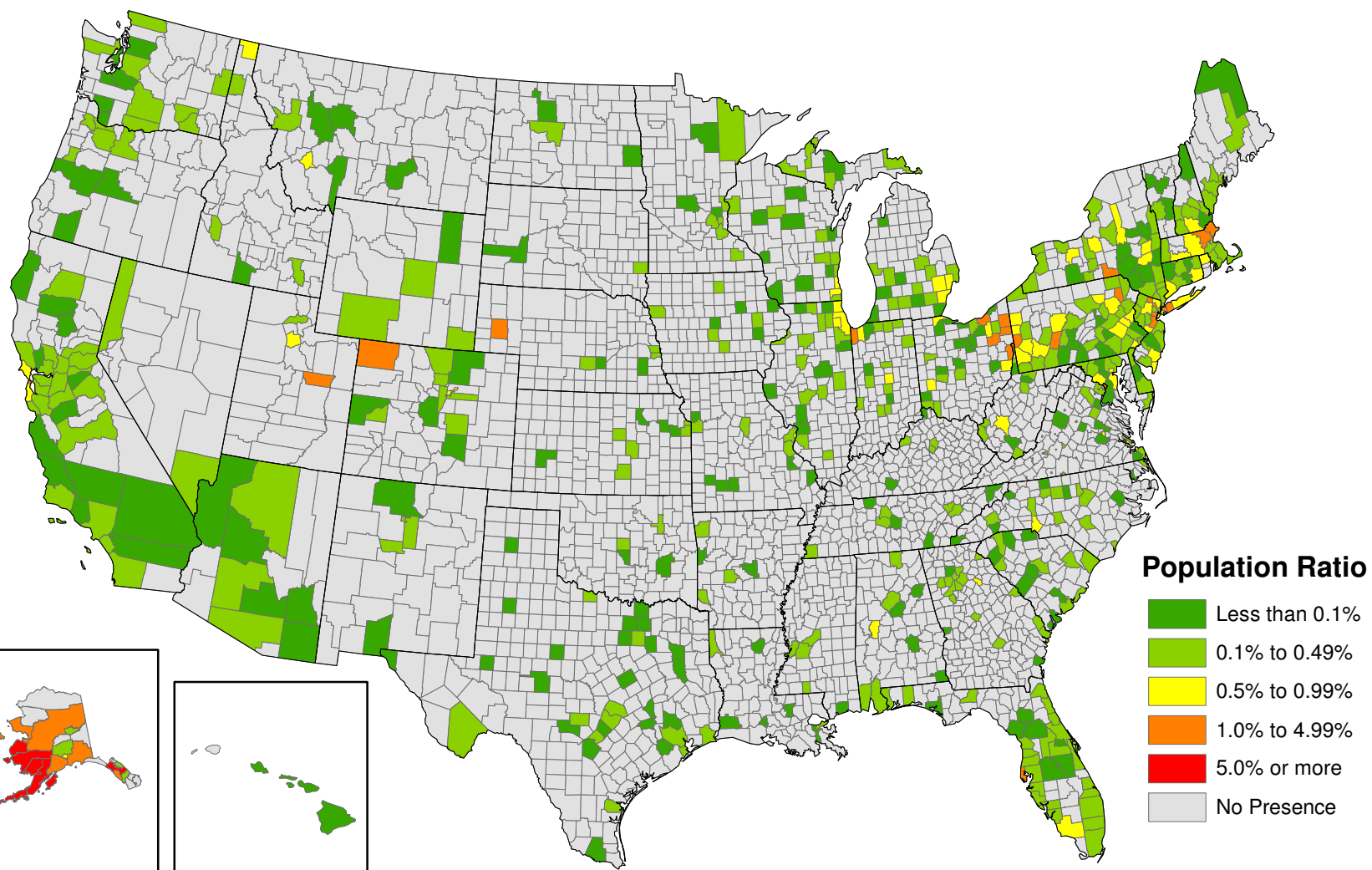
*Dots are randomly placed within each county to represent congregations.*

Map 2. Member Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops:  
Number of Adherents in the US Counties (2012)



1,900 parishes and 797,500 adherents total. Present in 626 counties.

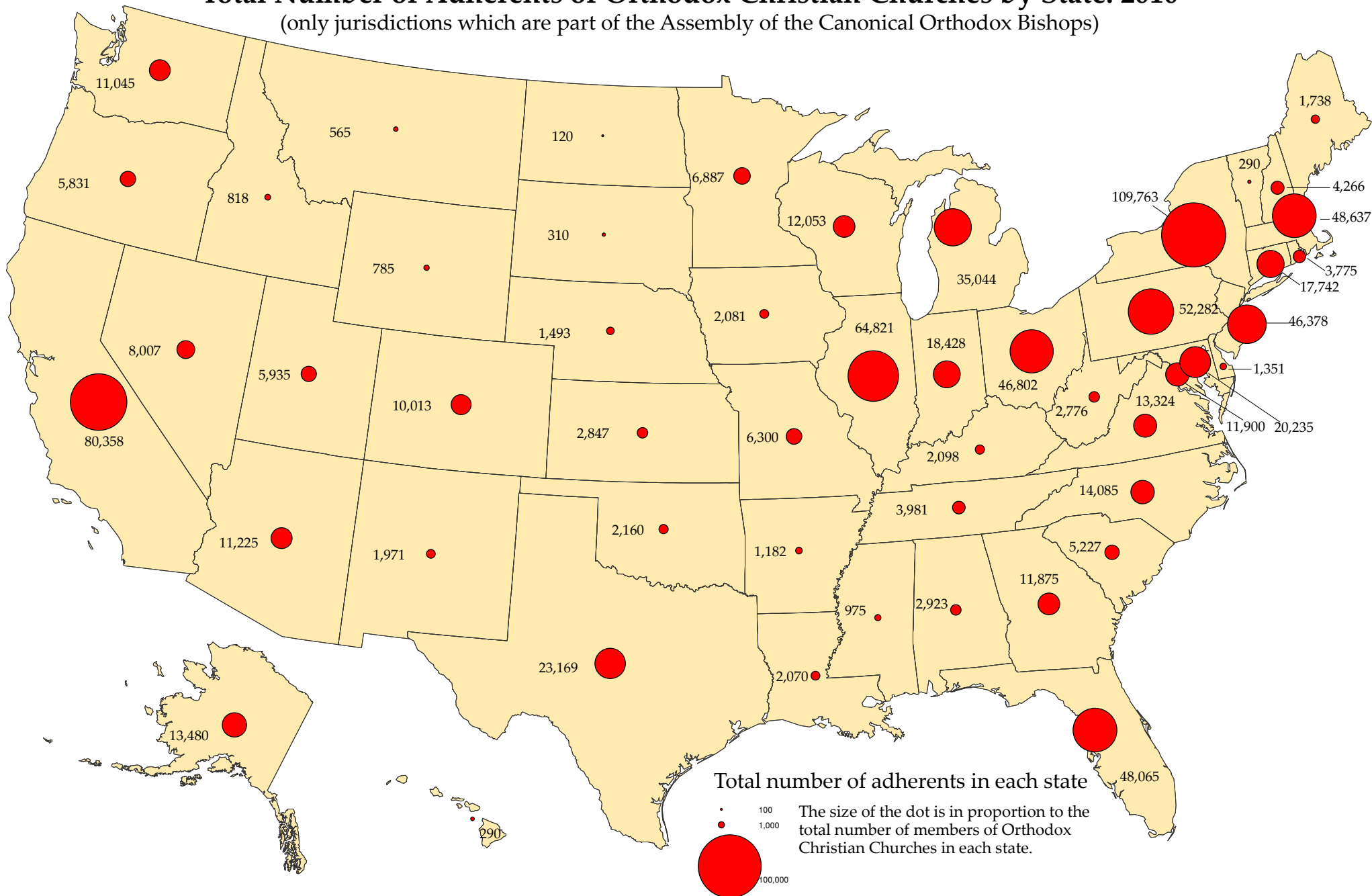
Map 3. Member Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops: Adherents as % of Population





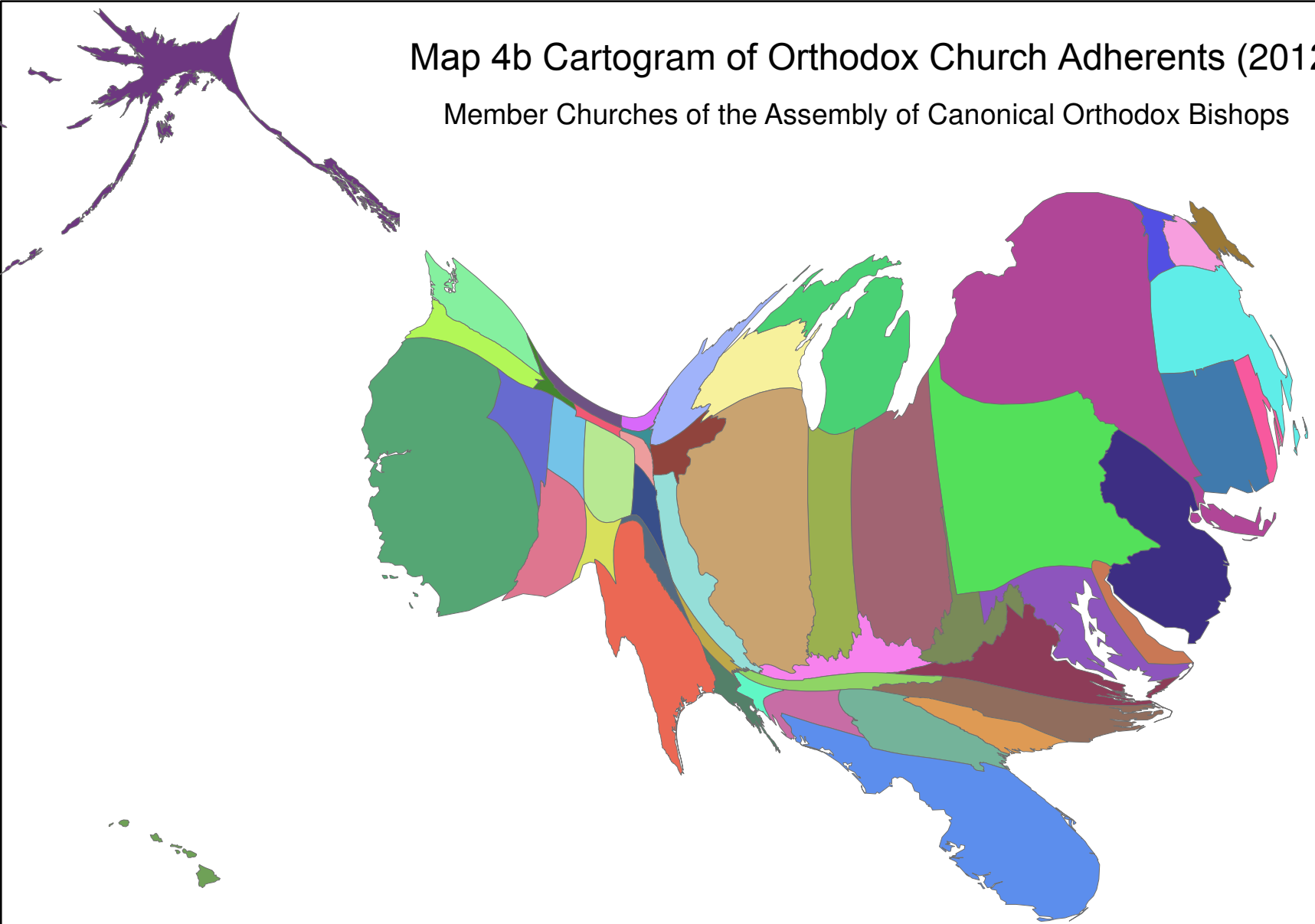
# Map 4a Total Number of Adherents of Orthodox Christian Churches by State: 2010

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



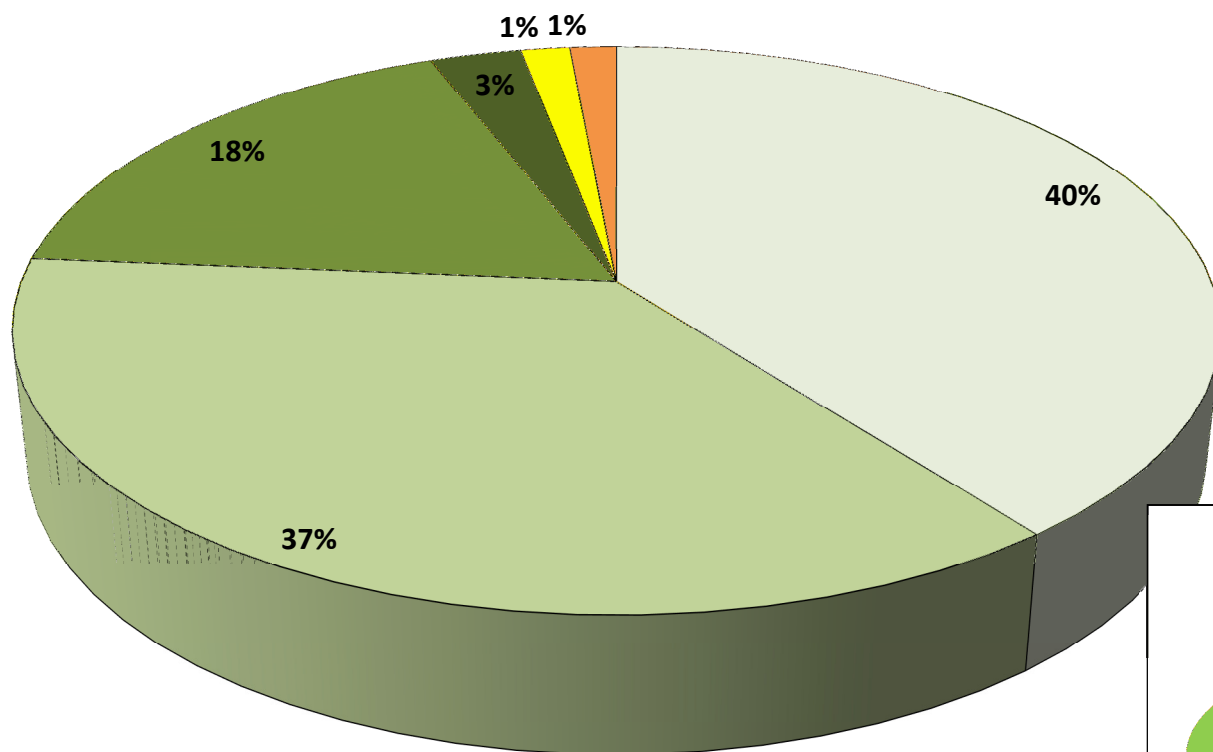
# Map 4b Cartogram of Orthodox Church Adherents (2012)

Member Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops



Adherent Cartogram resizes each state proportionately to the number of Orthodox Church adherents in that state.

## Location of Member Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops Adherents by Community Size



□ Metros of 5,000,000 or more

■ Metros of 250,000 to 999,999

■ Micropolitan Areas

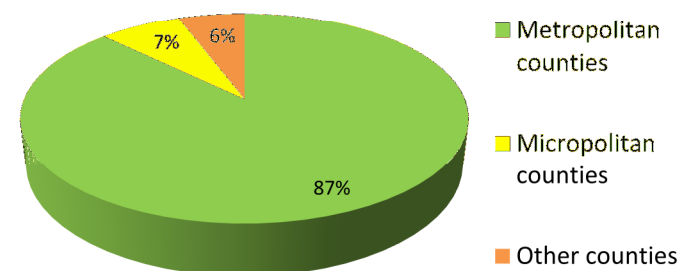
■ Metros of 1,000,000 to 4,999,999

■ Metros under 250,000

■ Outside Metropolitan and Micropolitan Areas

*The United States government defines both metropolitan and micropolitan areas for statistical purposes. Broadly, a metropolitan area is composed of counties associated with an urban core of at least 50,000 people. At the time of the 2010 census, metropolitan areas ranged in size from Carson City's 55,274 to New York City's 18,897,109. Micropolitan areas are composed of counties associated with smaller urban cores still having at least 10,000 people. Many counties are not associated with either metropolitan or micropolitan areas.*

## Location of Member Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops Congregations by Community Type

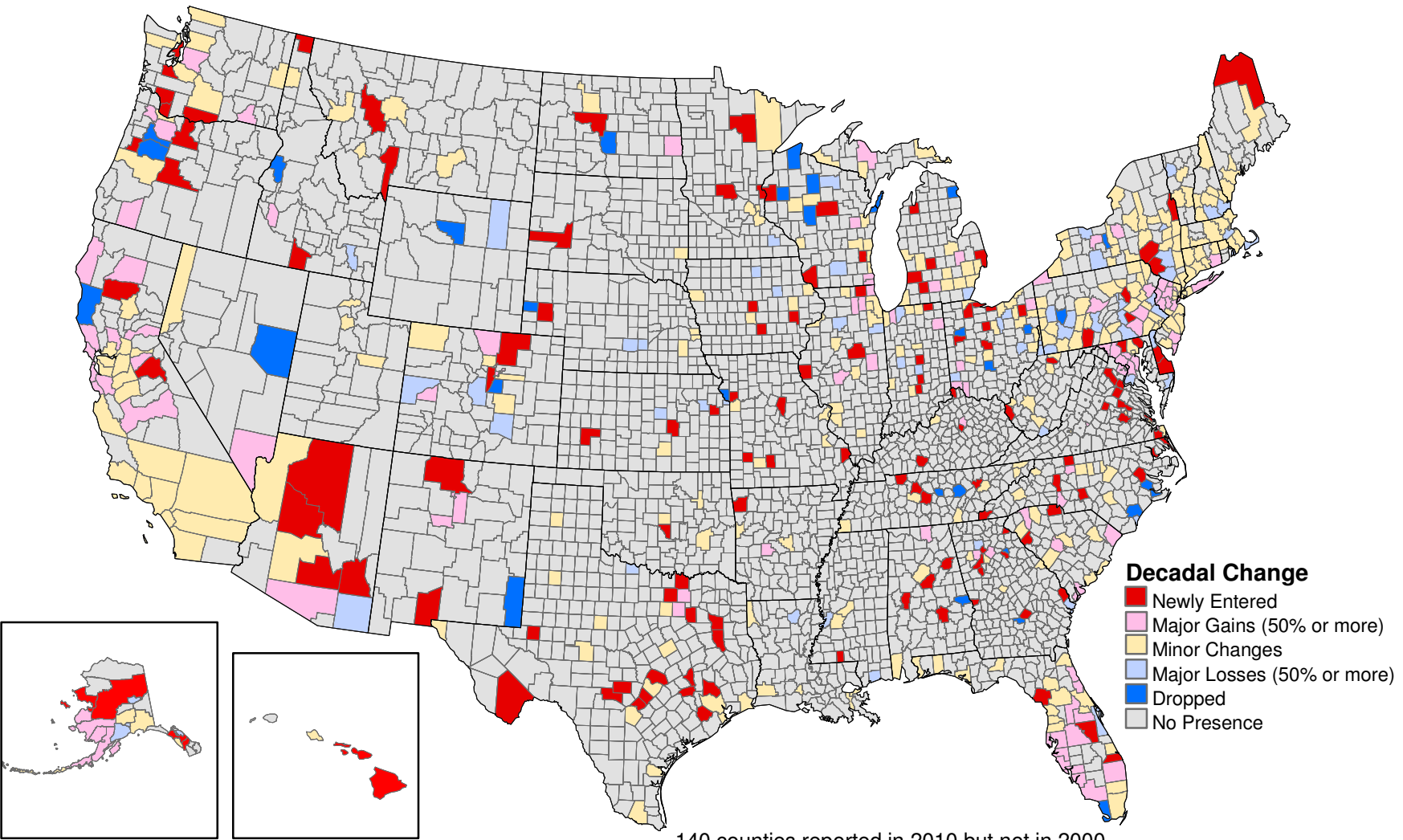


■ Metropolitan counties

■ Micropolitan counties

■ Other counties

Map 5. Change in Presence: 2000 to 2010. Churches of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops



140 counties reported in 2010 but not in 2000.  
32 counties reported in 2000 but not in 2010.