



By Alexei Krindatch (akrindatch@aol.com), Coordinator

National Census of Orthodox Christian Churches / 2020 US Religion Census

Holy Communion during the Pandemic in American Orthodox Parishes

“May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forgive you! What kind of questions are these? Heaven help us! These changes were caused by bishops and clergy who care more about what people think than what God thinks! I would never change the manner of Holy Communion. For it has always been done from the beginning.”

“I really don't care anymore one way or the other. The seed of rationalistic doubt has been planted. Whatever opinion or understanding I previously had about the chalice not transmitting disease has been broken. I'm just going on autopilot.”

“Receiving Holy Communion is a most sacred experience that is in no way conditioned by the number of spoons. We are made one by the One Body of Christ, regardless of how many spoons and chalices are used. We should not place stumbling blocks in the experience of our faithful, and we should also protect them by not exposing them to unnecessary (and possibly lethal) danger.”

(Written comments from study participants about changes in administering the Holy Communion: parish priests in the Romanian Archdiocese, the Orthodox Church in America, and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.)

Contents:

Executive Summary	p. 2
Introduction: About this Study	p. 4
I. Characteristics of the Parishes and Clergy Participating in this Study	p. 7
II. Not Everyone Is Able to Partake: How Parishes Distribute Holy Communion to Parishioners	
Who Cannot Attend Worship Services	p. 14
III. Changes and Innovations in Administering Holy Communion in Orthodox Parishes	p. 18
IV. How the Pandemic Affected Participation of Parishioners in the Sacrament	
of Holy Communion	p. 25
V. The Desire of (Some) Orthodox Clergy to Change the Manner of Administering	
the Holy Communion in Their Parishes: What and Why Do They Want to Change?	p. 33
VI. Different Methods of Administering Holy Communion: Clergy's Opinions about What Is and	
Is Not Acceptable. Priests' Ideas about Possible New Ways of Administering this Sacrament	p. 37
VII. Personal Thoughts of Parish Clergy about Serving Holy Communion during the Pandemic	p. 46
In Conclusion: Good News, Bad News, and the Vital Next Step	p. 52

Executive Summary

Holy Communion is the pivotal point of the Orthodox Christian worship experience. This Sacrament has been traditionally served with the same spoon and from a common chalice for all faithful present at the Liturgy. The spread of COVID-19 has made many church members apprehensive about continuing to use a common spoon, and a number of parishioners have stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of contagion. Consequently, some American Orthodox jurisdictions, dioceses, and parishes have introduced various temporary changes in administering the Eucharist. This report examines the wide range of questions related to these changes through the eyes of Orthodox parish clergy. Each chapter can be read separately depending on the reader's particular interests. The study was initiated by the Orthodox Theological Society in America (www.otsamerica.org).

Data were gathered July 21-31, 2020, via an online survey of 609 parish priests representing all Orthodox jurisdictions and from all parts of the country. The following major subjects are discussed in the report:

- ❖ The impact of the pandemic on participation of parishioners in the Sacrament of Holy Communion
- ❖ New ways of administering the Holy Communion in various American Orthodox jurisdictions
- ❖ How parishes distribute Holy Communion to parishioners who cannot attend worship services
- ❖ Clergy's opinions about different methods of offering the Holy Communion
- ❖ Personal ideas of the priests about possible new ways of administering this Sacrament

Several open-ended questions allowed us to learn about unique experiences of local parish communities, as well as personal opinions of the clergy about serving Holy Communion during the pandemic. This report includes both an analysis of answers to these open-ended questions and numerous direct quotations.

A few examples of key results are given below:

- About half (47%) of all US Orthodox parishes administer the Holy Communion exactly the same way as they did prior to the pandemic. But the percentage of such parishes varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (GOA, 61% of parishes) and, especially, of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russian (ROCOR, 70%) adhere most strongly to serving Holy Communion in a traditional manner. On the contrary, in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), only one-quarter (25%) of parishes have retained the traditional way of administering the Eucharist.

- The practice of having multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) is presently being used by 12% of all American Orthodox clergy and is most common in the OCA (25% of clergy).
- A number of parishes simultaneously offer multiple options (sometimes, by using two chalices) so that parishioners can choose how to commune, depending on their preferences and personal circumstances.
- Over one-third (36%) of the clergy reported that they “have found ways to offer Holy Communion to all or most parishioners: even outside of Liturgy and/or the parish.” These clergy were asked to describe how they distribute Holy Communion to parishioners who are not present at worship services. The report offers an analysis of their responses.
- The manner of administering Holy Communion in a parish is related to the likelihood that its parishioners will refrain from receiving this Sacrament. More than half of the clergy who use either the traditional approach to offering Holy Communion (one spoon and with lips closing on the spoon) or the “one spoon – tilt head back – don’t close the lips” method have reported that some members have stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission (53% and 68%, respectively). In comparison, only 41% of the priests who sanitize spoons between communicants and 39% of the priests who use multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) have noted that parishioners are abstaining from Holy Communion.
- Majority (55%) of the clergy believe that “participation in the Holy Communion is critical, but not the manner of its distribution,” while one-third (33%) of the priests disagree with this view (the remaining 12% have no clear opinion about this matter). However, this overall national picture is much more nuanced when looking separately at various jurisdictions. In the GOA and OCA, the clergy who believe that “participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution” hugely outnumber those who disagree with such approach. But this is not the case in ROCOR, where percentages of the supporters and opponents of this statement are comparable, or the Antiochian Archdiocese, where more clergy oppose this statement than agree with it.
- The use of multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) is viewed as acceptable by 40% of US Orthodox clergy. Among the clergy of the four individual jurisdictions, an absolute majority of OCA priests (56%) are willing to accept this method as compared to 36% of Antiochian, 32% of GOA, and 22% of ROCOR clergy. Overall, clergy in the Orthodox Church in America are more willing to accept various new methods of administering the Holy Communion than the clergy of other jurisdictions.
- Clergy were asked: “Would you suggest any other possible method of administering the Holy Communion?” This report offers an overview of the most interesting suggestions offered by the respondents.

Introduction: About this Study

Certain events – like September 11th – leave indelible imprints on society. Even if the problems caused by them are resolved, life is never the same afterwards. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be such an experience, with many lasting consequences for all American religious congregations. Yet the outcomes of the changes brought by the pandemic will differ from one faith community to another depending on both the nature of a particular religious tradition and the unique context of each local congregation.

The more physical and embodied the worship tradition, the more it will struggle with the “hands off, socially distanced” realities and requirements. Compared to many other Christian groups, Orthodox Christianity is a prime example of such religious tradition as it emphasizes worshipping together and with many elements of close physical interaction (e.g., kissing the Cross, icons, and the priest’s hand). Most importantly, the pivotal point of the Orthodox Liturgy and the central element of Orthodox Christians’ worship experience is the Sacrament of Holy Communion, which has been traditionally served with the same spoon and from a common chalice for all faithful present in the church. Predictably, as American Orthodox parishes began to resume in-person services, the fear of transmitting disease made physical elements of worship problematic and posed the difficult question of how, if at all, they would be adapted to the new circumstances. The Sacrament of Holy Communion was, of course, no exception.

Without questioning the teachings of the Church about the sacred character of the Holy Gifts and the Eucharist being a divine remedy, many church members are nonetheless apprehensive about continuing to use a common spoon for Communion. Further, as we will see later in this report, a significant number of parishioners stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of contagion. Consequently, some American Orthodox jurisdictions, dioceses, and parishes instituted (or, at least, allowed) certain changes in administering Holy Communion, some refrained from making any changes, and some are still struggling to decide.

Undeniably, the idea of possible change in the traditional manner of administering Holy Communion has caused great anxiety among both clergy and laity, resulting in heated discussions and increased tension at all levels of Church life.

It should be emphasized that this study does not attempt to address any theological questions about the Sacrament of Holy Communion itself or in the current context of the pandemic. There are many reputable Orthodox scholars who are much more capable of doing this or have done so already.¹ Similarly, this study by no means attempts to either advocate or criticize the different ways of serving Holy Communion that are presently being used in various parishes.

Our goal is simple yet important: to learn how (and why) different parishes responded to the crisis by making or refraining from adaptations in administering the Holy Communion, share these findings with our hierarchs, clergy, and laity, and help both local parishes and our church leadership to make informed decisions.

This study was initiated by the Orthodox Theological Society in America (www.otsamerica.org), which consists of scholars representing all Orthodox jurisdictions. The following report is based on an online survey of Orthodox parish priests representing all American Orthodox jurisdictions. Data were gathered July 20-31, 2020, with 609 clergy responding to the survey. Four jurisdictions had substantial enough numbers of respondents to allow for analysis and presentation of findings not only for the entire group of study participants, but also individually for:

- Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (AOCA), 63 clergy participating
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA), 189 clergy participating
- Orthodox Church in America (OCA), 183 clergy participating
- Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), 70 clergy participating

Three comments should be made before turning to the report itself. First, one should keep in mind that various American Orthodox jurisdictions or individual dioceses have taken different approaches to guiding their clergy on how Holy Communion should be administered in time of this crisis. Some issued more explicit directions which have to be followed by all their respective priests (e.g. GOA, Antiochian Archdiocese), while others allowed for more flexibility to decide on parish-by-parish basis and by taking into account local circumstances and unique context of each parish community (e.g. OCA, ROCOR, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA). These differences in degree of local parish discretion should be considered when looking at the results for any individual jurisdiction.

¹ For example, the article, “A Note on the Common Communion Spoon” by Rev. Fr. Dr. Alkiviadis C. Calivas, Professor Emeritus of Liturgics and Sacraments at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology: <https://www.goarch.org/-/a-note-on-the-common-communion-spoon--2020>

Second, the organization of this report allows readers select areas of greatest interest to them, rather than have to read sequentially. Each chapter can be seen as a short freestanding report, covering a distinct subject with a self-explanatory title. A few key findings are listed at the beginning of each chapter to give readers a good idea of what will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Finally, a significant number of survey questions were open-ended, allowing clergy to freely share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Some truly fascinating insights came from these write-in answers. Almost all sections contain some information from open-ended questions.

We invite everyone to offer feedback and tell us which specific issues related to the pandemic's impact on Church life should be further examined. To do so, please send your comments and suggestions to orthodoxdata@usreligioncensus.org or use the contact form on the website, www.orthodoxreality.org.

I. Characteristics of the Parishes and Clergy Participating in this Study

KEY FINDINGS:

- Two demographics of membership clearly distinguish the parishes of the four jurisdictions for which this study reports findings separately (Antiochian Archdiocese, GOA, OCA, ROCOR). These characteristics are: percentage of senior citizens (65+) and percentage of converts. A “typical” (median) GOA parish has 35% of its members older than 65, while at the opposite end, a typical Antiochian or ROCOR parish has only 20% senior citizens among its members. Antiochian parishes are most “convert-populated” with 60% convert members in a typical parish, in comparison with only 22% in a typical GOA parish.
- One-fifth of OCA (21%) and GOA (20%) parishes are communities in which more than 50% of members are aged 65 or older. Differently, in only 6% of Antiochian and 11% of ROCOR parishes, senior citizens constitute the majority of parishioners.
- Only 18% of GOA priests are converts to Orthodox Church, as compared to 71% in the Antiochian parishes. With a median age of 57 years, a “typical” GOA or OCA priest is somewhat younger than a typical clergyman in ROCOR or Antiochian parishes (median age 61 and 63, respectively).
- There is impressive variation among the parishes of these jurisdictions in how much emphasis they give to the following four religious practices: “frequent Holy Communion,” “fasting,” “in depth study of Scripture and Orthodox Faith by adults and children,” and “regular Church attendance.” The practice of “frequent Holy Communion” is especially important in the Antiochian and OCA parishes. 54% of Antiochian and 53% of OCA priests reported that their parishes place “a lot” of emphasis on this practice, in comparison with 47% of ROCOR and 29% of GOA clergy. In the case of the three other religious practices, the ROCOR stands out, with a much higher percentage of clergy reporting that their parishes emphasize these three practices “a lot.”
- Those parishes that reported emphasizing all four religious practices “a lot” were considered “intentionally Orthodox” parishes for the purposes of this study analysis. One-fifth (20%) of all parishes participating in the study were categorized as “intentionally Orthodox.” At the same time, there were significant variations among the four jurisdictions in how many of their parishes are “intentionally Orthodox:” 14% of GOA, 20% of OCA, 27% of Antiochian, and 32% of ROCOR parishes.

609 Orthodox parish clergy participated in this study. They represented all national Eastern Orthodox Church jurisdictions, and their parishes were located all across the United States. See Fig. 1 and 2.

Fig. 1a Number of Parishes of Various Jurisdictions Participating in the Study

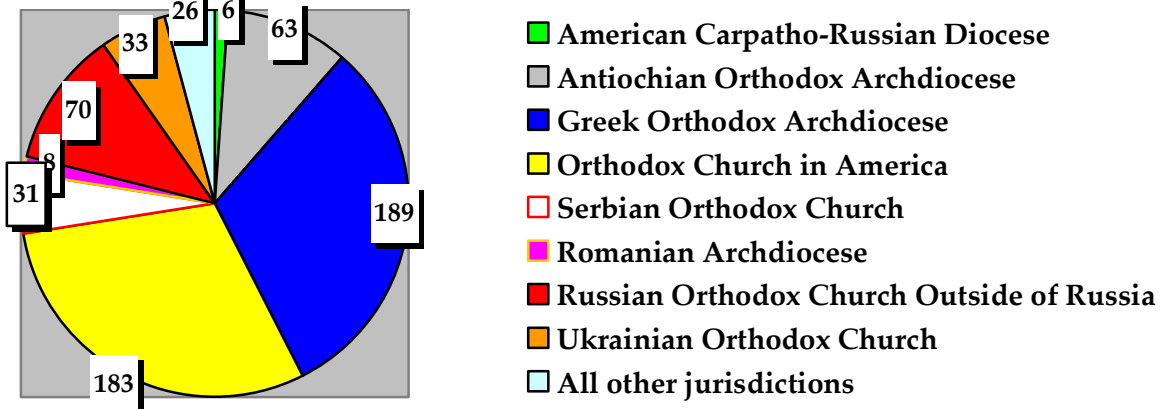


Fig. 1b Percentage (%) of Parishes of Various Jurisdictions Participating in the Study

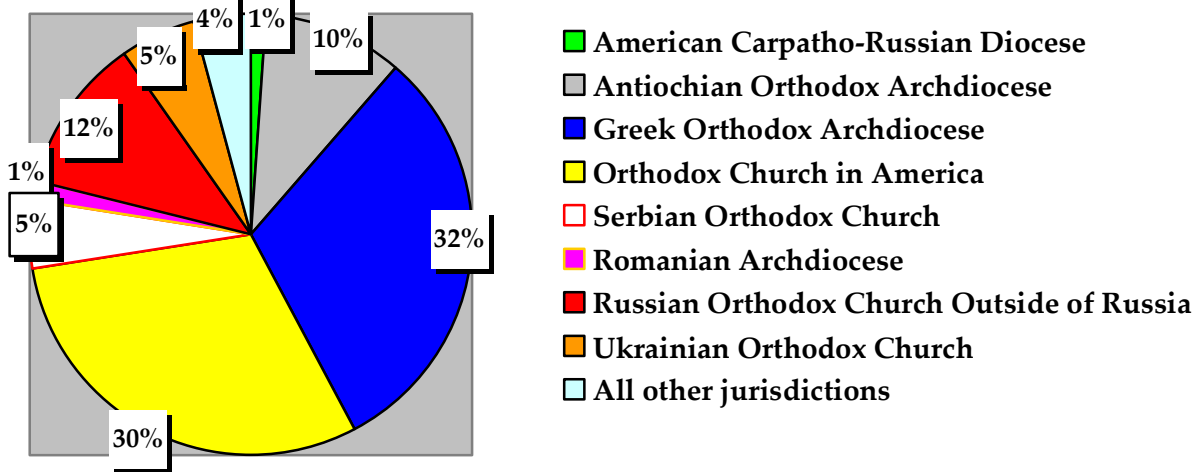


Fig. 2 Geographic Distribution of Parishes Participating in the Study: Percentage of Each State in the Total Number of Parishes. Top Nine States Shown

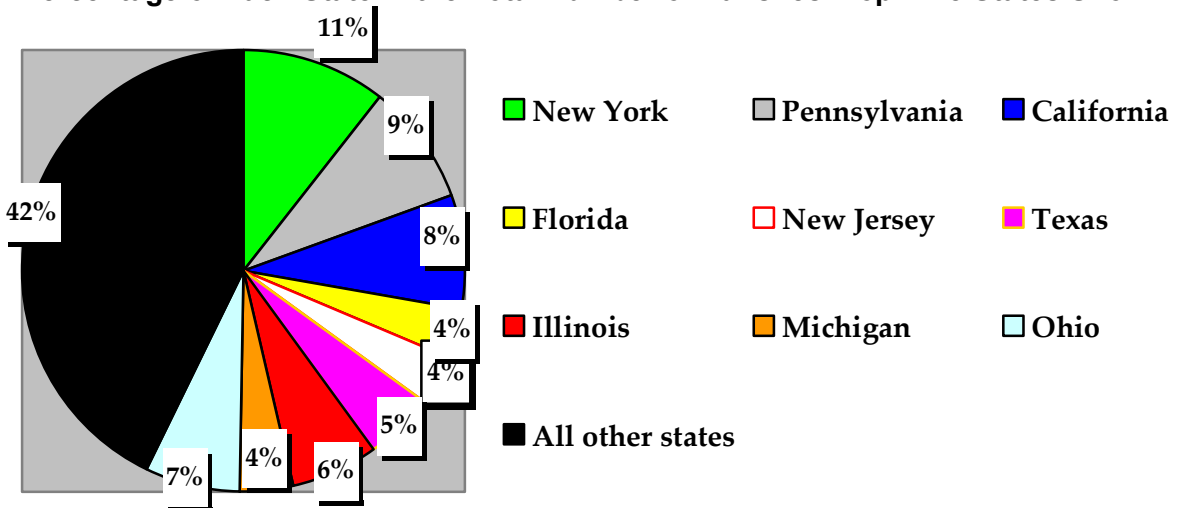


Table 1 shows membership demographics for all parishes combined and for the four individual jurisdictions with greatest representation. The table shows median percentage² of five categories of parishioners:

- Senior citizens (65+)
- Converts to Orthodoxy
- Recent immigrants to US
- Persons with college degrees
- Persons who live below the poverty level

Two demographics of membership clearly distinguish the parishes of the four jurisdictions: Antiochian Archdiocese, GOA, OCA, and ROCOR. These characteristics are: percentage of senior citizens (65+) and percentage of converts. A “typical” (median) GOA parish has 35% of its members being older than 65, while at the opposite end, a typical Antiochian or ROCOR parish has only 20% senior citizens among its members. Antiochian parishes are most “convert-populated” with 60% convert members in a typical parish, in comparison with only 22% in a typical GOA parish.

Table 1 Demographics of Members in Participating Parishes

Median percentage (%) of parishioners who are:	Senior citizens (age 65+)	Converts to Orthodoxy	Recent immigrants to US (within five past years)	People with College degrees	Live below poverty line
All parishes combined	30%	35%	2%	65%	5%
AOCA parishes	20%	60%	2%	65%	5%
GOA parishes	35%	22%	2%	62%	5%
OCA parishes	30%	50%	5%	70%	5%
ROCOR parishes	20%	50%	5%	72%	5%

² “Median” means that it is the midpoint: in half of the parishes in our sample this percentage is higher, while in the other half the percentage is lower.

For each of these two distinguishing characteristics (percentage of senior citizens and percentage of converts to Orthodoxy), we divided all parishes into three categories: low, medium, and high presence of senior citizens or converts. Figures 3a and 3b help to visualize how many parishes fell into each category.

Fig. 3a GOA and OCA Parishes Have More Senior Citizens than Antiochian and ROCOR Churches

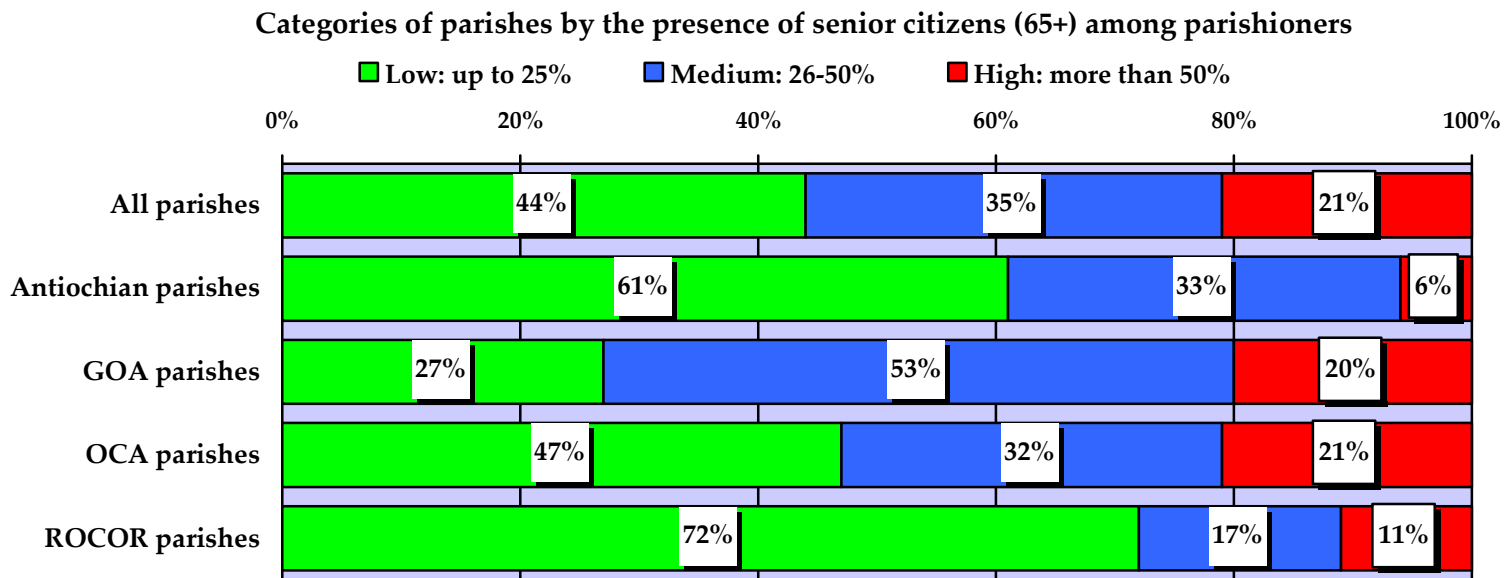
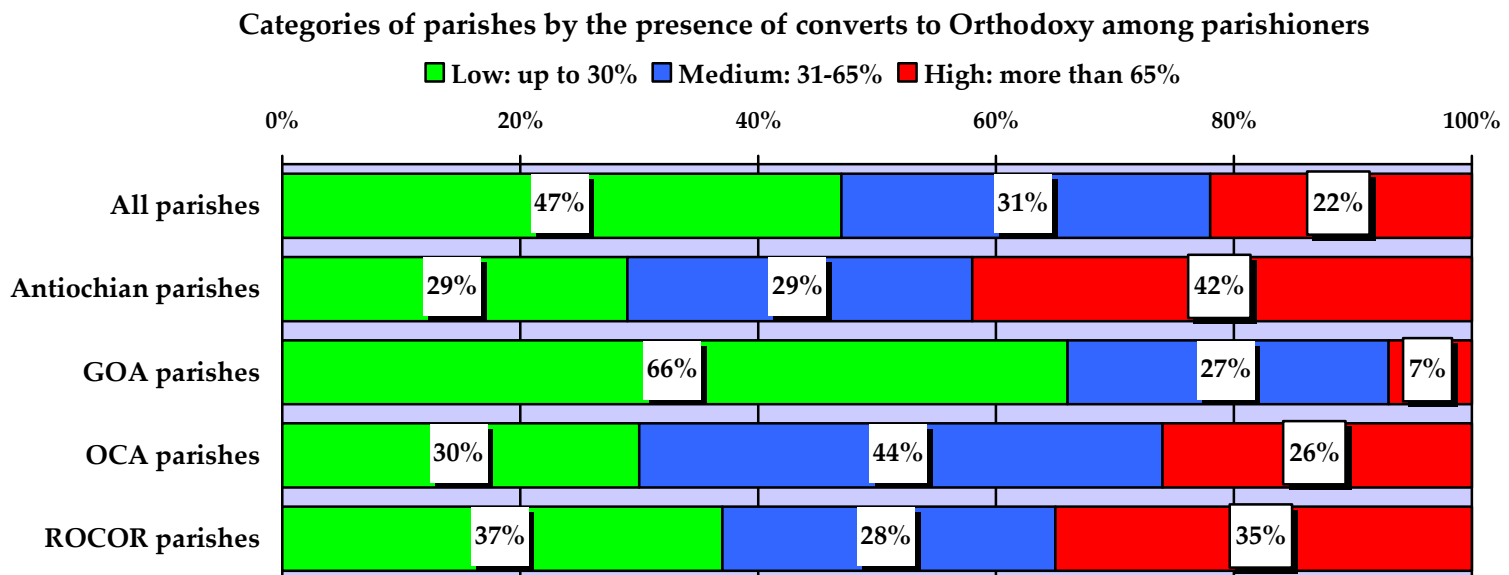


Fig. 3b Antiochian and ROCOR Parishes Are Much More “Convert-Populated” than GOA Churches



One-fifth of OCA (21%) and GOA (20%) parishes are communities in which more than 50% of members are aged 65 or older. In contrast, in only 6% of Antiochian and 11% of ROCOR parishes do you find senior citizens in the majority. Comparing the presence of converts to Orthodoxy among parishioners, 42% of Antiochian parishes have at least two-thirds (more than 65%) of their members who are converts to Orthodoxy in comparison with only 7% of such parishes in the GOA.

Similar to parish demographics, the clergy in various Orthodox jurisdictions also differ in their median age and presence of converts to Orthodoxy. See Table 2. Only 18% of GOA priests are converts, as compared with 71% in the case of Antiochian parishes. With a median age of 57, a typical GOA or OCA priest is somewhat younger than a typical clergyman in Antiochian or ROCOR parishes (median age 63 and 61, respectively).

Table 2 Demographics of Clergy in Participating Parishes

	% of converts to Orthodoxy among clergy	Median age of clergy (years)
Clergy in all parishes combined	43%	58
AOCA clergy	71%	63
GOA clergy	18%	57
OCA clergy	56%	57
ROCOR clergy	64%	61

Later in this report we will examine whether the demography of parishioners or clergy has any influence on approaches of the parishes to administering the Holy Communion during the pandemic.

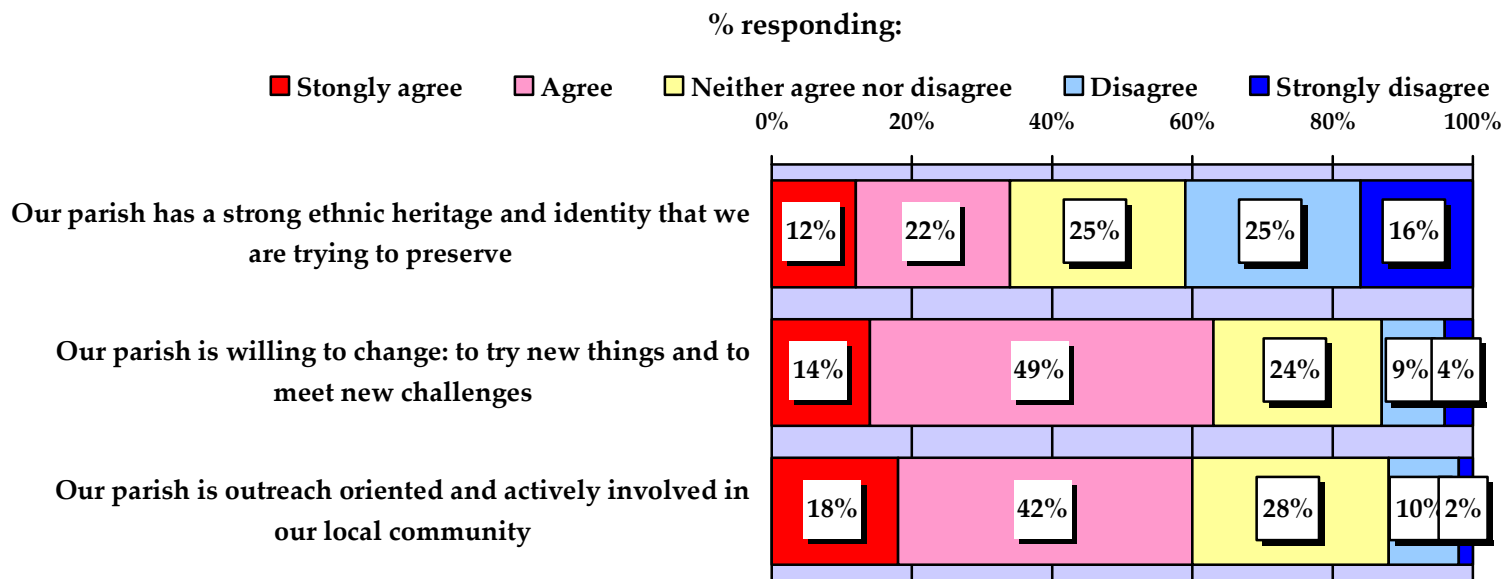
Not only membership demographics may influence the ways in which various churches dealt with the issues brought by the pandemic. Another factor to consider is what could be called “parish identity” – various distinctive features that, in concert, create a unique local Christian community. Indeed, Orthodox parishes organize themselves in very different manners. Some cherish their ethnic identity and make a conscious effort to preserve their ethnic heritage, while others strive to be “pan-Orthodox” and/or “all-American” parishes. Some churches embrace innovation and change, while others emphasize their adherence to established practices and ways of doing things. Some parishes consider outreach to the local community among their top priorities, while others are more internally focused, with few relations with their neighborhoods and towns. Strictness in observance of the various Orthodox Church requirements and practices also varies greatly from parish to parish.

To better understand the unique identities of the parishes involved in the study, the questionnaire asked, “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parish?”

- ❖ Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage and identity that we are trying to preserve
- ❖ Our parish is willing to change: to try new things and to meet new challenges
- ❖ Our parish is outreach-oriented and actively involved in our local community

With regard to each statement, the respondents could reply: "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral/not sure," "disagree," or "strongly disagree." See Fig. 4.

Fig. 4 Parish Identity: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your parish?"



On the following pages, when analyzing survey data, we will also consider whether the parishes which "strongly agreed" with each of the statements (that is "truly ethnic," "truly innovative," "truly outreach oriented" parishes) were in any way significantly different in their responses to the pandemic as compared to all other parishes.

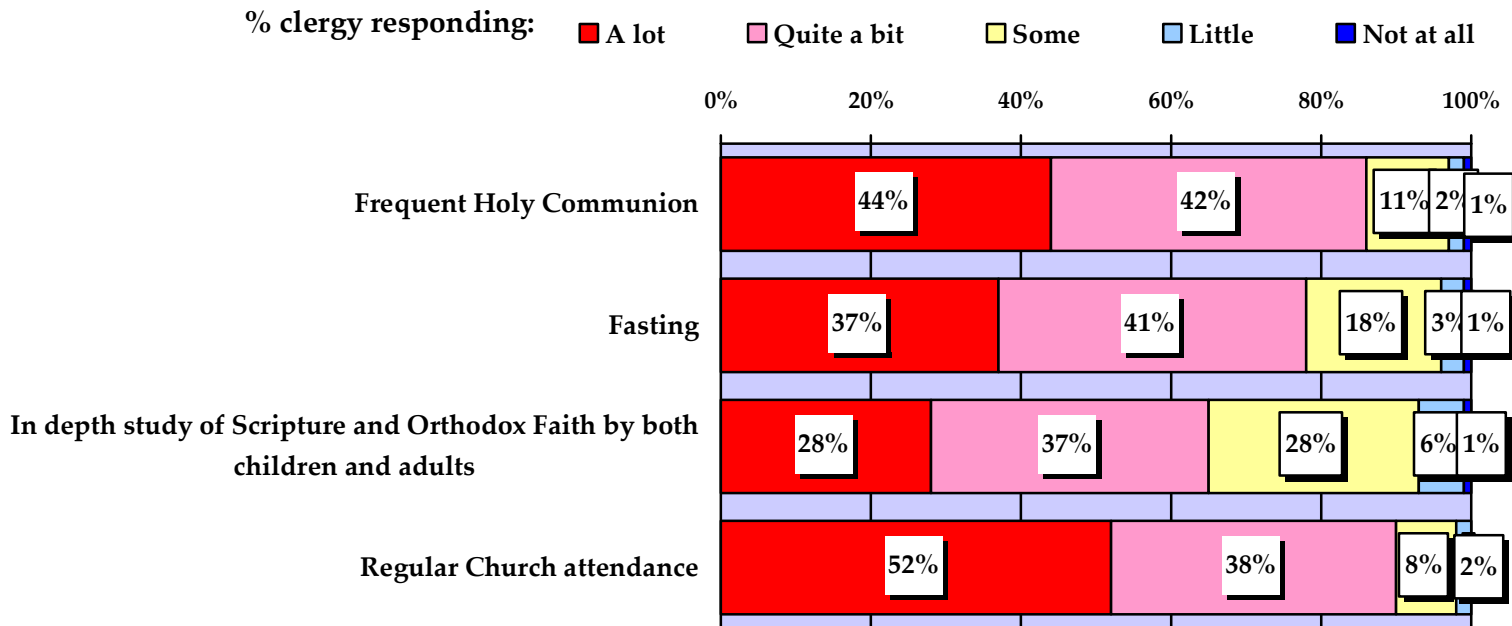
We also wanted to identify those parishes in which various Orthodox Church requirements and practices are more strictly enforced and emphasized and then see whether these more "intentionally Orthodox" parishes differed from other churches in how they are dealing with the new challenges. The questionnaire asked, "How much does your parish emphasize the following personal and family religious practices?"

- ❖ Frequent Holy Communion
- ❖ Fasting
- ❖ In-depth study of Scripture and Orthodox Faith by both children and adults
- ❖ Regular worship attendance

With regard to each practice, the respondents could reply: "a lot," "quite a bit," "some," "little," or "not at all."

See Fig. 5.

Fig. 5 Intentional Orthodoxy: “How much does your parish emphasize the following personal and family religious practices?”



There is impressive variation among the parishes of the four jurisdictions in how much emphasis they give to these four religious practices. Fig. 6 shows the percentage of parishes in each jurisdiction which place “a lot” of emphasis on each religious practice.

Fig. 6 Frequent Holy Communion Is Especially Encouraged in Antiochian and OCA Parishes. All Other Religious Practices Are Especially Strongly Observed in ROCOR Parishes

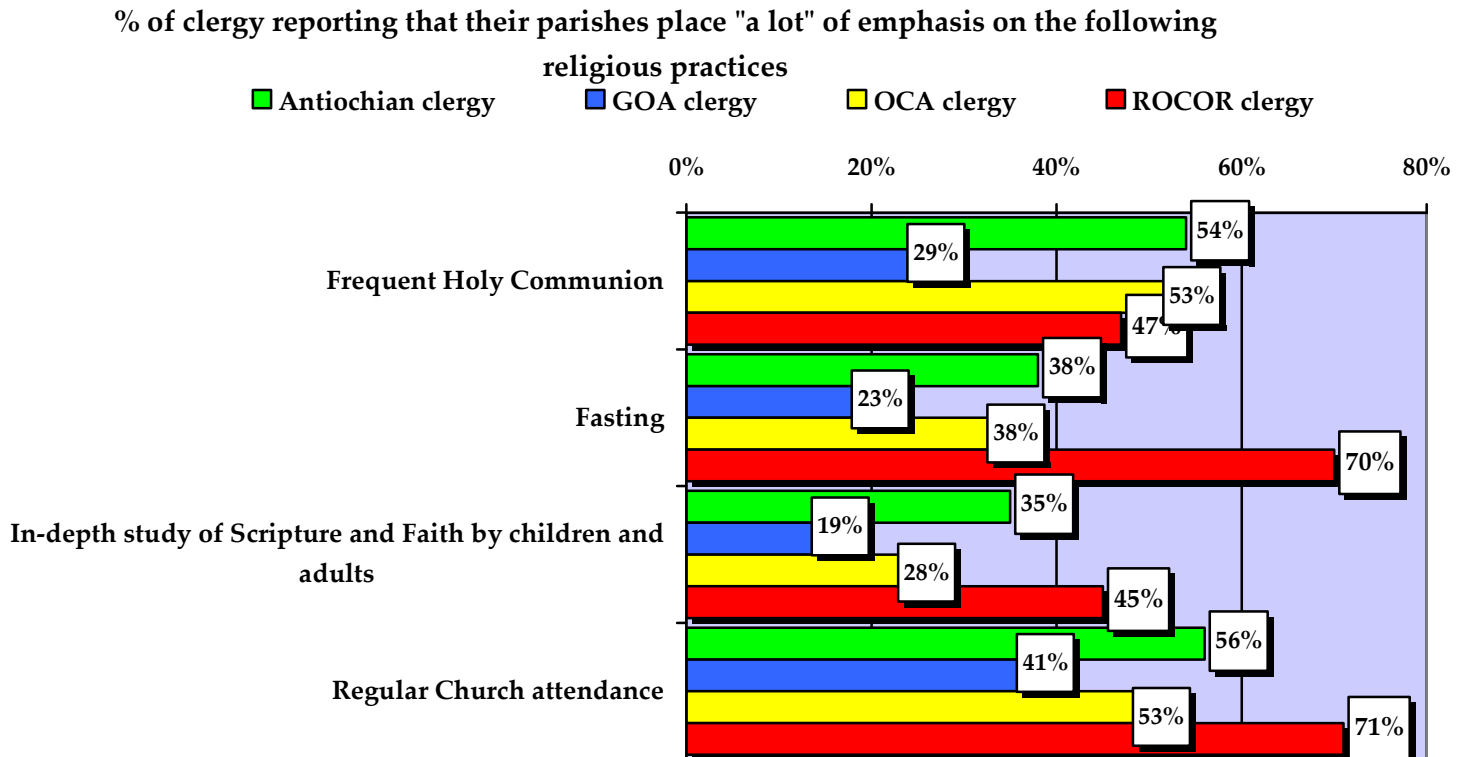


Fig. 6 shows that the practice of “frequent Holy Communion” is especially important in the Antiochian and OCA parishes. 54% Antiochian and 53% OCA priests reported that their parishes place “a lot” of emphasis on this practice in comparison with 47% of ROCOR and 29% GOA clergy.

In the case of the three other religious practices (“fasting,” “in-depth study of Scripture and Faith by children and adults,” and “regular Church attendance”), ROCOR stands out by the percentage of clergy reporting that their parishes emphasize these three practices “a lot.”

Those parishes that reported emphasizing all four religious practices “a lot” were considered “intentionally Orthodox” for the purposes of this study. One-fifth (20%) of all parishes fell into category of “intentionally Orthodox.” At the same time, there were significant variations among the four jurisdictions in how many of their parishes are “intentionally Orthodox:” 14% of GOA, 20% of OCA, 27% of Antiochian, and 32% of ROCOR parishes.

II. Not Everyone Is Able to Partake: How Parishes Distribute Holy Communion to Parishioners Who Cannot Attend Worship Services

KEY FINDINGS:

- By the time of the study, only 23% of parishes have been able to fully resume in-person liturgical services, at which all their regular attendees could participate and actually attend church again. Among the four individually reported jurisdictions, ROCOR has the highest percentage (52%) of such parishes, while GOA has the lowest (10%).
- About one-third (31%) of all parishes could accommodate all regular attendees for in-person worship, but report that a significant number of their members refrain from attendance because of the pandemic. GOA has an especially high percentage (40%) of such parishes.
- Clergy offered comments describing various creative approaches to enable all their regular attendees to attend church despite numerical limits imposed by secular authorities. This chapter shares these approaches.
- Over a third (36%) of the clergy reported that they “have found ways to offer Holy Communion to all or most parishioners: even outside of Liturgy and/or the parish.” These clergy were asked to describe how they distribute Holy Communion to parishioners who are not present at worship services. This chapter offers an analysis and overview of their responses.

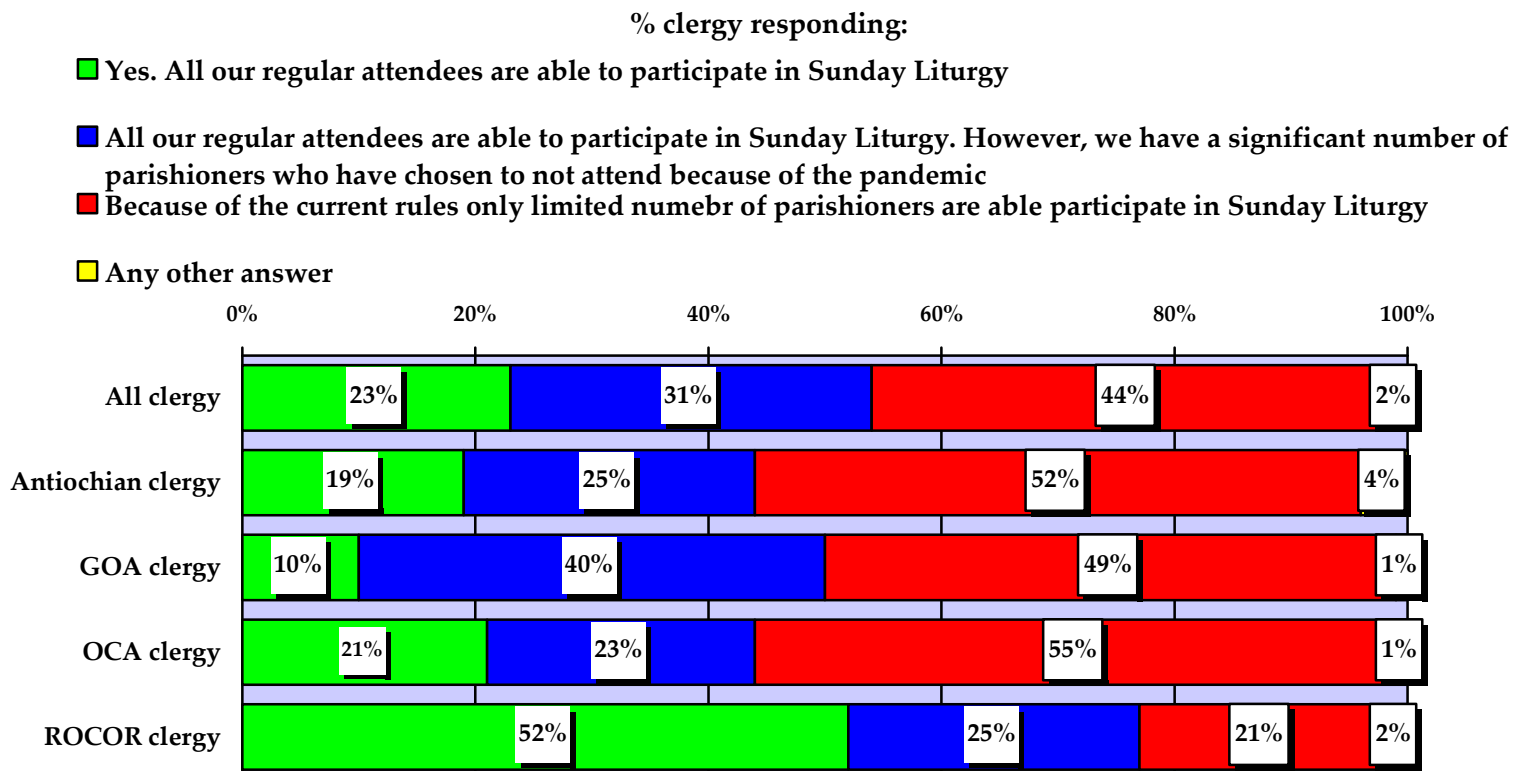
When we gathered the data for this study (July 21-30, 2020), not all parishes had re-opened. But even those which had resumed in-person services were, in most cases, subject to limitations as to how many people could be physically present in the church. Effectively, this also limited the number of parishioners who could receive Holy Communion by attending Sunday Liturgy, as they normally would.

We asked clergy: “Depending on state/county, Orthodox jurisdiction, or diocese, parishes have now different rules as to how many people may attend worship services. In your parish would you say that basically all who desire are able to attend Sunday Liturgy?” The respondents were given four options:

- a. Yes, all our regular attendees are able to participate in Sunday Liturgy
- b. All our regular attendees are able to participate in Sunday Liturgy. However, we have a significant number of parishioners who have chosen to not attend because of the pandemic
- c. No, because of the current rules (either church or secular) only limited number of parishioners are able to participate in Sunday Liturgy.
- d. Any other answer. Please explain.

Fig. 7 shows answers to this question for all parishes combined and for the four individual jurisdictions.

Fig. 7 “In your parish would you say that basically all who desire are able to attend Sunday Liturgy?”



Less than one-quarter of the parishes (23%) have been able to fully resume their in-person liturgical services, at which all their regular attendees are able to participate and actually attend church. Among the four jurisdictions, the best situation is in ROCOR (52% parishes are “back to normal”), while the most difficult is in GOA (only 10%).

About one-third (31%) of the parishes could accommodate all regular attendees for in-person worship, but a significant number of their members refrain from attendance because of the pandemic. Among the four jurisdictions, GOA has an especially high percentage (40%) of such parishes. The demographics of the GOA (highest percentage of members aged 65+ as shown in chapter I) is a likely explanation of this result.

In the case of parishes that had fully resumed their weekend liturgical services, a number of clergy provided comments about the creative ways they found to achieve this goal. The two most frequently cited approaches were either to celebrate the Liturgy outside the church (thus, less stringent or no limits on attendees) or having two Liturgies during weekend (two on Sunday or Saturday and Sunday) so that everyone could come to one of them. Clergy who moved their services outside also noted that many parishioners felt more comfortable and safer attending outdoors. Priests mentioned a number of other possibilities to expand the worship space and accommodate more people, while complying with government requirements, for example:

- Everyone who is comfortable being there is able to participate. Most people are in church, some are in the fellowship hall, following the Divine Liturgy over a big screen TV and speakers, and you can also park in front of the church and listen to Liturgy in a car over a big speaker.
- In order to allow a greater number of communicants to attend on Sunday, we are broadcasting the service into our parish hall for "overflow," and allow those in that space to come to Holy Communion when it is time.

Notably, several priests who selected the answer about “significant number of parishioners who have chosen to not attend,” explained that these decisions were not always related to fear of disease transmission. For example:

- 20% are not coming because they refuse to wear a mask.
- We have a significant number of parishioners who have chosen to not attend because of pandemic related limitations such as no coffee hour.

With the exception of those clergy who indicated that all their regular attendees can come to the church for weekend services and actually did so, respondents were asked: “Who is able to receive Holy Communion in your parish?” They were given two choices to respond:

- a. Only people who are physically present in the church at the Divine Liturgy
- b. We have found ways to offer Holy Communion to all or most of our parishioners (even outside of Liturgy and/or the parish)

36% of priests chose the second answer. Among clergy of the four individual jurisdictions, ROCOR and Antiochian clergy had the highest percentage of respondents selecting this answer: 48% and 50%, respectively. All respondents who said they had found ways to distribute Holy Communion to parishioners who could not attend Liturgy were asked to describe their approaches.

Five types of answers emerged from clergy’ responses. The most frequent was about offering Holy Communion by visiting parishioners, sometimes inside their homes and sometimes outdoors.

- I visit families through out the week hearing Confessions and offering Communion in a clinical fashion like a hospital visit.
- I have distributed the Pre-sanctified Gifts for the Holy Communion at home to the willing parishioners with my detailed instruction of fasting rules and prayers before the Communion.

The second group of answers was about communing parishioners in the church by individual appointment on a weekday:

- All who wish to receive Communion individually can do so at any time in the Church by prior arrangement. The Holy Gifts prepared for them. Also, those who are ill can take Communion where they are.
- Invite them to church on weekdays when no other parishioners are present, or late Sunday afternoon when everyone else has gone home. I will hear their Confessions, where appropriate, and then commune them.

The third type of responses was about allowing individual parishioners or families to come to the church for Holy Communion immediately after Divine Liturgy when everyone else has already left:

- Any of the faithful who cannot physically attend the Sunday Divine Liturgy are blessed to come to church doors after the Liturgy is completed and receive the Holy Gifts there. They are encouraged to share in the Liturgy prior to this by watching the live stream.

A number of clergy explained that they have established special Liturgies for people in “at risk” categories:

- We provide a Divine Liturgy on Thursday for the “at risk” members.
- We offer Saturday Liturgies specifically for the elderly and the vulnerable who feel more comfortable in smaller gatherings and with others who (similarly to them) have minimal exposure.

Finally some clergy indicated that they offer Holy Communion not only after Liturgy, but also other services:

- I distribute Holy Communion at the end of any service: vespers, matins, Akathist, compline, etc., from the Reserved Mystery.

III. Changes and Innovations in Administering Holy Communion in American Orthodox Parishes

KEY FINDINGS:

- About half (47%) of all US Orthodox parishes administer the Holy Communion exactly the same way as they did prior to the pandemic. But the percentage of such parishes varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction with GOA (61%) and, especially, ROCOR (70%) parishes adhering most strongly to serving Holy Communion in a traditional manner. On the contrary, in the OCA, only one-quarter (25%) of parishes have retained the traditional way of administering the Eucharist.
- The practice of asking communicants to tilt their heads back so that the priest can drop the sacred elements into the mouth without physical contact of communicant with the spoon has been adopted by one fifth (21%) of the parishes. This practice is especially widespread in the Antiochian Archdiocese where 37% of the clergy use this method.
- The approach of using either one or several (in rotation) spoons which are sanitized after each communicant is being implemented in 13% of parishes, most commonly in the OCA: 29% of OCA parishes follow this practice.

- The practice of having multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) is presently being used by 12% of the clergy and – like sanitizing spoons between communicants - is most common in the OCA: 25% of OCA parishes follow this practice.
- Some “other approach” to offering Holy Communion was reported by 6% of the clergy. They were asked to explain how exactly they administer the Sacrament. This chapter shares information provided by these priests.
- A number of parishes offer – simultaneously - several ways to commune (sometimes, by using two chalices) so that parishioners can choose, depending on their preferences and personal circumstances.
- Unlike the diversity in ways of offering Holy Communion to parishioners, the clergy of all jurisdictions are much more uniform in how they themselves commune. The vast majority (about 90%) use the “traditional manner for receiving both Holy Bread and precious Blood.”

This chapter discusses *actual changes* in how the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is being administered US Orthodox parishes now versus times prior to the pandemic. For those who skipped reading the introduction to this report, two preliminary comments should be made.

First, it should be emphasized that this study does not attempt to address any theological questions about the Sacrament of Holy Communion itself or in the current context of the pandemic. Similarly, this study by no means attempts to either advocate or criticize the different ways of serving Holy Communion that are presently being used in various parishes.

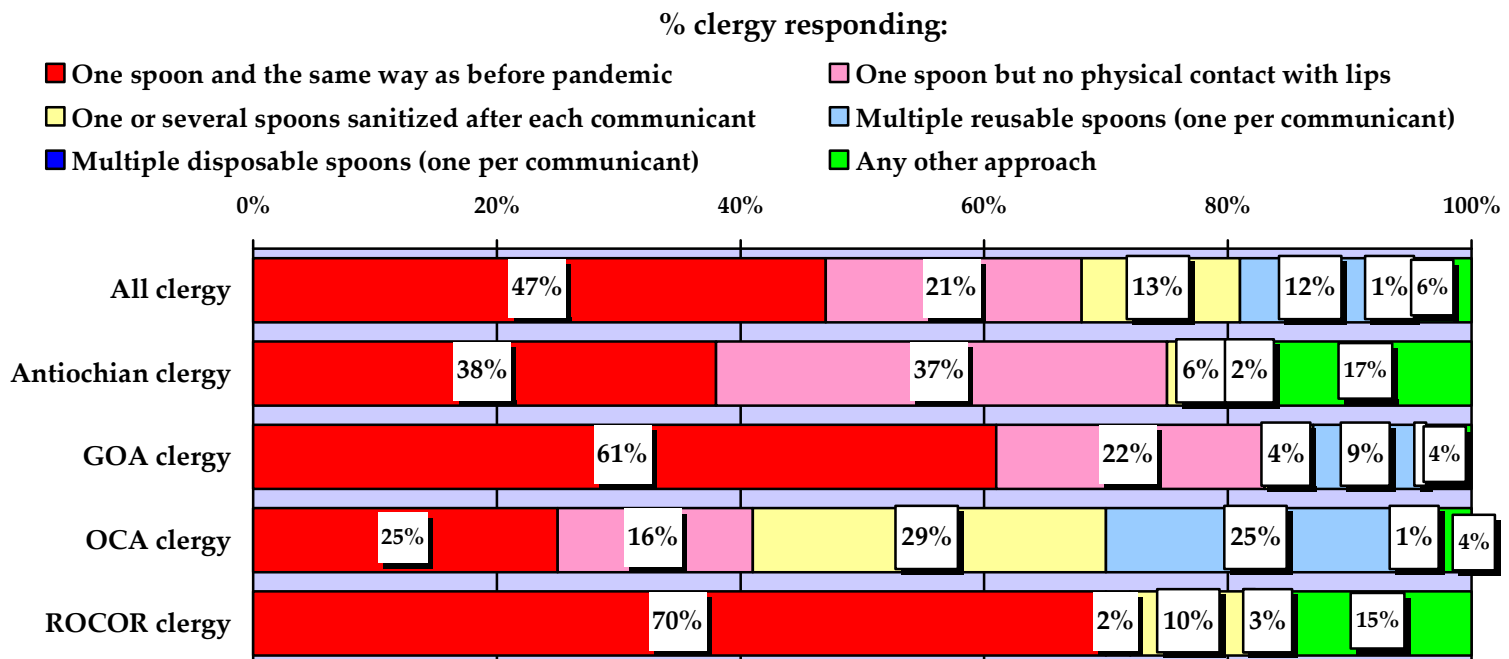
Second, one should keep in mind that various American Orthodox jurisdictions or individual dioceses have taken different approaches to guiding their clergy on how Holy Communion should be administered in time of this crisis. Some issued more explicit directions which have to be followed by all their respective priests (e.g. GOA, Antiochian Archdiocese), while others allowed for more flexibility to decide on parish-by-parish basis and by taking into account local circumstances and unique context of each parish community (e.g. OCA, ROCOR, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA). These differences in degree of local parish discretion should be considered when looking at the results for any individual jurisdiction.

The survey asked clergy: “Do you administer Holy Communion in a traditional way, with one spoon, or in some other manner?” Respondents were given seven options to respond:

1. Yes, we administer Holy Communion with one spoon and in the same manner we did prior to the pandemic
2. We administer Holy Communion with one spoon, but I ask a communicant to tilt his/her head back and open mouth wide so that I may drop the sacred elements into the mouth without physical contact with the spoon. I also specifically ask communicants to not close their lips on the spoon.
3. We administer Holy Communion with one spoon, but it is sanitized (with alcohol, boiling water, vinegar) between communicants
4. We use a small amount (3-4) of reusable spoons, which are sanitized between communicants and used “in rotation” during administration of Holy Communion
5. We use reusable spoons, one per communicant, which are collected and sterilized after each Liturgy
6. We use disposable spoons which are collected and discarded (buried or burned) after each Liturgy
7. Any other approach to the distribution of Holy Communion. Please describe.

Fig. 8 shows the answers to this question by all clergy and by the priests from the four individual jurisdictions. For simplification of presentation, we combined responses “3” and “4” into one category.

Fig. 8 “Do you administer Holy Communion in a traditional way, with one spoon, or in some other manner?”



Several important observations can be made from Fig. 8.

1. About half (47%) US Orthodox parishes did not make any changes and administer the Holy Communion the same way as they did prior to the pandemic. But the percentage of such parishes varies greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The ROCOR (70%) and GOA (61%) clergy are adhering most strongly to serving Holy Communion in a traditional manner. On the contrary, in the OCA, only one-quarter (25%) of priests maintained the traditional way of administering the Eucharist.
2. The practice of asking communicants to tilt their heads back so that the priest can drop the sacred elements into the mouth without physical contact of the lips with the spoon has been adopted by one fifth (21%) of the parishes. This practice is especially widespread in the Antiochian Archdiocese where 37% of the clergy use this method.
3. The idea of using either one or several (in rotation) spoons which are sanitized after each communicant is being implemented in 13% of the parishes, and it is most common in the OCA (29%).
4. The practice of having multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) – which caused many discussions and disagreements – is presently being used by 12% of the clergy and – similar to the practice of sanitizing spoons between communicants - is most common in the OCA (25% of OCA parishes).
5. In all jurisdictions, very few parishes implemented the practice of using multiple disposable spoons (one per communicant) that are burned after being used.
6. The four jurisdictions vary greatly from each other in the degree of “plurality” of approaches to serving Holy Communion in their parishes. The OCA is clearly most internally diverse in variety of methods used by its clergy.

6% of the clergy indicated that they use some “other approach” to offering Holy Communion in their parishes. These clergy were asked to explain how exactly they administer this Sacrament. Here is the summary of responses.

First, in the case of the Antiochian Archdiocese and ROCOR, a number of respondents were priests of Western Rite Orthodox parishes. Their approach to administering Holy Communion had been different from other parishes even prior to the pandemic. Western Rite parishes traditionally use the method called “intinction”: dipping pieces of consecrated bread in the consecrated wine and placing them on the tongues of the communicants. Most Western Rite parishes continued to use “intinction” during the pandemic, but some further modified this method. For example, a ROCOR Western Rite priest wrote: “At Liturgy, Holy Communion is a portion of the Holy Lamb tintured with Holy Blood. It is offered to the faithful on the Paten (special plate) with pieces being appropriately spaced. The Paten is placed on a sacramental table covered with a communion cloth. Each faithful picks up a portion with their left hand, place in their right hand, and consumes. Each wipes hand and mouth with small rectangle of a paper towel and places paper in a glass bowl for burning later. They get a piece of antidoron. Parent assists child. We have been able to commune others from other jurisdictions and from other cities this way.”

Second, a number of Eastern Rite parishes implemented new methods of offering Holy Communion which are – essentially – similar to “intinction.” Here are a few examples. An OCA priest wrote: “The Lamb is cut into portions, the blood is added to each, and they are placed in individual paper (1 oz.) cups. Distributed to each communicant. They consume and move to receive antidoran bread and wine in individual cups. The paper cups are burned afterwards.” In a ROCOR parish: “We prepare Reserved Gifts as large cubes which can be self-administered while maintaining social distancing.”

Third, a number of parishes now offer – simultaneously – several ways to commune (sometimes, by using two chalices) so that parishioners can choose depending on their preferences and personal circumstances. Here are several quotes exemplifying such parishes:

- I do both the "Slavic" and "Greek" style. But I ask that those who feel strongly about putting their lips around the spoon to approach last.
- We use multiple spoons for one chalice and a single Communion spoon for another chalice.
- We distribute the Holy Communion in a traditional way, but ask the communicants beforehand if anyone is afraid of getting infected by taking it from one common spoon. If there is someone feeling that way we give them the Holy Communion with a separate spoon after the end of the liturgy.
- I first distribute Holy Communion to parishioners who tilt heads back and I deposit in the mouth. Then I ask those who want to receive Holy Communion in the traditional way to approach the Chalice.

- The Eucharist is placed on a napkin and after consuming the napkins are placed in a plastic bag and then burned by the priest. The people also have the option to receive Holy Communion by tilting their heads back and placing the elements into their mouths, but most use the napkin method. The plan was approved at the Consistory.

Fourth, some parishes use a single spoon and ask parishioners to not close their lips on the spoon until – inadvertently – a physical contact occurs. Then this spoon is replaced with another. Here are examples.

- We ask they tilt their heads back and not close their lips on the spoon. We use the same spoon until it touches someone's mouth, then we have another one ready and the former is sanitized.
- For situations when inadvertently I may happen to touch the lip or teeth of the communicant by the spoon, I have a few extra spoons and I immediately replace the spoon. At the end of the Liturgy I sanitize the spoons to have them ready for the next service. In my emergency kit, I also carry sanitizing wet napkins to make sure the communion spoon gets disinfected.

Fifth, a significant number of parishes indicated – regardless of their approaches to administering the Holy Communion – that they now use disposable paper napkins (individual for each parishioner) instead of Communion cloths:

- We serve as always. The only difference is that we use napkins instead of the Communion cloth. Each parishioner holds their own napkin and we dispose of them weekly by burning.

Finally, in a handful of parishes, the clergy approach communicants individually instead of parishioners “lining up” to receive the Holy Communion:

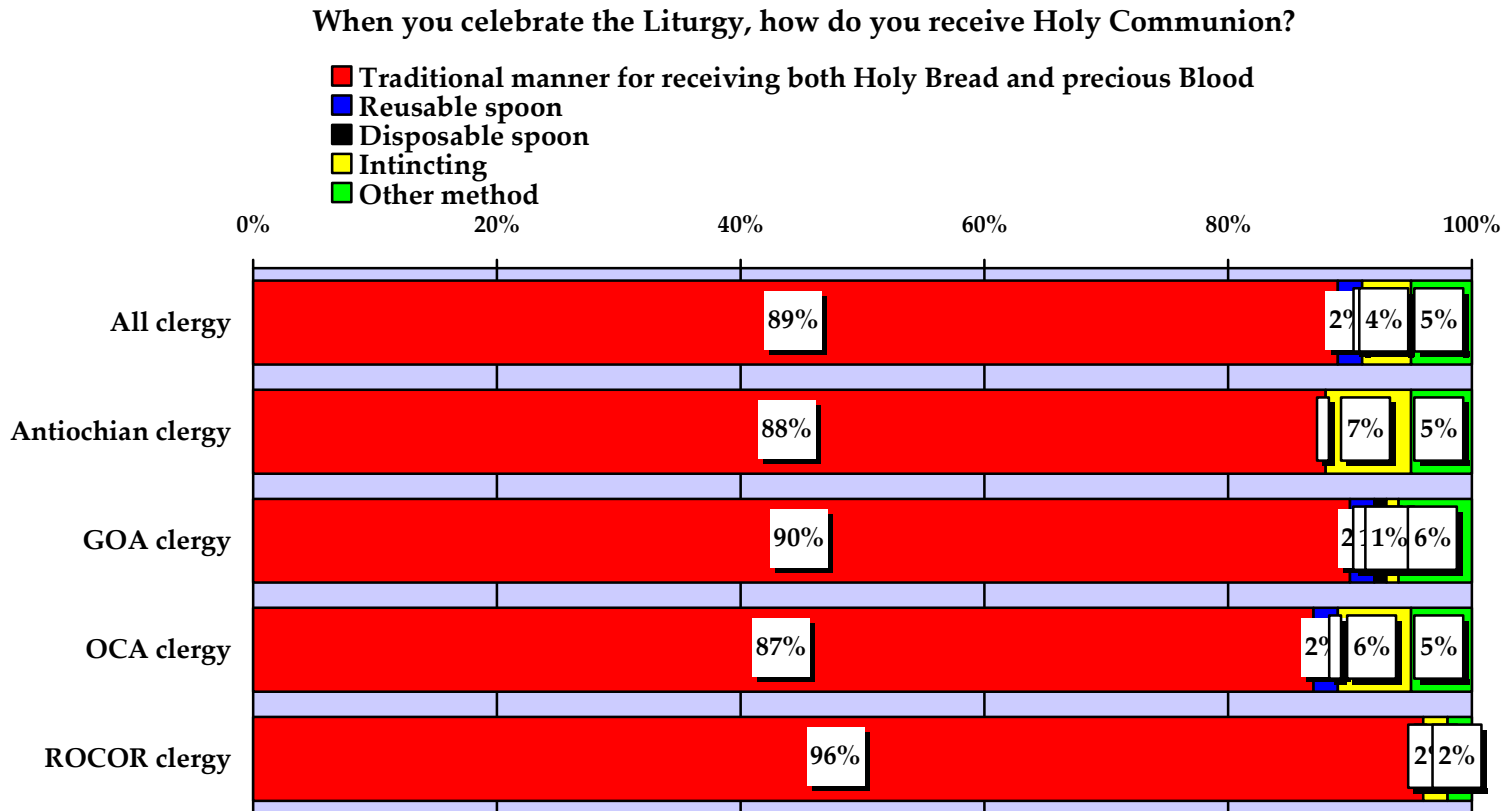
- We ask faithful to stay in their seats, while the clergy would come to them (with masks and gloves on) and serve the Eucharist.

We also asked clergy about how they themselves receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion: “When you celebrate the Liturgy, how do you receive Holy Communion?” The clergy were given five possible answers.

1. Traditional manner for receiving both the Holy Bread and precious Blood
2. Reusable spoon
3. Disposable spoon
4. “Intincting”: partially dipping the bread to avoid drinking directly from the Chalice
5. Other. Please explain

Fig. 9 shows that – unlike significant diversity in ways of offering Holy Communion to parishioners – the clergy of all jurisdictions are much more uniform in how they commune. The vast majority, about 90% of all priests, use the “traditional manner for receiving both Holy Bread and precious Blood.”

Fig. 9 Nearly All Clergy in All Jurisdictions Use the Traditional Manner to Receive Holy Communion



We asked the clergy who selected the “Other” option to further explain how they commune. Nearly all answers were about using two chalices: one for them and other for parishioners so that parishioners would not have any contact with the chalice touched by clergy lips. Here are examples:

- I partake in the Holy Blood from my personal Chalice. The Chalice from which I distribute the Communion to the people is NOT touched by any lips.
- I follow the traditional manner, but pour my portion of the Precious Blood in a different cup just before I drink it, for the protection of the faithful.

And here is another approach with the same idea of “distancing” parishioners from items touched by the priest’s lips:

- I receive Holy Communion at the Altar with the red cloth and commune with my own spoon. I wear gloves and a mask during Holy Communion and take His Body as usual in my hand and then commune with the spoon. I do not put the spoon back into the Chalice but leave both on the Holy Table and commune the parishioners with multiple spoons.

One more note should be made before concluding this chapter. It appears that affiliation with a particular Orthodox jurisdiction is the strongest predictor of how exactly Holy Communion is being presently served in one or another parish. Indeed, we also looked at possible relations with other characteristics of the parishes (see chapter 1 for more information) such as: percentage of converts among parishioners, clergy being cradle Orthodox or converts, the parish’s agreement with the statement, “Our parish has a strong ethnic heritage and identity that we are trying to preserve,” and the parish’s emphasis on frequent partaking of Holy Communion, etc. None of these variables shows any relationship to the manner of administering the Holy Communion in a particular parish community.

IV. How the Pandemic Affected Participation of Parishioners in the Sacrament of Holy Communion

KEY FINDINGS:

- In half (50%) of US Orthodox parishes, some members are abstaining from receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission. Among the four separately reported jurisdictions, GOA parishes are most affected: three-quarters (75%) of the GOA clergy report having such parishioners. On the opposite end are ROCOR parishes: only about one-fifth (22%) ROCOR priests report that some of their faithful do not partake in Holy Communion anymore.
- The manner of administering Holy Communion in a parish is related to the likelihood that its parishioners will refrain from receiving this Sacrament. More than half of the clergy who use either the traditional approach to offering Holy Communion (one spoon and with lips closing on the spoon) or the “one spoon – tilt head back – don’t close the lips” method have reported that some members have stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission (53% and 68%, respectively). In comparison, only 41% of the priests who sanitize spoons between communicants and 39% of the priests who use multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) have noted that parishioners are abstaining from Holy Communion.

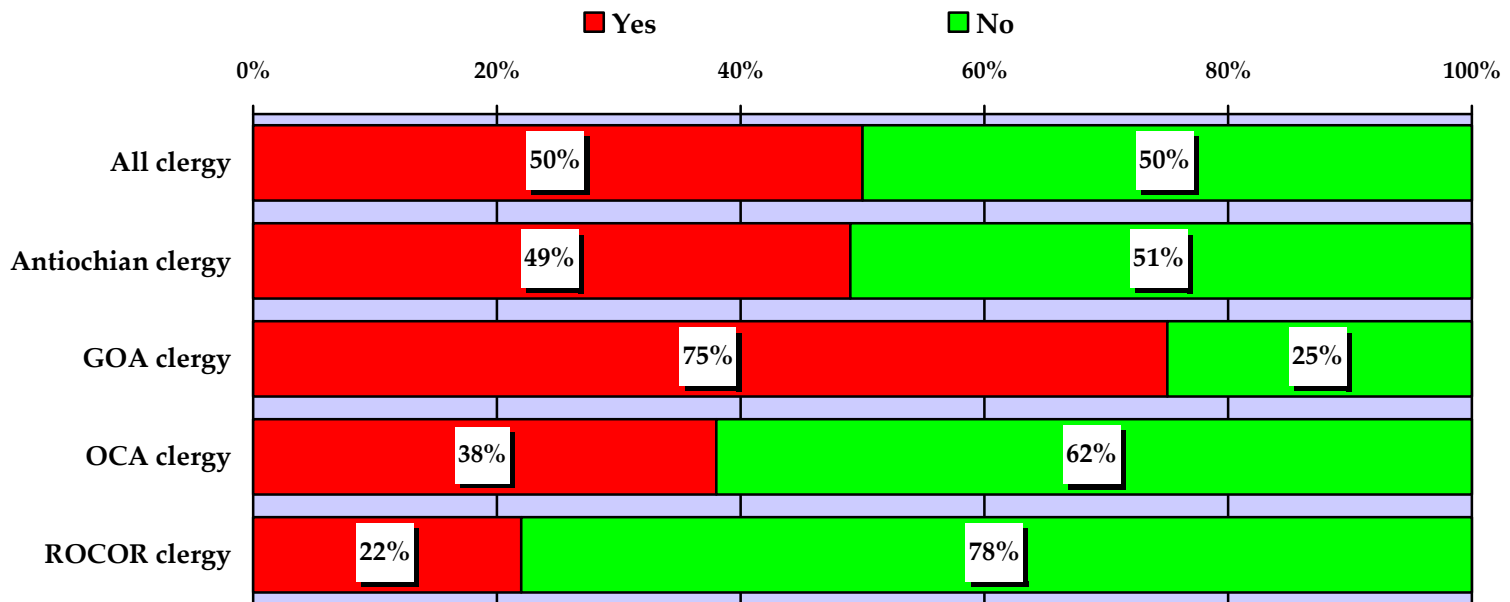
- Those clergy reporting parishioners abstaining from Holy Communion were asked: “Would you like to share any particular concerns or questions raised by these parishioners?” This chapter offers analysis and examples of responses to this question.
- When asked whether they think that the current manner of distribution of Holy Communion in their parishes reflects the preference of the majority of parishioners, a majority (59%) of clergy replied “yes,” and only a tiny minority (6%) answered “no.” The remaining priests selected the answers, “my parishioners are quite divided in their opinions” (15%) and, “most parishioners are simply accepting unquestioningly the way it is done” (20%). Among the four individual jurisdictions, the Antiochian and, especially, ROCOR parishes appear to be more “attuned” to the preferences of their members than are the GOA or OCA parishes.

When designing this study, we knew anecdotally that in many parishes a significant number of parishioners had resumed attending services (after the reopening of churches), but stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of COVID-19 transmission. What we did not know was how widespread this phenomena was and whether there was any relation between a particular manner of serving Holy Communion and parishioners’ reluctance to partake.

The survey asked: “Among those who presently attend services, are there any who stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission?” Fig. 10 shows that in half (50%) of the parishes the pandemic changed parishioners’ participation in the Eucharist, with some of them not receiving Holy Communion any more. Among the four individual jurisdictions, GOA parishes are most affected: three-quarters (75%) of the GOA clergy report having parishioners who abstain from participation in this Sacrament. On the opposite end are ROCOR parishes: only about one-fifth (22%) ROCOR priests reported that some of their faithful do not partake in Holy Communion.

Fig. 10 In Half the Parishes, Some Parishioners Are Abstaining from Receiving Holy Communion out of Fear of Disease Transmission

Among those who presently attend services, are there any who stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission?

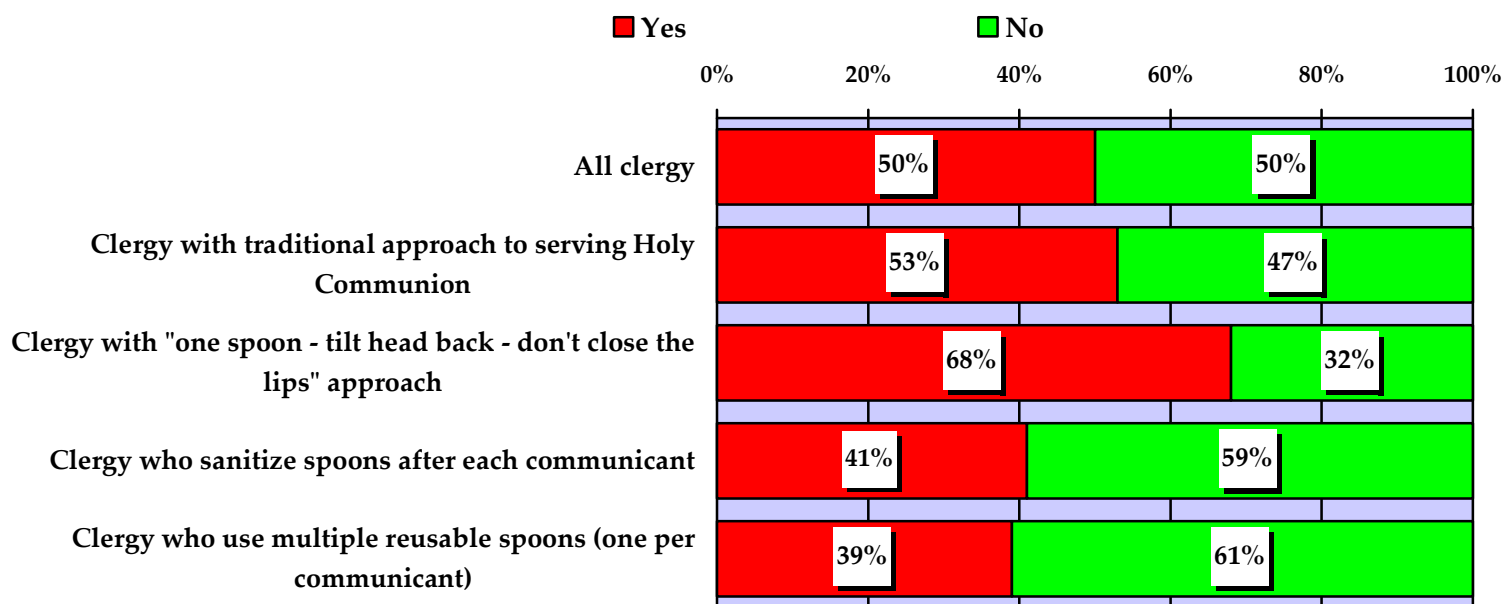


Is there a relation between the manner of administering Holy Communion in a certain parish and the likelihood of its parishioners refraining from receiving this Sacrament? The answer to this question is: “Yes.”

Fig. 11 shows that more than half of the clergy who use either the traditional approach to offering Holy Communion (from one spoon and with closing lips on the spoon) or the “one spoon – tilt head back – don’t close the lips” method have reported that their members have stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission (53% and 68% respectively). In contrast, only 41% of priests who sanitize spoons between communicants and 39% of the priests who use multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) have noted parishioners abstaining from Holy Communion.

Fig. 11 When Clergy Sanitize Spoon(s) Between Communicants or Use Multiple Spoons, Fewer Parishioners Abstain from Receiving Holy Communion

Among those who attend services, are there any who stopped receiving Holy Communion out of fear of disease transmission?



Those clergy reporting that in their parishes some members stopped receiving Holy Communion were further asked: "Have these parishioners expressed this fear to you?" 86% of the priests answered that, indeed, these parishioners have shared their fears and concerns. We then asked priests an open-ended question: "Would you like to share any particular concerns or questions raised by these parishioners?" Here is the summary of the three most typical themes in their responses.

The first (and the strongest) theme was about the fact that indeed some parishioners are uncomfortable with using a single spoon for everyone. They would prefer to have multiple reusable spoons or, at least, have the spoon sanitized after each communicant. For example:

- They did not say, "We are afraid to take Communion," but, "We won't take Communion until you disinfect the spoon like in Moscow."
- Those who have expressed concern about receiving Communion have tended to express it in terms of "I'm not afraid of the Gifts, I'm afraid of the spoon."
- Many faithful would prefer separate spoons ... a practice not allowed by our Diocesan Bishop.
- There's no doubt about sanctity of the Sacrament (Body and Blood), but people are not comfortable with the way how it is administered to them. Also, it is very important to note, that the most of the

concerned are the parishioners with the high education degree. University professors, people with the medical background and the business owners.

- In the absence of individual sterile utensils they prefer to abstain from Communion during group services.

The second group of answers was about the fact that it is not the procedure of the Holy Communion per se, but some other surrounding circumstances which discourage parishioners from participating in Holy Communion. For example:

- Simple health concerns; they would prefer to wear their mask the whole service.
- I've had one parishioner who expressed concern--not so much about Communion, but about coming into close proximity to me.
- On one occasion another priest took his mask off during Epiclesis and a few parishioners who saw it did not commune.

The last group of answers came from clergy who expressed their disappointment in parishioners who – in clergy view - lack faith, thinking that a disease can be transmitted via Holy Communion.

- They told me they didn't have the faith at this point, even though they knew they were "wrong." Their main concern was their fear of germs even at times when they could have approached the chalice first.
- They are afraid of getting the "disease" from the common spoon and cup. They however never gave it any thought during regular flu or cold season in the past. There have been too many Orthodox hierarchs and clergy instilling fear into people and diminishing the faith of the people.
- Despite stressing the church's teaching that disease cannot be transmitted through the blood and body of Christ, my "high risk" category parishioners have allowed their lack of faith to prevent them from receiving.

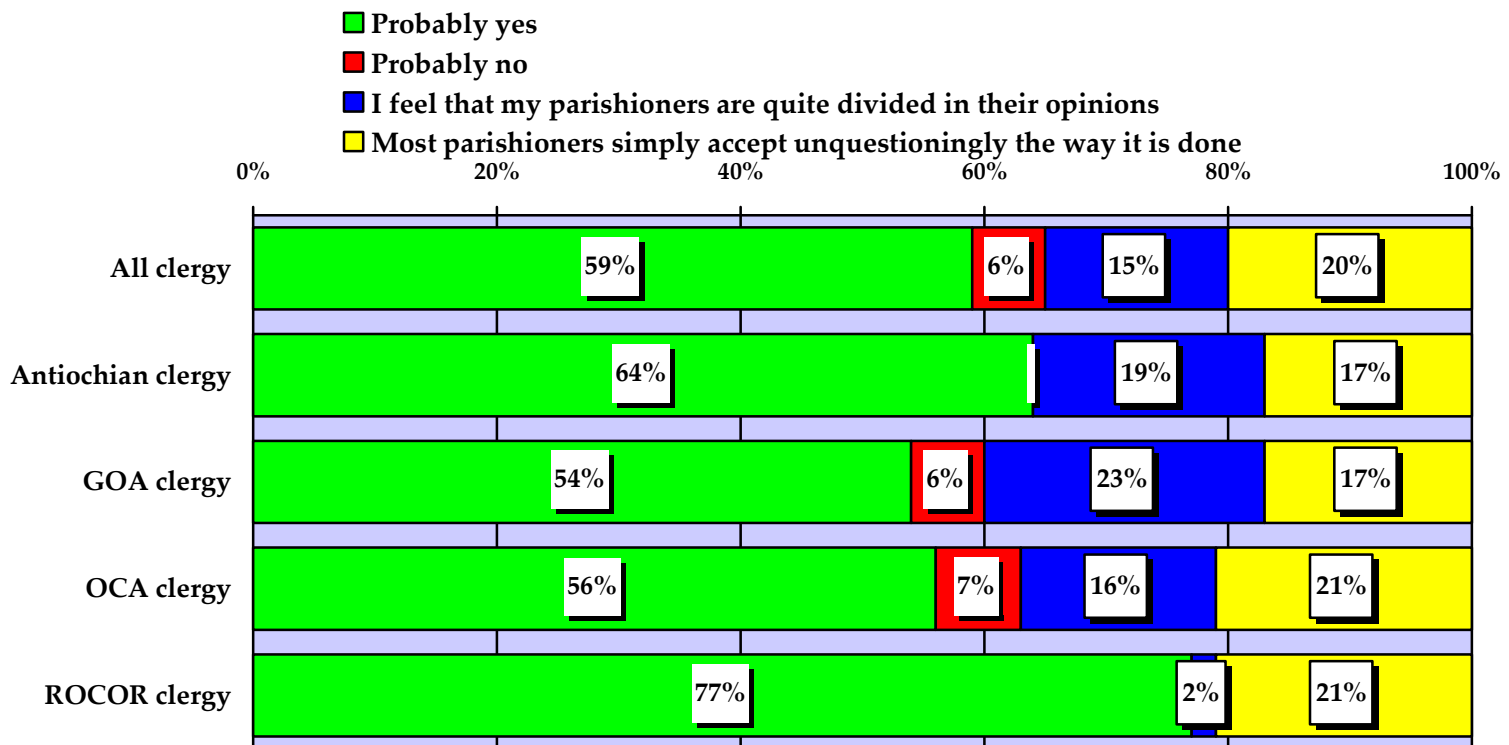
What we found so far in this chapter is that half of US Orthodox parishes have members abstaining from Holy Communion because of the fear of disease and that this fear affects especially strongly those parishes with more traditional ways of administering the Holy Communion: "one spoon and closing lips on the spoon" or "or one spoon – tilt head back – do not close lips on the spoon." Therefore we asked clergy whether they thought that the current manner of distribution of Holy Communion in their parishes reflected the preference of the majority of parishioners. See Fig. 12.

Fig. 12 allows for different interpretations. On one hand, in most parishes (59%) clergy feel that the current way of serving Holy Communion is what their parishioners want, and in only 6% of parishes do the priests think that their parishioners are dissatisfied. On the other hand, 15% of parishes seem to be internally divided over the question of administering Holy Communion, and in one-fifth (20%) of parishes the priests *believe* that their faithful simply accept unquestioningly “the way it is done,” which may or may not be true.

Among the four individual jurisdictions, Antiochian and, especially, ROCOR parishes seem better attuned to the preferences of their members than are GOA or OCA parishes. Indeed, two thirds (64%) of Antiochian and three quarters (75%) of ROCOR clergy think that the manner of distribution of Holy Communion in their parishes reflects the preference of the majority. Not a single Antiochian or ROCOR priest selected the answer “No” to this question.

Fig. 12 ROCOR and Antiochian Parishes Are Better Attuned to the Preference of their Parishioners Regarding the Manner of Administering the Holy Communion

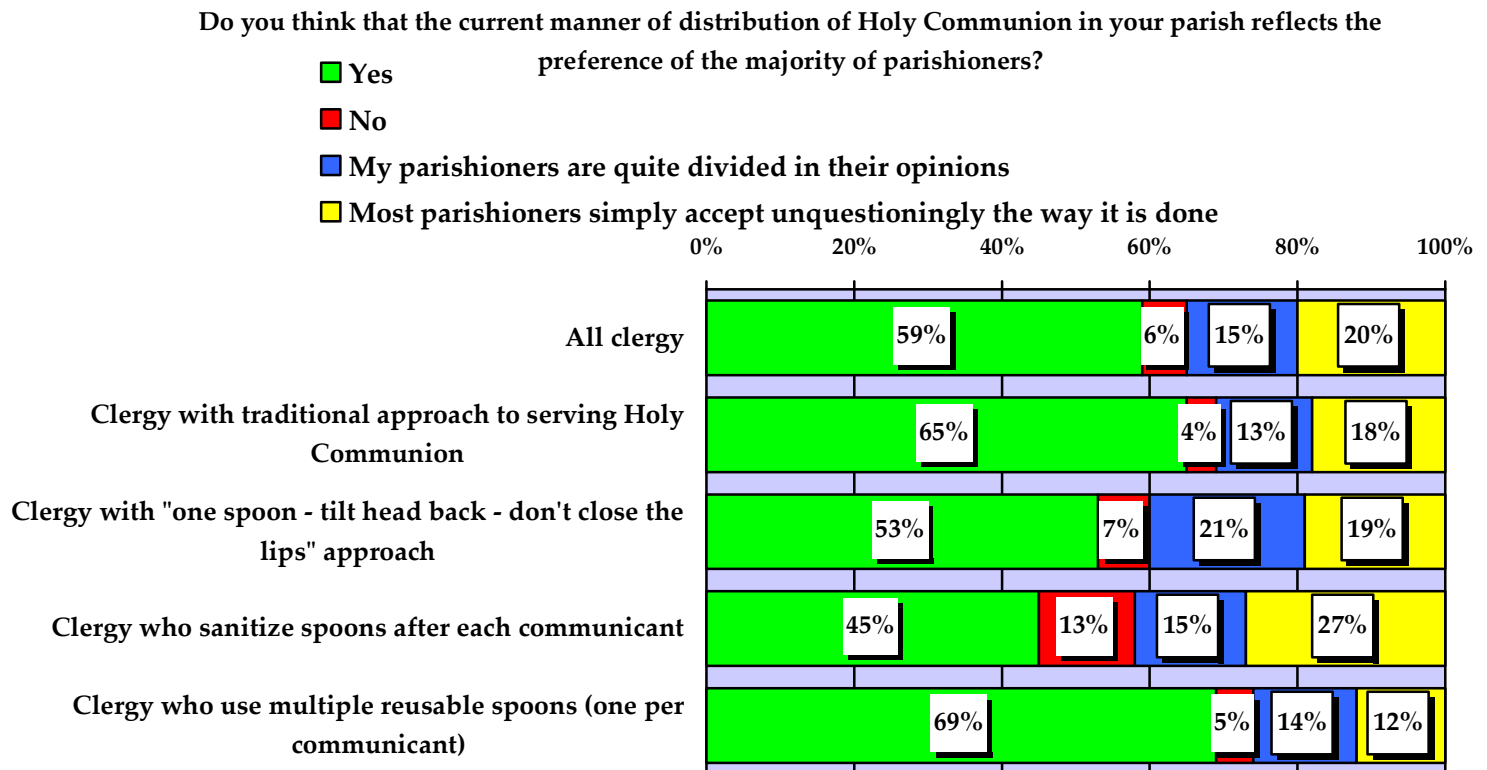
Do you think that the current manner of distribution of Holy Communion in your parish reflects the preference of the majority of parishioners?



Is there any significant difference between parishes with various methods of distributing Holy Communion in terms of their members' satisfaction with how this Sacrament is administered? The study data indicated that the parishes representing the two "opposite ends" – those with either the "traditional" way of serving Holy Communion or those using multiple reusable spoons – are most likely to report that most their members are satisfied with the current method of administering this Sacrament. See Fig. 13.

This finding might be puzzling (or deserving further examination), but it does not contradict our previous observation that the parishes with reusable spoons for each communicant are less likely to report parishioners who abstain from Holy Communion out of fear of disease as compared to the parishes with traditional manner of administering Holy Communion. Indeed, the traditional way of serving Holy Communion may affect more parishes in a way that *some their members* would stop receiving this Sacrament, but this does not mean that the *majority of members* are not satisfied with this method.

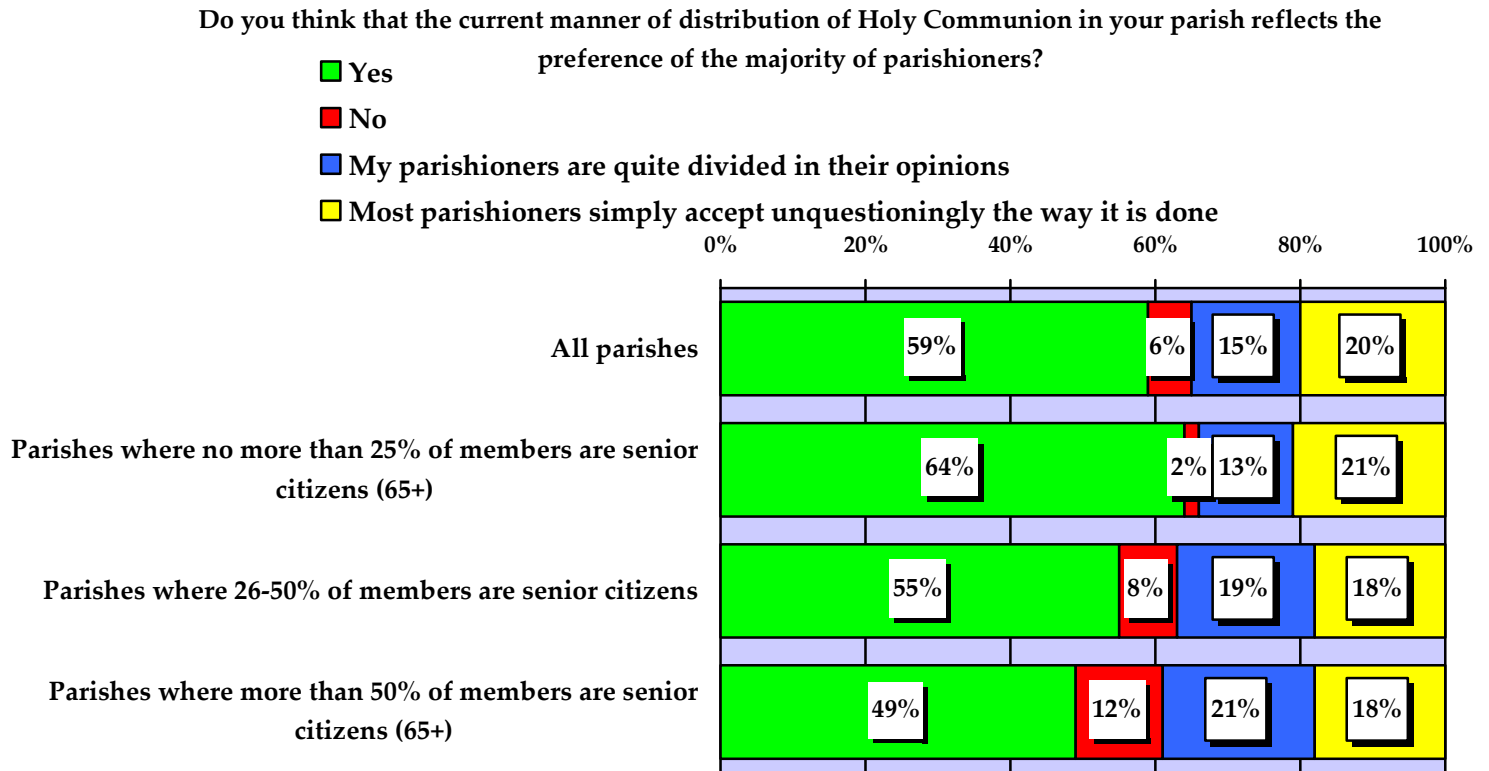
Fig. 13 Parishes with the Most "Traditional" and Most "Innovative" Approaches Are More Likely to Report Member Satisfaction with Current Method of Distributing Holy Communion



The study also found that the parishes with demographically older membership are less likely report that their members are satisfied with the current method of administering Holy Communion; they are more likely to

indicate that “parishioners are quite divided in their opinions” about how this Sacrament should be served. See Fig. 14.

Fig. 14 Parishes with Older Membership Are Less Likely to Report that Their Parishioners Are Satisfied with Current Manner of Administering Holy Communion



V. The Desire of (Some) Orthodox Clergy to Change the Manner of Administering the Holy Communion in Their Parishes: What and Why Do They Want to Change?

KEY FINDINGS:

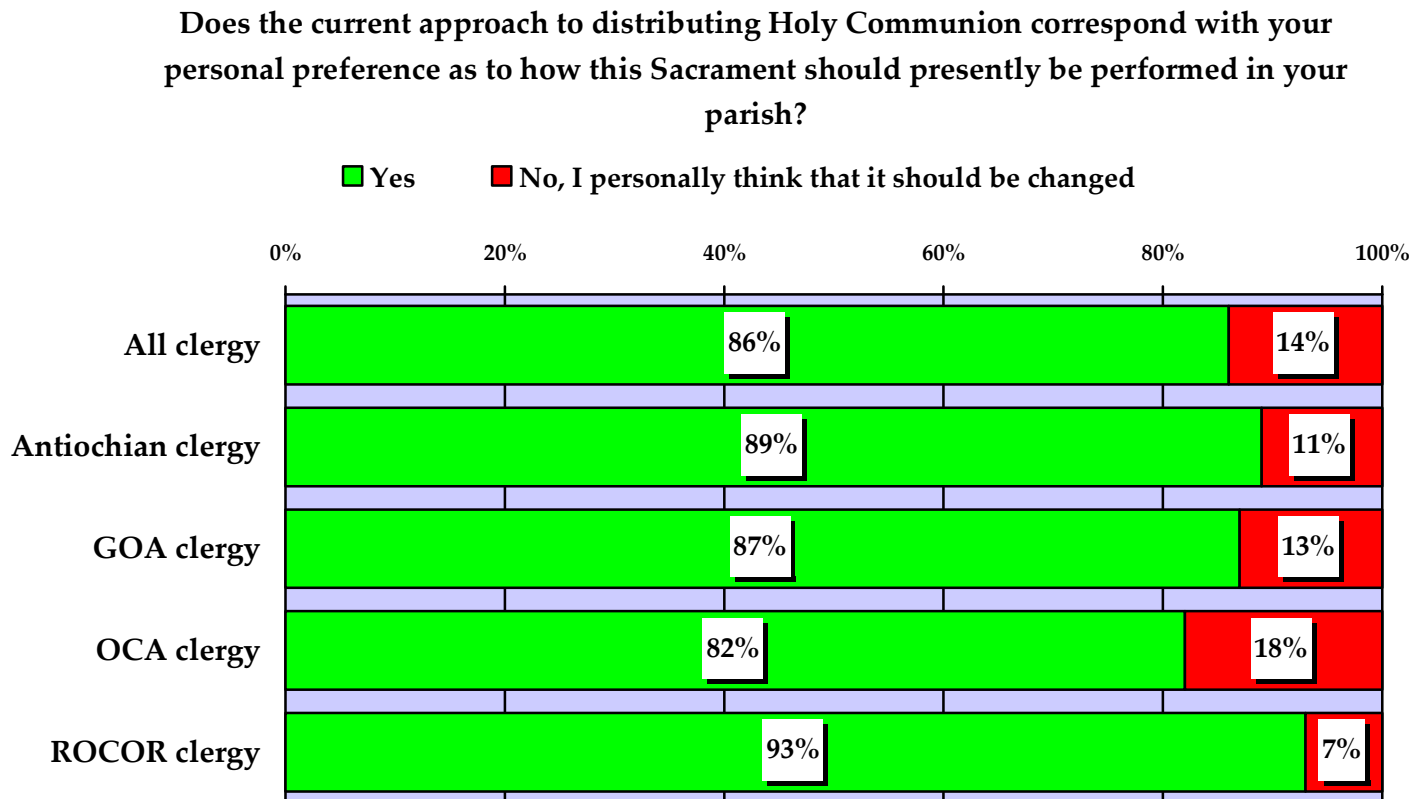
- The clergy were asked “Does the actual current approach to distributing Holy Communion correspond with your *personal preference* as to how this Sacrament should presently be performed in your parish?” The vast majority answered “yes” and only 14% indicated a desire to change the manner of offering Holy Communion.
- Those clergy desiring to change the method of serving Holy Communion were asked: “What would be your preferred manner for administering Holy Communion in your parish?” Twice as many replied that they would move back from more “modern” (brought by the pandemic) methods to more traditional approaches, as compared to those who wanted to move the opposite way; i.e., from more traditional manners of administering Holy Communion to either multiple (one per communicant) or sanitized spoons.
- Answering the question “Why would you change the manner of distribution of Holy Communion in your parish?”, 38% chose the answer, “because this change would reflect **both** my personal position and the preference of parishioners on how Holy Communion should be administered”; 34% replied, “because this change would reflect my personal position”; 15% selected the answer, “because I believe my parishioners would prefer it”; and the remaining 13% offered some “other answer.”

It was noted that various American Orthodox jurisdictions or individual dioceses took different approaches to guiding their clergy on how the Sacrament of Holy Communion should be administered during the pandemic. Some issued more explicit directions which had to be followed by all their priests (e.g., various GOA Metropolises, Antiochian Archdiocese), while others allowed their clergy more flexibility to decide locally, taking into account the unique context of each parish community and in consultation with their bishops (e.g., OCA, ROCOR, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA).

One might assume that more clergy in the jurisdictions and dioceses with stricter universal guidelines would probably desire to change the manner of serving Holy Communion in their parishes than in the jurisdictions and dioceses in which the priests were given more freedom to decide locally. But the study results did not support this assumption.

The questionnaire asked clergy: “Does the current approach to distributing Holy Communion correspond with your personal preference as to how this Sacrament should presently be performed in your parish?” Fig. 15 shows that vast majority (more than 80%) of clergy in all jurisdictions feel that they presently serve Holy Communion in a way that also reflects their personal preference. Only 14% of the priests desire to change the manner of offering Holy Communion in their parishes.

Fig. 15 Vast Majority of Clergy Are Satisfied With the Manner of Administering the Holy Communion in their Parishes



Those clergy who reported their desire to change the method of offering Holy Communion were asked two additional questions:

- What would be your preferred manner for administering Holy Communion in your parish?
- Why would you change the manner of distribution Holy Communion in your parish?

Fifty-six priests answered the first question. Out of this number, 34 said that they would prefer to either have the traditional way of communing (one spoon, lips may be closed on the spoon, no spoon sanitizing between communicants) or use the method “one spoon – tilt head back – drop sacred elements into mouth – do not close lips on the spoon.” 16 reported that they would either use multiple spoons (reusable or disposable) one per communicant or sanitize the spoons after each communicant.

In other words, more than twice as many clergy would “move back” from more “modern” (brought by the pandemic) methods to more traditional approaches as compared to the number of those who would “move opposite way:” from more traditional manners of administering Holy Communion to either multiple (one per communicant) or sanitized spoons. The remaining six respondents offered answers which did not fit in either of above categories, but suggested something entirely different. Here are their responses:

- Personally, and this has nothing to do with the pandemic, I wish Holy Communion was still received by hand and the chalice was given to the people by the priest.
- Prepared like reserved sacrament with a drop of blood placed on it and then it is placed in the hand of a communicant. Altar boy would pour water over their hand after they partook and they could dry them with paper towels
- Definitely no touching of lips or mouth. Ideally, by intinction without spoon.
- By intinction with priest’s gloved hand [during COVID] and dropping into the recipients open mouth: head tilted back mouth open wide.
- By giving each communicant a portion of the Bread in the hand and a sip from the chalice.
- In the hand with an intincted portion of the Lamb, according to ancient practice

Answering second question (“Why would you change the manner of distribution of Holy Communion in your parish?”), the plurality of clergy (38%) chose the answer, “because this change would reflect **both** my personal position and the preference of parishioners on how Holy Communion should be administered”; 34% replied, “because this change would reflect my personal position”; and 15% of the priests selected the answer, “because I believe my parishioners would prefer it.”

Most of the remaining 13% (those who selected “other answer” option) referred simply to pure medical considerations as a motive for desirable change. For example:

- I would favor a temporary change in the view of the unprecedented risk of contagion during the pandemic. This is for the protection of our parishioners and has nothing to do with anyone's personal preferences.

Yet, a handful of clergy described their reasoning with some sort of “theological” grounding:

- The security of not spilling the Sacrament when avoiding lip contact (this answer came from a clergyman advocating multiple spoons instead of “one spoon – tilt head back – do not close the lips” method).
- I believe multiple spoons reflects tradition as opposed to the one spoon which is traditionalism.

We also asked clergy who expressed their desire for some change in serving Holy Communion in their parishes: “What presently prevents you from making this change?” Somewhat predictably, more than three-quarters of them (76%) replied that the “guidance of my Bishop” does not allow them to make the desired change; 14% chose the answer, “the majority of parishioners would be opposed to this change”; while 10% selected the option, “both the guidance of my bishop and the fact that majority of parishioners would be opposed to this change.”

A number of clergy also offered some additional comments on what prevents them from making the desired change. Two themes were most common. The first one was that they were trying to avoid any steps which might cause internal disagreements and conflicts inside their parishes:

- Pastorally I think it is more prudent to be 'above reproach' and not to scandalize my weaker brother. I am sure many of my parishioners would be fine with going back to one spoon, but many would not.
- There were enough controversial statements made by theologians and sometimes hierarchy. I do not want to personally cause divisions and disputes in our parish over the most sacred aspect of our Faith.

The second motive was about the need to accommodate the fears of some parishioners even if they constitute the minority of members:

- I prefer distributing Communion in the traditional manner where communicants close their mouth on the spoon. Despite my personal feeling about that, I slightly altered the practice (by dropping the Holy Species into their mouths). The reason I did that is because a few of the parishioners had adamantly suggested a radical change (e.g. plastic spoons, paper cups, etc.). These options are unacceptable of course.
- Trying to be sensitive to the few fearful parishioners.

VI. Different Methods of Administering Holy Communion: Clergy's Opinions about What Is and Is Not Acceptable. Priests' Personal Ideas about Possible New Ways of Administering this Sacrament

KEY FINDINGS:

- 55% of the clergy believe that “participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution,” while 33% of the priests disagree with this view. The remaining 12% of clergy have no clear opinion about this matter. This overall national picture is much more nuanced when looking separately at various jurisdictions. In the GOA and OCA, the clergy who believe that “participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution” hugely outnumber those who disagree with such approach. But this is not the case in ROCOR, where percentages of the supporters and opponents of this statement are comparable, or the Antiochian Archdiocese, where more clergy oppose this statement than agree with it.
- Clergy were asked: “In response to the pandemic, some national Orthodox Churches abroad as well as some American Orthodox parishes have instituted changes in the manner Holy Communion is administered. Below are six currently used approaches. For each, please indicate your *personal opinion* as to whether it is acceptable or not.” Of six offered methods, only two were viewed as “acceptable” by at least half of all the priests: “Dropping sacred elements into parishioner’s mouth and asking not to close the lips on the spoon” and, “One spoon which is sanitized between communicants.”
- The use of multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) is viewed as acceptable by 40% of US Orthodox clergy. Among the clergy of the four individual jurisdictions, an absolute majority of OCA priests (56%) are willing to accept this method as compared to 36% of Antiochian, 32% of GOA, and 22% of ROCOR clergy.
- Overall, clergy in the Orthodox Church in America are more willing to accept various new methods of administering the Holy Communion than the clergy of other jurisdictions.
- Clergy were asked: “Would you suggest any other possible method of administering the Holy Communion?” This chapter offers an overview of the most interesting suggestions offered by the respondents.

The three priests’ comments on the title page reflect very different ways of thinking about how much flexibility the Orthodox Church should permit when it comes to serving the Sacrament of Holy Communion under the present extraordinary circumstances. In this chapter, we will examine the opinions of American Orthodox clergy on this challenging question.

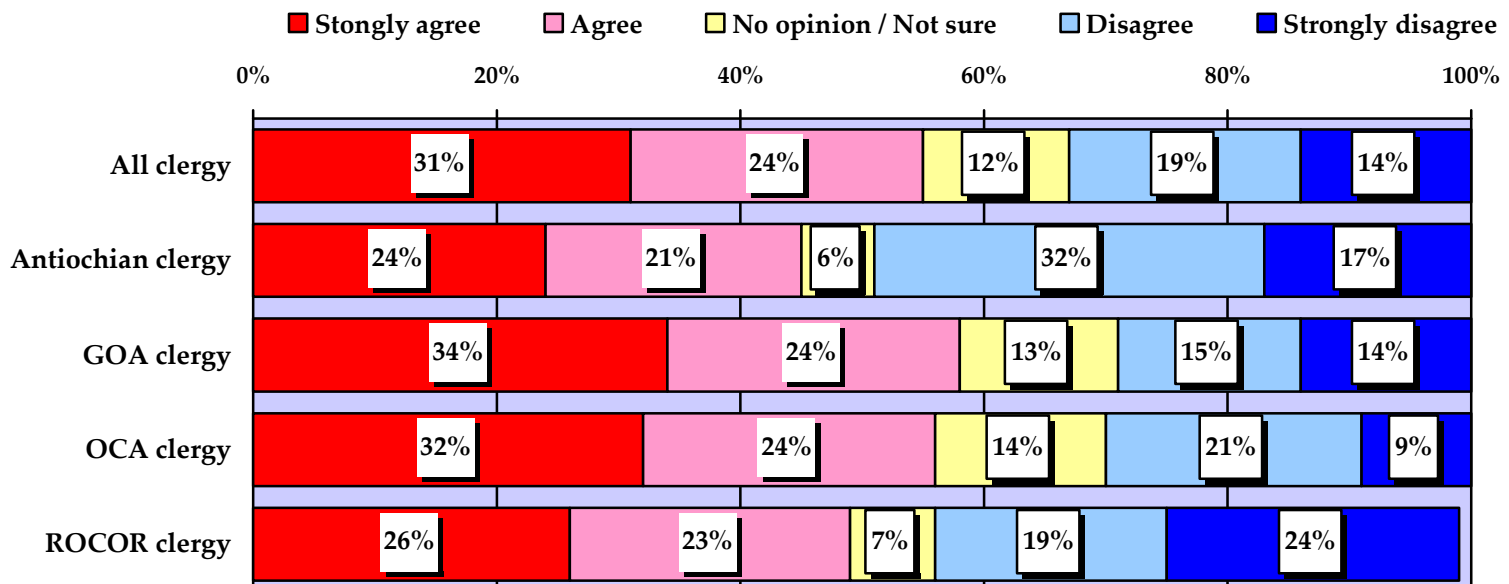
One can ask a somewhat simplistic, yet important question: “Overall, do Orthodox priests believe that the participation of the faithful in the Sacrament of Holy Communion is more important than the manner of its administering?” In order to examine this question, the survey asked: “Do you agree or disagree with the statement, ‘Participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution.’”

Fig. 16 shows that in the overall picture, a majority (55%) of American Orthodox clergy feel that participation in the Holy Communion is much more important than the manner of its distribution, while one-third of the priests (33%) do not share this view. In addition, about one-in-eight clergy (12%) have no clear opinion about this question.

However, this overall national picture is much more nuanced when looking separately at various jurisdictions. In the GOA and OCA, the clergy who believe that “participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution” (58% in GOA and 56% in OCA) strongly outnumber those who disagree with such approach (29% and 30%, respectively). But this is not the case in ROCOR, where percentages of the supporters (49%) and opponents (43%) of this statement are fairly comparable or, most notably, in the Antiochian Archdiocese, where more clergy (49%) oppose this statement than agree with it (45%).

Fig. 16 Clergy of Various Jurisdictions Have Various Opinions about What Is More Important: Participation in Holy Communion versus How It Is Administered

Do you agree or disagree with the statement "Participation in Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution?"



We looked at two possible personal characteristics of the priests which – presumably – might have some relation to their opinion about the statement, “Participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution”: clergy age and whether they are converts or not. Neither of these characteristics was related to their answers. That is, younger and older priests, cradle Orthodox and convert clergy, were equally likely to either agree or disagree with this statement.

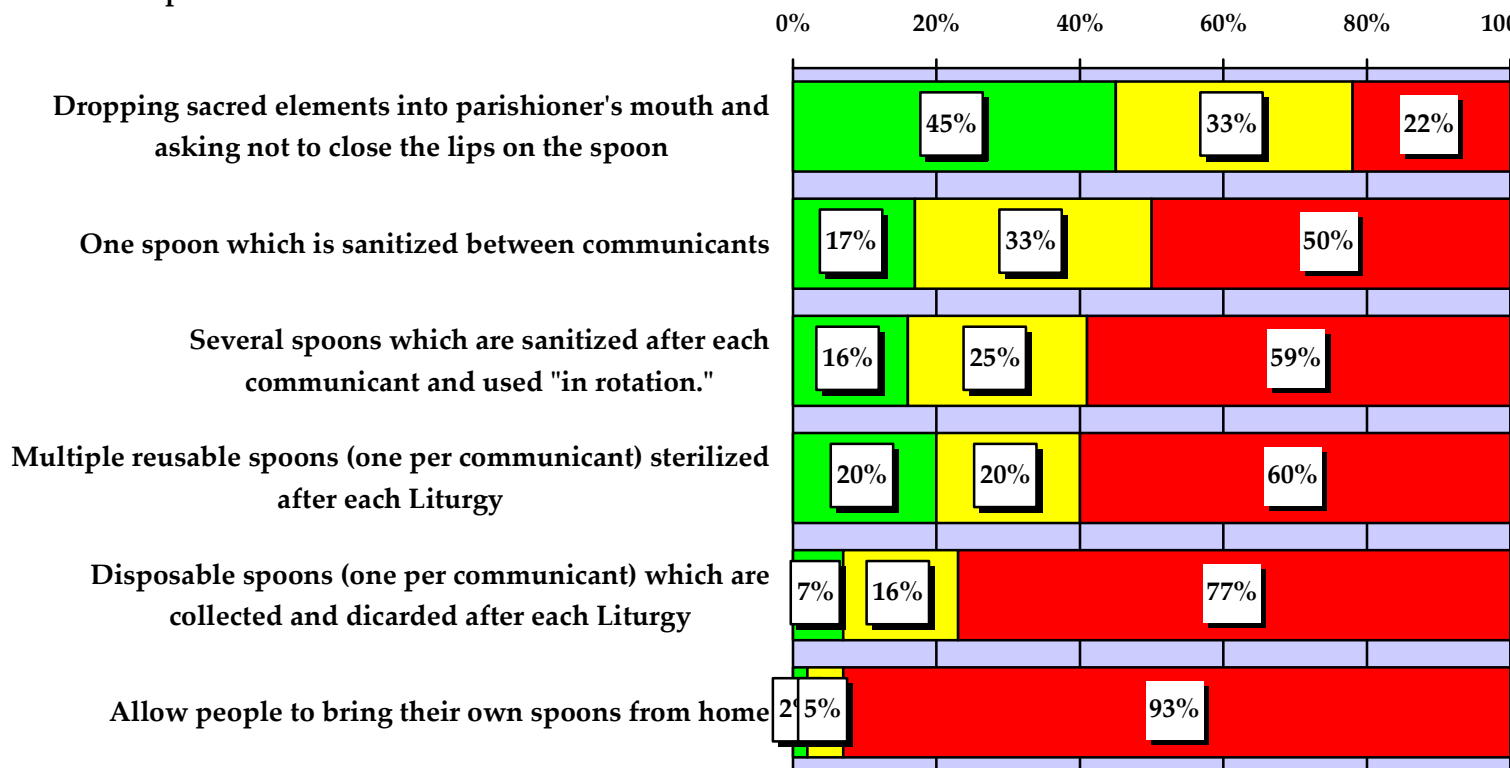
In short, it appears that the distinct “internal culture” of each jurisdiction is the most important predictor of clergy’s personal flexibility in adapting the methods of offering Holy Communion for the sake of their parishioners’ participation in this Sacrament. Among the four individual jurisdictions, the GOA and OCA “clergy cultures” are much more conducive for altering the procedure of this Sacrament if needed than are ROCOR or AOCA “priests’ cultures.”

Regardless of how they administer Holy Communion in their parishes, clergy may have various opinions about the different ways of serving this Sacrament which came recently into existence in respond to the pandemic. The questionnaire asked: “In response to the pandemic, some national Orthodox Churches abroad as well as some American Orthodox parishes have instituted changes in the manner Holy Communion is administered. Below is the list of several currently used approaches. For each, please indicate your *personal opinion* as to whether it is acceptable or not.” See Fig. 17.

Fig. 17 Opinions of American Orthodox Clergy about Different Methods of Administering Holy Communion during the Pandemic

% of priests saying that the following methods of serving Holy Communion are:

■ Acceptable and I personally would be inclined to use it
 ■ Acceptable, but I would be reluctant to use it
 ■ Unacceptable



Of the six possible methods of administering Holy Communion offered for clergy consideration, only two were viewed as “acceptable” by at least half of the priests: “Dropping sacred elements into parishioner’s mouth and asking not to close the lips on the spoon,” and, “One spoon which is sanitized between communicants.”

The method which caused most recent arguments and debates in American Orthodox Churches – the multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) – would be acceptable for 40% of US Orthodox clergy, with half of those (or 20% of all priests) being strong supporters of this approach.

Are there any significant differences among the clergy representing various Orthodox jurisdictions in their opinions about which methods of serving Holy Communion are permissible and which are not?

The following six charts (one for each method) compare results for clergy in the four jurisdictions. For simplification of presentation, we combined the two different levels of “acceptable” shown above into one category.

Three major observations can be made. First, the method “Dropping sacred elements into parishioner’s mouth and asking not to close the lips on the spoon” is seen as “acceptable” by nearly all Antiochian clergy (93%). This is not surprising, because it is the approach to the administering of Holy Communion that is presently mandated by the Antiochian Archdiocese. Essentially, all Antiochian clergy are directed to follow this method.

Second, when it comes to “more innovative” approaches (one or several spoons which are sterilized after each communicant, multiple reusable spoons – one for each communicant, or multiple disposable spoons – one for each communicant), the clergy in Orthodox Church in America are consistently more willing to accept these new methods than are clergy of other jurisdictions. This difference is especially visible in the case of “multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant)”: an absolute majority of OCA priests (56%) would be willing to accept this method as compared to only 36% of Antiochian, 32% of GOA, and 22% of ROCOR clergy.

Third, very few clergy in any jurisdiction would be willing to accept the idea of permitting people to bring their own spoons from home for receiving Holy Communion.

Fig. 17a Opinions of Orthodox Clergy about “Dropping sacred elements into parishioner’s mouth and asking not to close the lips on the spoon” as the Method of Administering Holy Communion

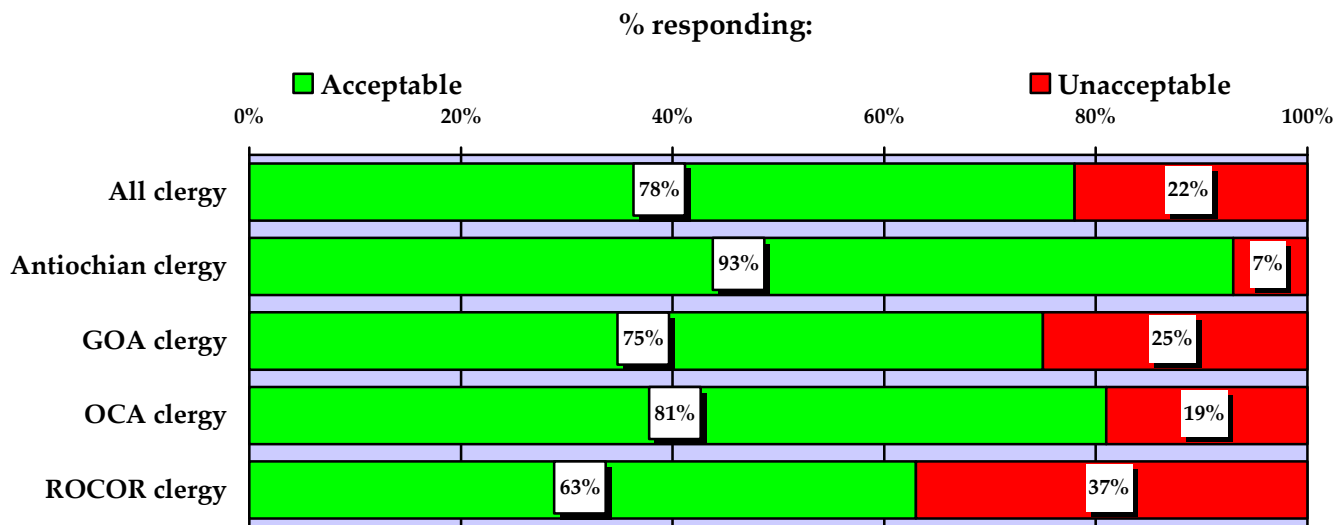


Fig. 17b Opinions of Orthodox Clergy about “One spoon which is sanitized between communicants” as the Method of Administering Holy Communion

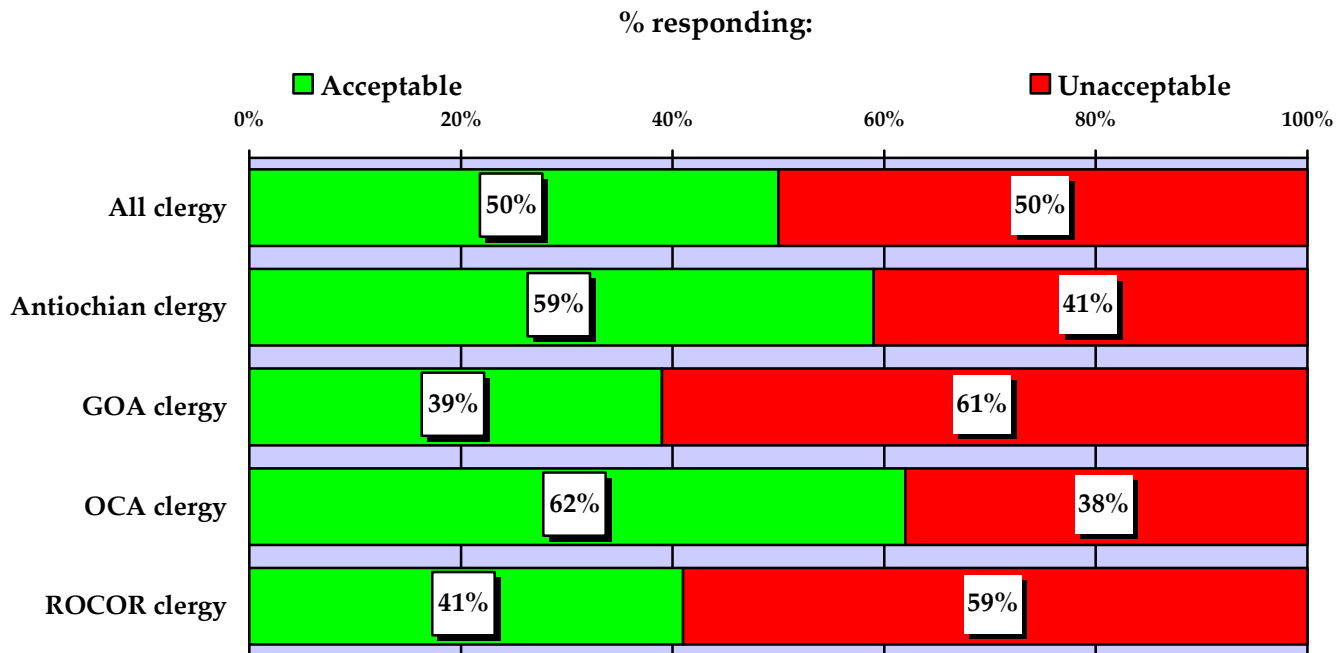


Fig. 17c Opinions of Orthodox Clergy about “Several spoons which are sanitized after each communicant and used ‘in rotation’” as the Method of Administering Holy Communion

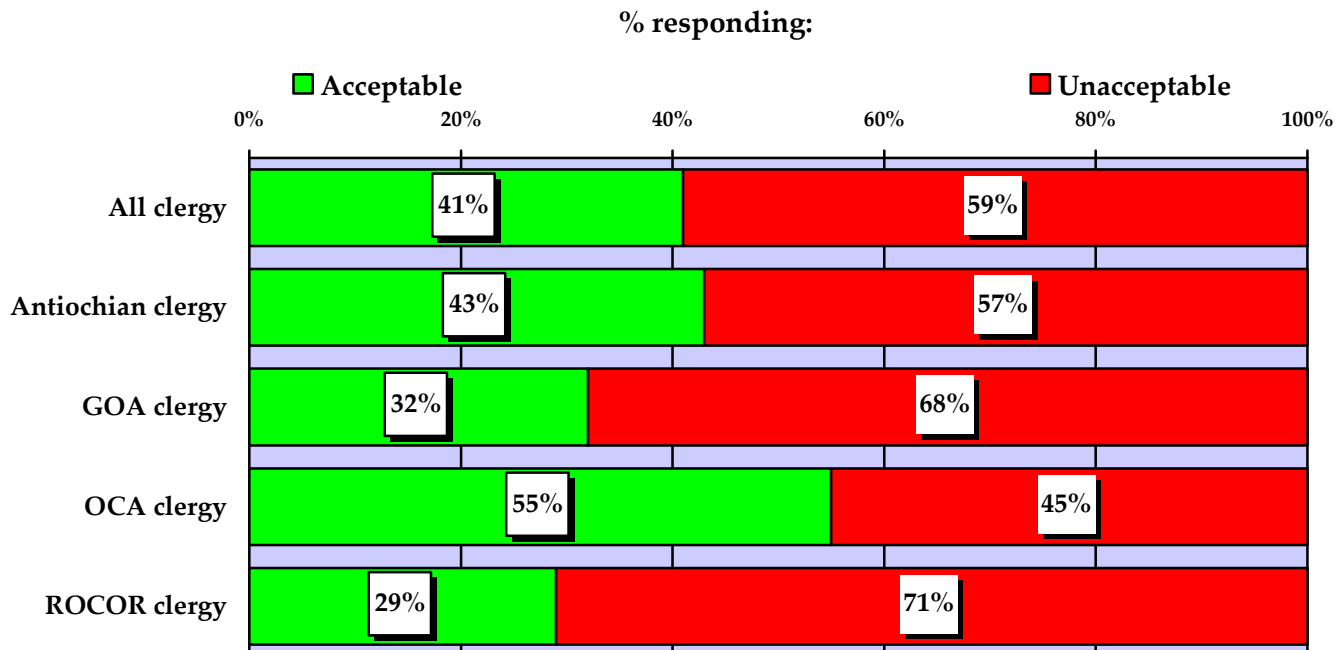


Fig. 17d Opinions of Orthodox Clergy about “Multiple reusable spoons (one per communicant) which are sterilized after each Liturgy” as the Method of Administering Holy Communion

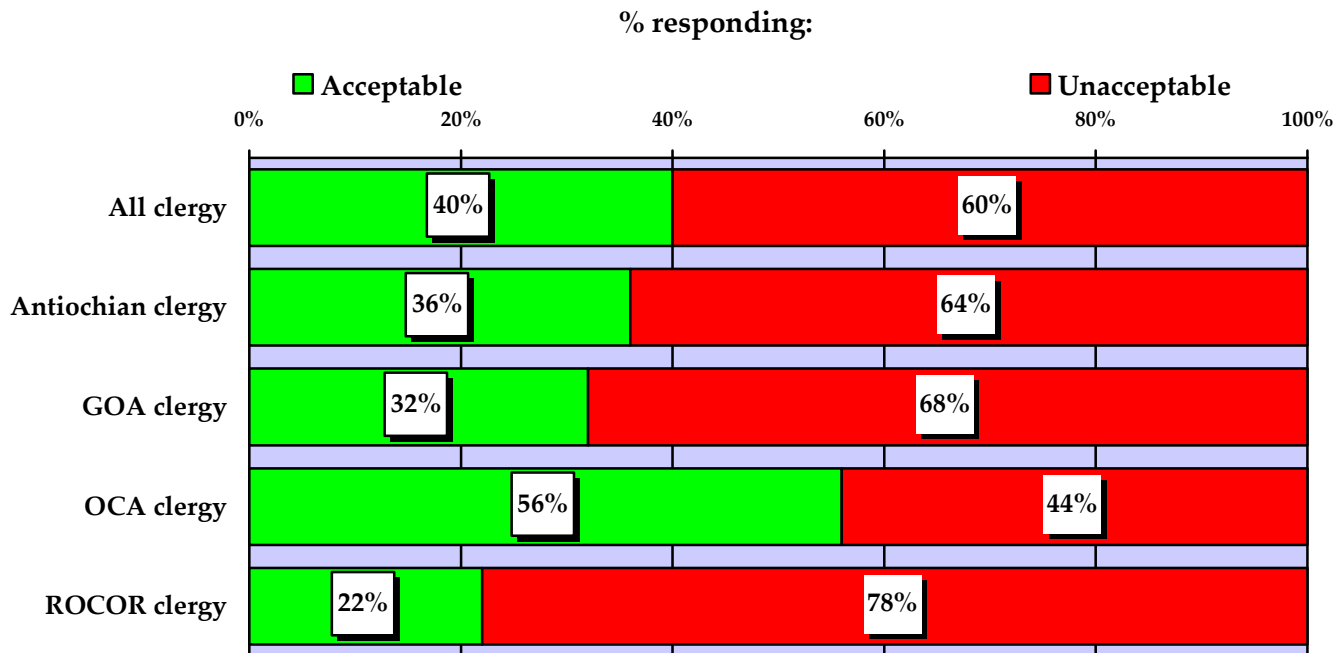


Fig. 17e Opinions of Orthodox Clergy about “Multiple disposable spoons (one per communicant) which are collected and discarded after each Liturgy” as the Method of Administering Holy Communion

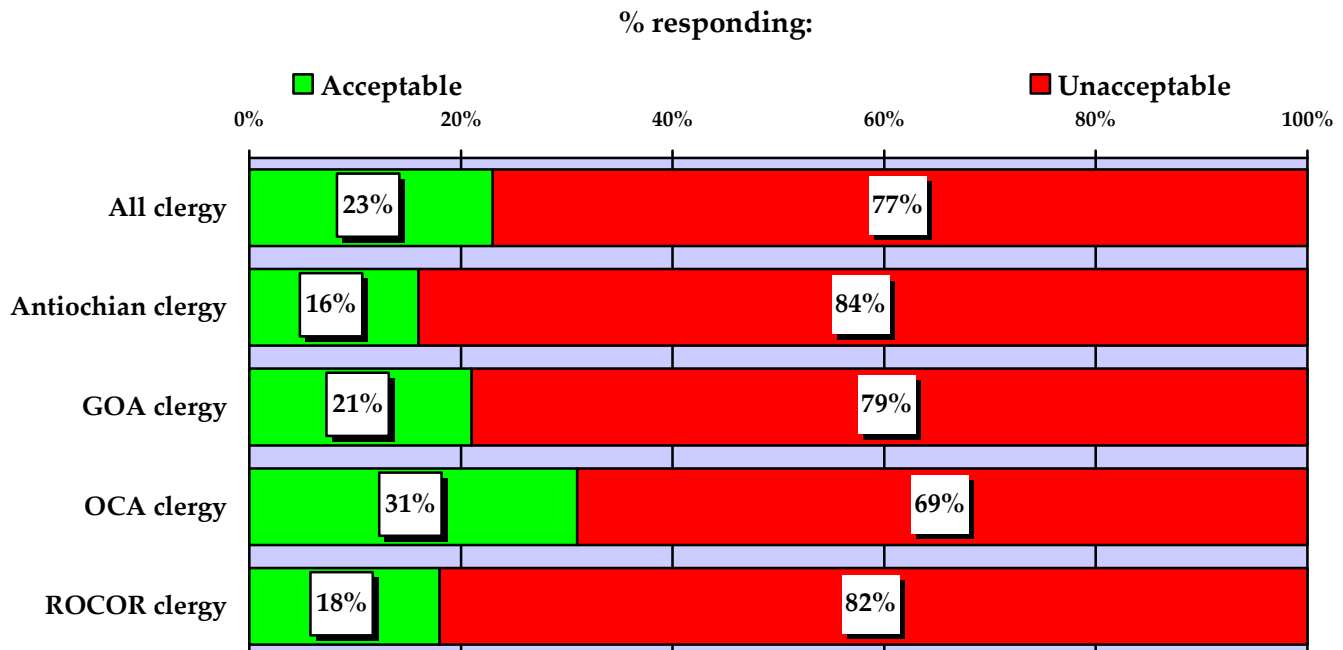
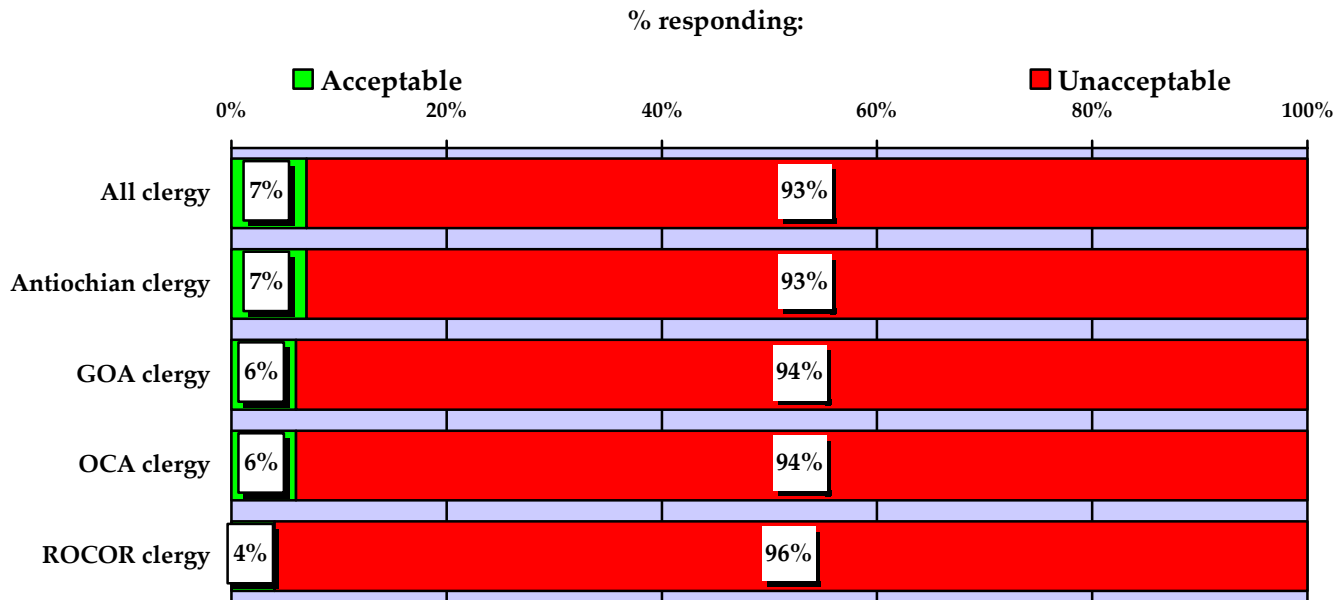
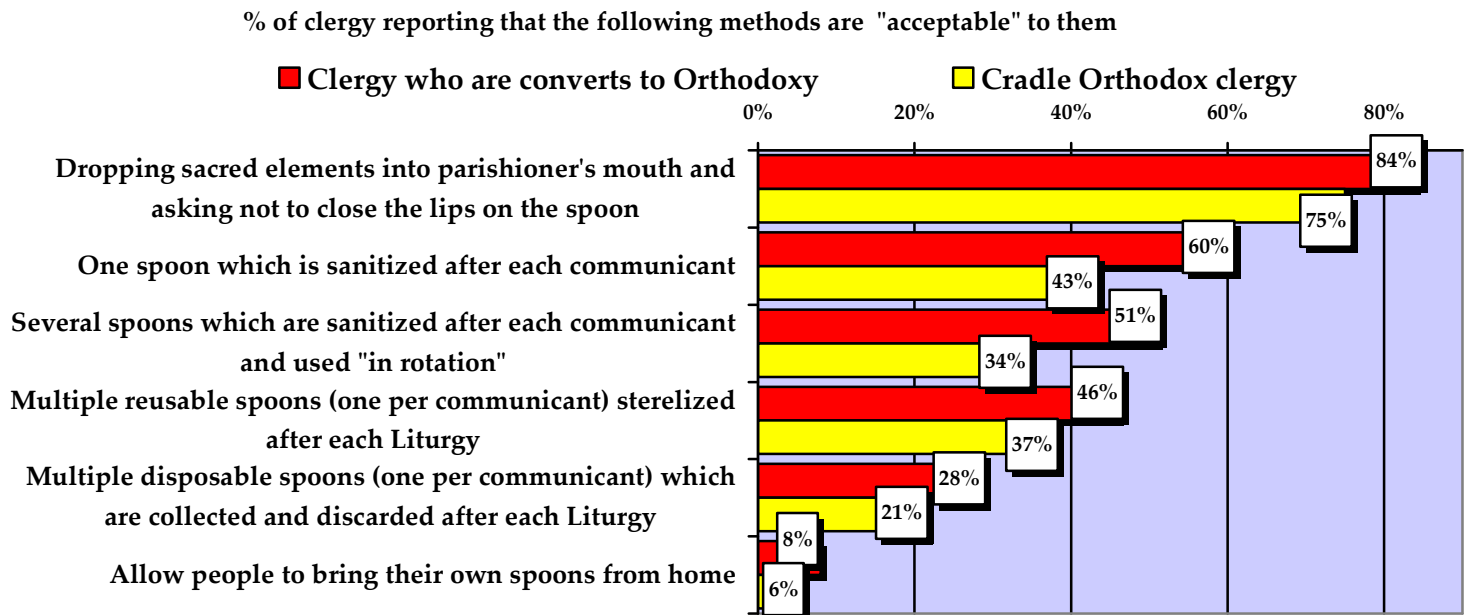


Fig. 17f Opinions of Orthodox Clergy about “Allow people to bring their own spoons from home” as the Method of Administering Holy Communion



There were no differences in opinions about various methods of administering Holy Communion between younger and older priests. At the same time, it was found that convert Orthodox priests were more willing to accept various new methods of serving Holy Communion brought by the pandemic than were cradle Orthodox priests. See Fig. 18.

Fig. 18 More Convert than Cradle Orthodox Clergy Are Willing to Accept New Methods of Administering Holy Communion during the Pandemic



We also asked clergy: "Would you suggest any other possible method of administering the Holy Communion?" A number of them offered own ideas. Further, while some of their suggestions were simply possible ideas, the other were methods which they had already implemented in their parishes. Below we offer quotations reflecting the most interesting suggestions:

- From an OCA priest: "The communicants approach in line, keeping physical distance, and wearing masks. They will be encouraged to sanitize their hands before and after Communion since they will be touching their masks. Passing the table with empty paper cups so that each communicant takes one. Having approached the Chalice, a communicant, instead of removing his mask and opening his mouth, presents a cup to the priest. The priest deposits a particle of the Holy Gifts from the Chalice using the spoon into the cup, pronouncing the usual formula. The communicant, holding the cup, bows and moves away to the designated space (about 6 feet apart). He stops there, pulls the mask down, and partakes in the Holy Communion by up-ending the cup into his mouth. Then he pulls the mask back up. Going forward to the Communion table at the back of the church, he presents his empty cup to a server for post-communion wine. The wine will wash any trace of the Holy Communion. The communicant picks up another prepared cup from the table containing a piece of antidoron and moves to his original place to consume. The communicant deposits empty cups in a special container in the narthex. They will be burnt later."
- From an OCA priest: "The Lamb is cut into portions, the blood is added to each, and they are placed in individual paper (1 oz.) cups. The cups are distributed to each communicant. They consume and move to receive antidoran bread and wine in individual cups. The used paper cups are burned."
- From a GOA priest: "As in the Liturgy of St. James where the priest places the Body directly in to the mouth of the communicant."
- From an Antiochian priest: "The Holy Eucharist does not transmit disease, but the cloth we use to catch particles might. The only thing I would suggest to people is that they not wipe their mouths on the cloth."
- From a GOA priest: "Having been a microbiologist before becoming a priest, the only safe way to completely sterilize utensils against a novel virus would be in an autoclave as dentists and doctors use."
- From GOA priest: "I would intinct the bread into the chalice, and then place it directly into the person's mouth. I understand this was done several centuries ago."
- From a ROCOR priest: "At our Liturgy, Holy Communion is a portion of the Holy Lamb tintured with Holy Blood. We offer to the faithful on the paten (special plate) with portions appropriately spaced,

over a sacramental table covered with Communion cloth. Each faithful picks up a portion with their left hand, place in their right hand, and consumes. Each wipes hand and mouth with small rectangle of a paper towel and places paper in glass bowl for burning later. They get a piece of antidoron. Parent assists child.”

- From a Serbian Orthodox priest: “A second chalice with pre-sanctified dried Holy Gifts which could be placed in the hands of the faithful who would properly clean their hands before hand and after receiving Holy Communion.”

VII. Personal Thoughts of Parish Clergy about Serving Holy Communion during the Pandemic

The last question in the survey offered clergy opportunity to “share *any other* thoughts or experiences (either negative or positive) on serving Holy Communion under present circumstances.” Predictably, this question yielded a huge variety of answers. However, there were themes (or trends) in responses which were mentioned by many priests. We will first describe these most frequently repeated thoughts and then provide actual quotations exemplifying each trend.

The following six patterns in answers were most common:

1. Arguments *supporting* the need to make adjustments and change the manner in which Holy Communion is administered during the pandemic
2. Arguments *opposing* the changes in the methods used for administering the Holy Communion during the pandemic
3. Answers about the great need for a unified respond to the crisis (including the issue of Holy Communion), educational materials, and theological grounding/guidance which would come not from individual bishops (or jurisdictions) but from the Orthodox Church at large
4. Answers indicating that the clergy are agreeable with newly introduced innovations in administering Holy Communion, but would return to the traditional manner as soon as medical situation would permit
5. Answers reflecting confusion and perplexity resulting from situations in which bishops first issued certain directives and then changed them
6. Answers addressing various “technicalities” of administering Holy Communion during the pandemic or describing the nuances of offering this Sacrament to certain demographic groups (numerically the largest pattern of responses)

Below we offer actual quotations from the clergy exemplifying each pattern.

1. Arguments *supporting* the need to make adjustments and change the manner in which Holy Communion is administered during the pandemic

- The question is do we allow for the participation of the Eucharist in a manner that does not prevent people from participation during this pandemic. This is a culturally sensitive question for the American context. We can not use other cultural contexts where there may be a more fearful obedience to a diocesan autocratic leadership or superstitions over reason and science. Are we able to understand that the church is a living organism that allows change or do we adhere to a blind traditionalism and fundamentalism that is seen in cults?
- Communion should be available to as many as possible under current circumstances and social distancing. I am inclined to be flexible with distribution, one spoon per person sanitized after service. I understand the traditional belief about one spoon without cleaning because no one can be infected through Communion. But the truth of that matter requires empirical and historical justification for which I have basically seen only anecdotal impressions or prior theological arguments. Consecrated bread and wine as well as chalice and spoon retain their chemical properties even though bread and wine are Body and Blood of our Lord. This current virus is potentially too lethal especially for older parishioners to utterly disregard public health directives.
- Some variations in how the Eucharist is distributed are at best a non-issue. They can cause problems because we don't like change, but if we are affirming that receiving the Eucharist is for our life, health, and salvation, then I don't much care if we use different spoons. The only truly problematic variation I've heard of is when priests have been instructed to not distribute the Eucharist to the faithful. If I was told by secular authority that we need to cease distributing the Eucharist to the faithful, then we would consult with our Bishop on how best to absolutely disobey that directive.
- Receiving Holy Communion is a most sacred experience that is in no way conditioned by the number of spoons. We are made one by the One Body of Christ, regardless of how many spoons and chalices are used. We should not place stumbling blocks in the experience of our faithful, and we should also protect them by not exposing them to unnecessary (and possibly lethal) danger
- The church must revisit its understanding of the Eucharist. It is one cup not one spoon.
- I don't believe that the Body & Blood of Christ would transmit disease, but don't want such a concern to keep parishioners from the chalice.

2. Arguments *opposing* the changes in the methods used for administering the Holy Communion during the pandemic

- The manner of distribution directly affects the faith of the communicants. It has always been the universal belief of the Orthodox Church, reflected in its practice, that Holy Communion is the healing of soul and body, and cannot spread disease. To take these precautions against sharing germs is to cast doubt upon that belief.
- I come from a Western background, where liturgical change has had very harmful consequences for faith. Theology and liturgy really do go together, and changes in liturgy can quickly lead to changes in theology. The manner in which the Holy Communion is given must underline our firm belief that what is received is 'the Body and Blood of Our Lord.'
- My concern is that making temporary changes will change the very ethos of the Church. Either we believe it is the Body and Blood of Christ or we don't. Are we partaking in an unworthy manner by approaching the chalice with innovative means that are supposed to keep us safe? Do we believe in the cup of Salvation, for the healing of soul and body? Not one person in our parish has contracted Aids or the Corona Virus from the Chalice. Those that are afraid tend to not understand that it is the source of Life and not death or disease.
- I think we need to be very careful about changing any aspect of traditional Orthodox worship, especially those aspects that the faithful regularly expect. Presently they are not allowed to attend every service, venerate the Icons, or the Cross at the end of Liturgy. Multiple changes in the expectations of faithful may lead them to think other aspects of the Faith are simply arbitrary or optional and lead to casual disregard for traditional Orthodox observance, to the detriment of their souls and further erosion of parish life.
- The manner of the sacrament's distribution (spoon if Eucharist, wand/brush/finger if anointing) is part of accepting the sacrament. By allowing multiple spoons or "cleansing" after each communicant, we "teach" that the Body and Blood of Christ CAN BE contaminated. What folly is this? If people choose to remain away from the sacraments, their breaking communion with the church is an element for them to deal with before God, hopefully while being encouraged by their spiritual father to return to communion. Changing "the manner" is counter to teaching our faith in its fullness.

3. Answers about the great need for a unified respond to the crisis (including the issue of Holy Communion), educational materials, and theological grounding/guidance which would come not from individual bishops (or jurisdictions) but from the Orthodox Church at large

- I believe there should have been 100% unity on behalf of the hierarchs from the very beginning so as to not put us in this position we are currently in. I am disappointed at the lack of leadership from the whole top in the USA.
- Clarity and better theological reasoning in directions given to us would have been very appreciated. We have obeyed the directions given to us, but were frustrated at the lack of substantial theological reasoning regarding changing the practice of administering Holy Communion.
- It was appalling that NO educational programs re "Participation in the Holy Communion is critical, not the manner of its distribution" were launched. Instead, strange spiritual leaders and elders were allowed to share their unsubstantiated personal opinions unchecked. It would have helped if Slavic Instructional notes were published and widely circulated, and that would have helped clergy to formulate their opinion and position.
- I think all hierarchs need to do much more in placing this issue (as well as the others, i.e. face masks, social distancing) in its theological and historic context.
- It is very awkward now. It would be best if all our bishops could agree. The manner of receiving affects the experience of the communicant, so it is also of great importance. Not sure it is Orthodox to separate manner from the thing itself. It's like Schmemmann's example of boiling an egg. When does boiling happen? At the moment you turn off the burner? No it's a continuum. So this doesn't convince me either way, regarding the correct decision about changing the manner or not.
- It is very hard when rules change from Diocese to Diocese - a problem that affects many areas within the Church.

4. Answers indicating that the clergy are agreeable with newly introduced innovations in administering Holy Communion, but would return to the traditional manner as soon as medical situation would permit

- My people have been very patient through all of this as they are just thankful to be able to be back at liturgy at church even though it's not inside the temple as we are worshiping outside. And they are very thankful to be able to receive the Holy Gifts even though it is not exactly the same way we did before. I believe that after this crisis passes and it is no different than flu for us, we should go back to our traditional way of giving communion with one spoon from the chalice.

- We will continue to commune the laity in this new manner until the present situation drastically improves. We look forward to resuming the traditional manner of communing all as soon as is possible.

5. Answers reflecting confusion and perplexity resulting from situations in which bishops first issued certain directives and then changed them

- Several of my more pious parishioners were so scandalized by the requirement to sanitize the spoons that they stopped attending services at our church. Our bishop recently gave permission to now revert to the traditional method, but the damage has already been done. Now, those who remained have gotten accustomed to sanitizing the spoon and some would probably revolt if I stopped doing it. It is a bizarre position to be in.
- The multiple spoons were used in our parish by the instruction of our Bishop. He has blessed us to return back to using one spoon. It was very confusing for many people. It seems that if we use multiple spoons for safety, then we should always use multiple spoons to mitigate the risk of disease transmission, if that is the concern. Otherwise, maintaining the use of one spoon seems to be most consistent with our Tradition and beliefs surrounding Holy Communion.

6. Answers addressing various “technicalities” of administering Holy Communion during the pandemic or describing the nuances of offering this Sacrament to certain demographic groups

- Because it is difficult for older people to put their heads back, I have a podium that is between me and them. I have placed paper napkins on top, one for each person, that they use. We also sanitize their hands before they come up to receive Communion. If they have a problem with getting dizzy they ~~put~~ hold the podium to steady themselves. So far it is working very well this way. Also, then I do not need anyone to hold a napkin for me, it is just me and the communicant.
- In the time of COVID 19 we have left it to the choice of the parishioners to receive the Holy Communion either in a traditional way or by choosing the option of having it with an individual spoon.
- The method of distributing communion should be as non-distracting as possible. I feel that cleaning/sanitizing DURING distribution will either be distracting or simply not done properly. If we are going to take the time to sanitize, it should be a careful and methodical process, not rushed. Most sanitizing methods require minutes (4-10) to be effective.

- I believe that it is imperative that the Holy Gifts are treated with the utmost reverence, even if we make some changes to the method of distribution. We use multiple spoons (about 10) by rotation, placed in boiling water in a special liturgical vessel on an electric burner, and this water is consumed by the priest after the conclusion of Liturgy. I am strongly against any method that would involve disposable spoons or "sanitizing" in a chemical that cannot be consumed with reverence.
- With the head tilted back, with the mouth wide open and dropping the host into the open mouth is not practical for most small children.
- For converts who have difficulty in embracing the spoon to start with, the calling of it into question in recent months has proved to be a stumbling block. Trying to retrain people in the face of a crisis is not helpful to faith and piety.
- We are using paper napkins instead of the communion cloth (each person takes one and holds it under their chin), which are then burned later. We are also placing the antidoron in small plastic ziplock bags and each person takes one.
- I am the only person distributing Communion so it is easier for me to have multiple spoons. This way I am not worried about sanitizing one spoon, because I have multiple spoons. Parishioners are comfortable with the set up. Also, they each pick up their own paper napkin, to put under their chin.
- I additionally put on a clear face shield for distributing the Eucharist.
- I'm using the practice which my PhD Parishioner, infectious disease doctor recommended, but I am now at odds with my Metropolis guidelines. The logic of taking all the precautions of not kissing Icons etc. but excluding the spoon from these precautions eludes me.
- COVID-19 is not transmitted by eating—it is transmitted by airborne "drops" that are breathed in. Stomach acids kill the virus. The manner of serving Communion is not the issue here. We would more likely control possible spread of disease by simply "reading" the liturgy rather than singing it. It is more likely spread when people (choir or congregation) sing, regardless of whether or not they are wearing a mask.

In Conclusion: Good News, Bad News, and the Vital Next Step

Our deep gratitude to the 609 priests, representing all Orthodox jurisdictions and regions of the country, who contributed to this study. They shared not only factual information about the parishes but – most importantly – their personal, very honest, and frank reflections and thoughts. With their help we were able to paint a picture of the great variety of approaches taken by parishes in administering the Sacrament of Holy Communion during the pandemic.

It was noted previously, and bears repeating, that this study by no means attempts to either advocate or criticize the different ways of serving Holy Communion that are presently being used in various parishes. Accordingly, there will be no “concluding discussion” about positives and negatives of various approaches to administering this Sacrament. The preceding pages contain a rich source of information for parishioners, clergy, scholars, and church leaders who may wish to engage in such discussions.

Instead, it seems important, in conclusion, to bring attention to two findings of this study which should be considered by all those involved in decision making at the parish, diocesan and national levels.

The good news is that (as discussed in chapter IV and V), despite the variety of approaches to serving Holy Communion, the vast majority (86%) of clergy feel that they presently administer this Sacrament in *their parishes* in a way that reflects their personal preference. Some priests might feel theoretically unhappy or even scandalized by certain changes (or absence of changes) in administering Holy Communion in other parishes, but there is no evidence of the large-scale seething discontent that might arise if they were compelled to offer the Eucharist in a manner that they considered unacceptable. Further, most parishioners are perceived by their priests to be satisfied as well: only 6% of clergy feel that the current manner of distribution of Holy Communion did NOT reflect the preference of most parishioners; and another 15% had “parishioners [who] are quite divided in their opinions.” That is, in the overall national picture and in the vast majority of parishes, both clergy and laity are satisfied with how Holy Communion is administered in *their parish communities*.

The bad news or rather unsurprising reality is that personal approaches and opinions of clergy representing various Orthodox jurisdictions are clearly different. In chapter VI, we discussed survey data indicating the very different viewpoints of Antiochian, GOA, OCA, and ROCOR priests about how much flexibility in serving the Sacrament of Holy Communion should be permitted under the present extraordinary circumstances.

In short, the distinctive “internal culture” of each jurisdiction is the most important predictor of the clergy’s personal opinions and feelings on this topic. We called this finding “bad news,” because, as a consequence, it would be very difficult to articulate any common, uniform policies which could be “happily adopted” by all jurisdictions.

What might be the next step in addressing this difficult question – administering the Sacrament of Holy Communion during the pandemic? So far, we have been able to learn about approaches taken by American Orthodox hierarchs (reflected in their guidelines and directives) and hear the perspectives of the clergy (found and discussed in this study). We believe it is also crucially important to hear and learn from Orthodox parishioners – both in leadership positions and ordinary “people in the pews.” It is our sincere hope that either some national jurisdictions or their individual dioceses will be interested in helping with such a study. If so, please communicate with us either via email, orthodoxdata@usreligioncensus.org, or via the contact form on our website, www.orthodoxreality.org.

We encourage you to share this report with your parish communities as well as with Orthodox friends and relatives. And, of course, we welcome your feedback and suggestions. Furthermore, if your national jurisdiction, diocese, or parish is interested in a more in-depth examination of any of the subjects presented in this report, we would welcome such inquiries and try to help. You can send your requests via email or the contact form indicated above.