



Alexei Krindatch (akrindatch@aol.com), Coordinator

National Census of Orthodox Christian Churches / 2020 US Religion Census

www.usreligioncensus.org, www.orthodoxreality.org

The Orthodox Church in America (OCA): a Decade of Changes in Parishes, Membership, and Worship Attendance

Contents:

To trigger your interest: examples of what 2020 Census of OCA Parishes revealed	p. 2
Data and Definitions Used in this Report	p. 2
OCA: National Overview	p. 3
OCA in 2020: Diocese-by-Diocese	p. 5
OCA Dioceses: from 2010 to 2020	p. 8
OCA Geography	p. 12
Maps of OCA parishes and members	
Map 1. State-by-State cartogram of OCA adherents	p. 14
Map 2. Geographic concentration of OCA adherents by US counties	p. 15
Map 3. Number of OCA adherents by US counties	p. 16
Map 4. Location of OCA parishes by US counties	p. 17
Map 5. Number of OCA parishes by US counties	p. 18
Map 6. Change in number of OCA parishes by US counties between 2010 and 2020	p. 19
Map 7. Change in number of OCA adherents by US counties between 2010 and 2020	p. 20
Map 8. OCA adherents as percentage (%) of total population by US counties	p. 21

To trigger your interest, here are examples of what 2020 Census of OCA Parishes revealed:

- ❖ From 2010 to 2020, the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) experienced a decline in overall membership. The total number of all adherents¹ dropped from 84,449 to 74,415 (-12%), while the decrease in regular attendees was smaller: from 33,495 to 32,484 (-3%).²
- ❖ However, these changes in membership were quite different in the various dioceses. Between 2010 and 2020, three OCA dioceses grew, while eight declined.
- ❖ OCA dioceses vary greatly in terms of how many of their total adherents attend church regularly. Parishes in the Archdiocese of Washington, DC, and the Diocese of the South have the highest proportion of regular attendees among total adherents (69% and 58% respectively). On the opposite end are the Albanian Archdiocese and the Diocese of Alaska, where less than one-quarter of parishioners attend their churches regularly.
- ❖ Nearly half (48.1%) of all OCA adherents live in just five states: Alaska (16.3%), Pennsylvania (10.3%), Ohio (8%), New York (6.8%), and California (6.7%). In comparison, only a quarter (25.8%) of the total US population lives in these states.

Data and Definitions Used in this Report

In the 2010 and 2020 US Religion Census (www.usreligioncensus.org), each OCA parish was asked two questions:

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

The answer to the first question gives information on the number of *all adherents*. This is the most inclusive category of membership that reflects the total number of persons involved – some regularly and some occasionally – in the life of the local parish community. The answer to the second question indicates the number of *regular attendees* – the number of parishioners who participate in the life of a parish on a regular weekly basis. The *percentage of regular attendees among total adherents* can be seen as a measure of church commitment among parishioners. In essence, it shows the size of the “membership nucleus” formed by regularly involved people versus the remaining parishioners who participate only occasionally or marginally.

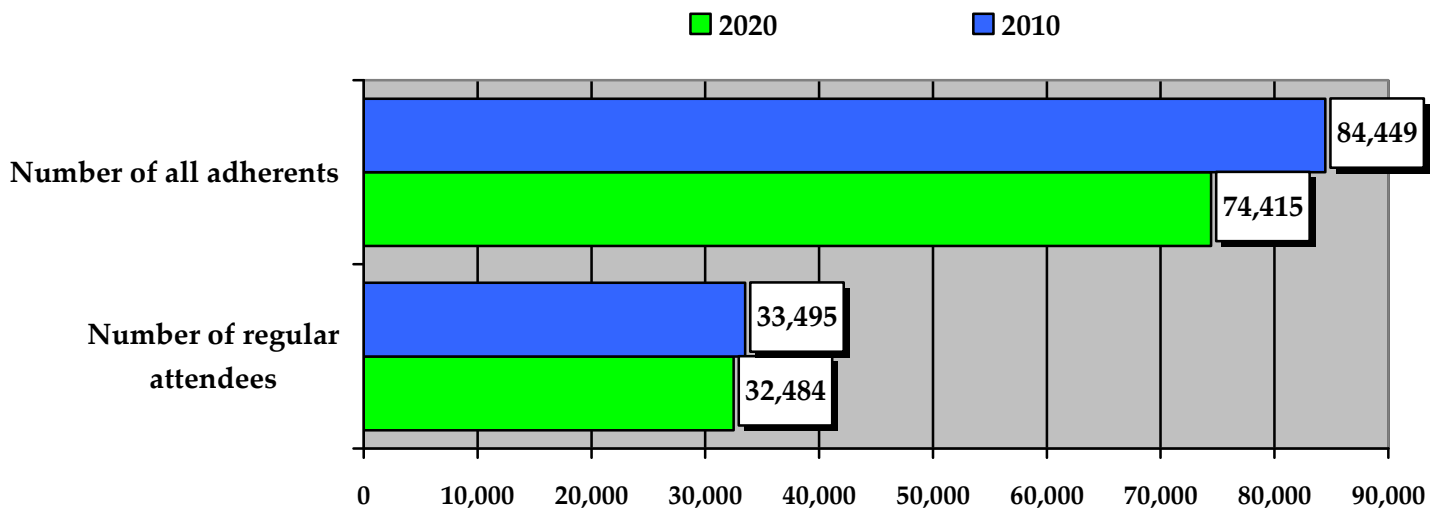
¹ For definitions of “adherents” and “regular attendees,” see the next section of this report

OCA: National Overview

If measured by the number of all adherents (regular attendees and occasional/marginal participants), the estimated membership of the Orthodox Church in America in 2020 is 74,415 people (including children). Looking only at the number of regular attendees, the estimated OCA membership is 32,484 (including children). That is, 44% of OCA parishioners (32,484 out of 74,415) participate in church life on a regular basis.

Between 2010 and 2020, the OCA experienced a decline in membership. However, the losses in total adherents were greater than the decrease in regular attendees. The number of all adherents dropped from 84,449 to 74,415 (-12%), while the decline in regular attendees was smaller: from 33,495 to 32,484 (-3%). See Fig. 1.

Figure 1 OCA: Change in Membership from 2010 to 2020



When looking at changes in adherents parish-by-parish, out of 522 parishes that existed in both 2010 and 2020, 291 declined, 21 remained the same, and 210 increased. When looking at changes in regular attendees, 260 parishes declined, 51 remained the same, and 211 grew. Table 1 on the next page summarizes 2010-2020 changes in OCA membership and parishes. It also indicates the current (2020) size of a “typical” median³ parish measured either by all adherents or only by regular attendees. Looking at the total number of adherents involved in a life of a parish, the “typical” OCA church has 95 people. When counting only those people who attend regularly, the median OCA church has 41 active participants. Table 1 also offers the list of the largest

³ For a list of values that is in order, the median is the value that is in the middle of the list. Suppose we have nine parishes with memberships of 10, 13, 15, 20, 25, 30, 31, 37, and 40. The size of a median parish in this list is 25 members – the value that separates the four smaller and four larger parishes. If there is an even number of parishes, then the median is the average of the two middle values. Suppose we have ten parishes with memberships of 10, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 30, 31, 37, and 40. Here, the size of a median parish is 24 – the average of 23 and 25.

OCA parishes measured either by total adherents or by regular attendees. Note that, because of the varied attendance rates, the parishes with the largest communities of total adherents are not necessarily the same as those with the greatest number of “people in the pews” on any given Sunday.

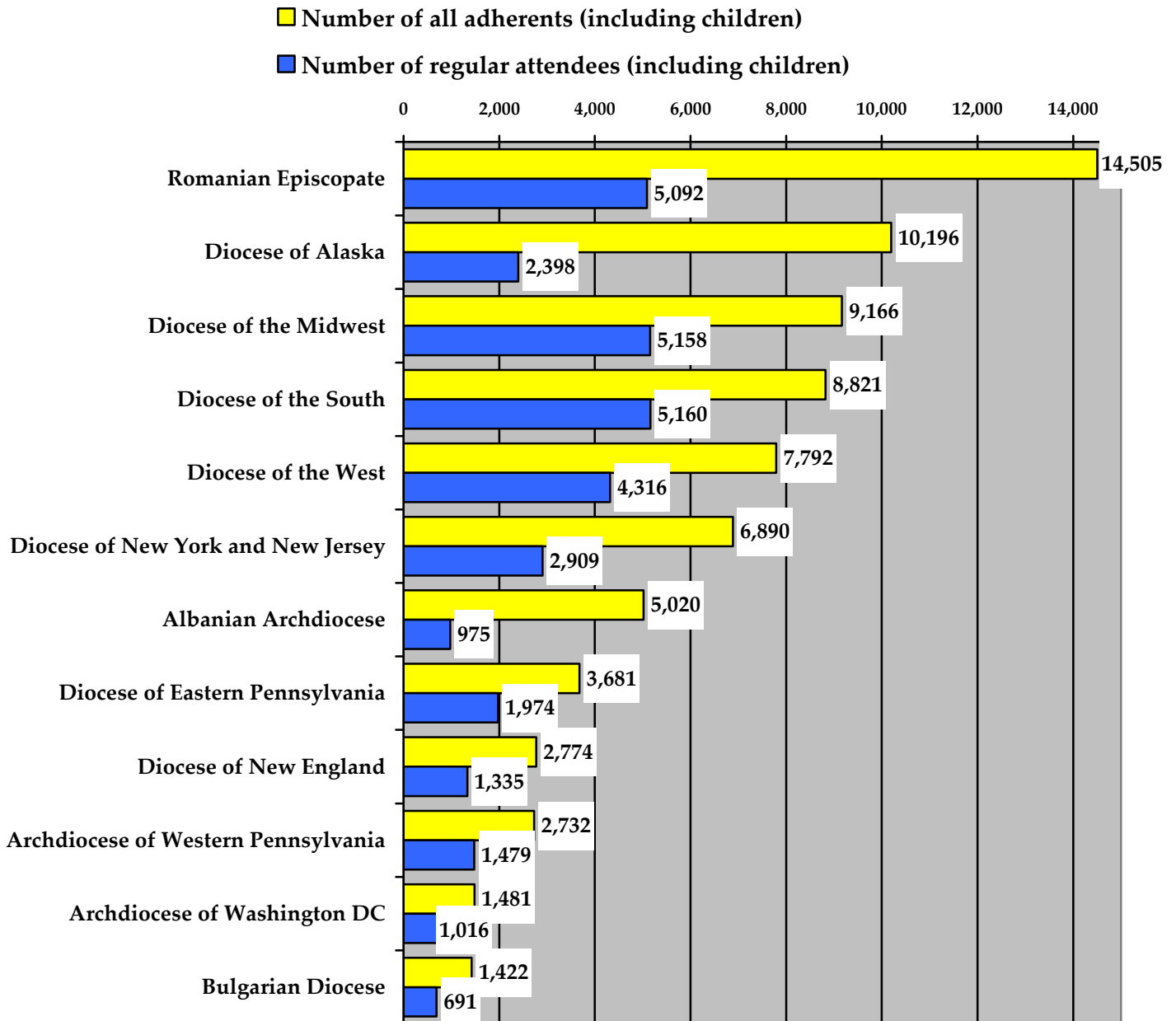
Table 1 Overview of Parishes and Membership of the Orthodox Church in America

Change in the number of parishes and missions: 2010 → 2020	560 → 559 (37 were founded while 38 closed since 2010)
Change in the number of total adherents: 2010 → 2020	84,449 → 74,415 (-12%)
Change in the number of regular attendees: 2010 → 2020	33,495 → 32,484 (-3%)
Size of a median parish measured by number of total adherents in 2020	95
Size of a median parish measured by number of regular attendees in 2020	41
Largest parishes by number of total adherents (including children) in 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary, Cleveland, OH (2000 people) ➤ St. George, South Boston, MA (1300) ➤ St. Innocent, Anchorage, AK (900) ➤ Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Worcester, MA (850) ➤ Holy Nativity of the Lord, Chicago, IL (800) ➤ St. George, Southfield, MI (800) ➤ Holy Virgin Mary, Los Angeles, CA (700) ➤ St. Mary, Minneapolis, MN (700) ➤ St. John Chrysostom, Philadelphia, PA (675) ➤ St. Joseph, Wheaton, IL (625)
Largest parishes by number of regular attendees (including children) in 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ St. Nicholas, Washington, DC (355 people) ➤ St. Mary, Minneapolis, MN (310) ➤ Holy Nativity of the Lord, Chicago, IL (300) ➤ St. Joseph, Wheaton, IL (275) ➤ Falling Asleep of the Ever Virgin Mary, Cleveland, OH (250) ➤ Archangel Michael, Broadview Heights, IL (240) ➤ St. George, South Boston, MA (225) ➤ Sts. Constantine and Helen, Colorado Springs, CO (225)

OCA in 2020: Diocese-by-Diocese

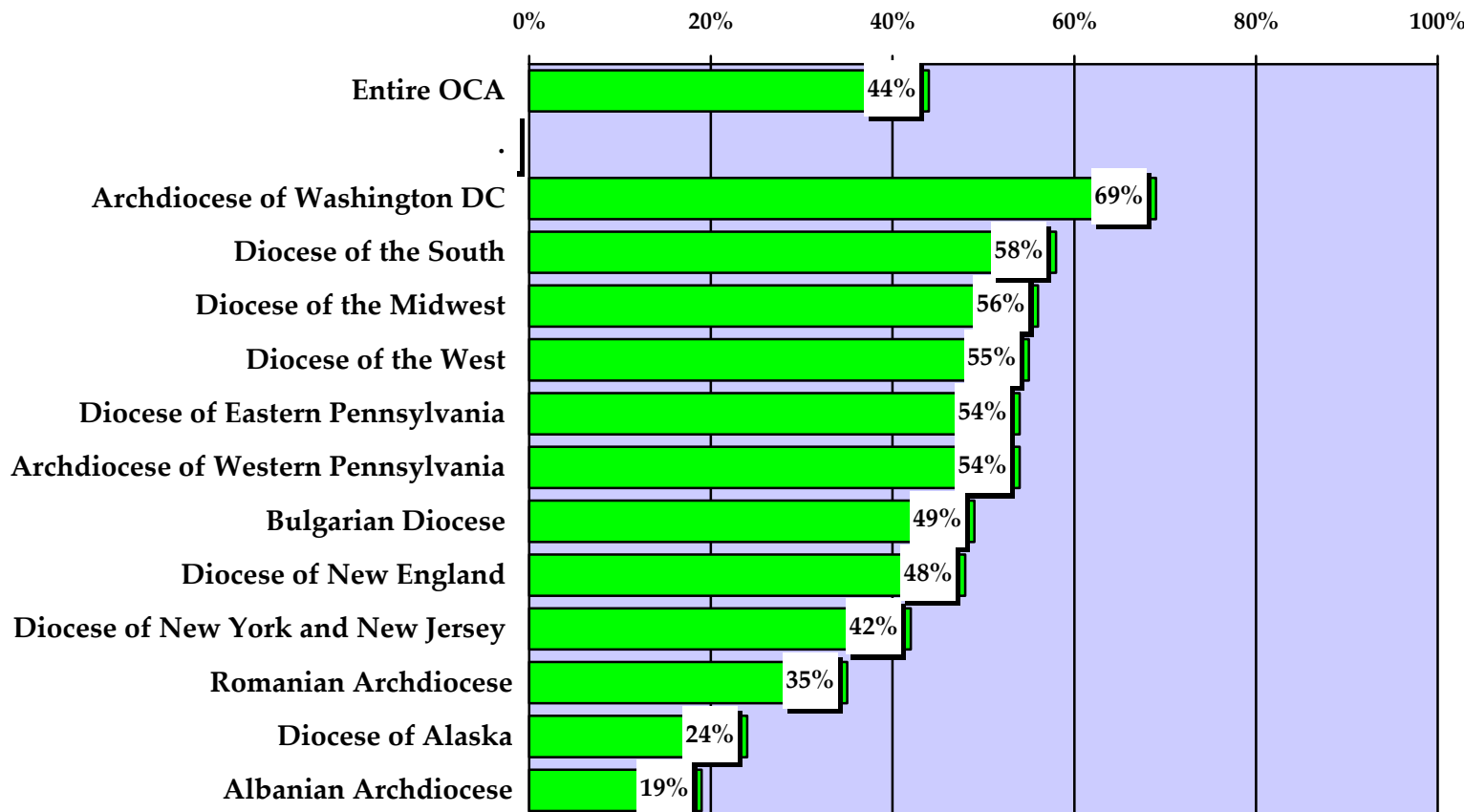
If measured by the number of total adherents, the membership of the OCA dioceses varies from 14,505 in Romanian Episcopate to 1,422 in Bulgarian Diocese. When counting only regular attendees, the OCA dioceses vary in size from 5,160 in the Diocese of the South to 691 in the Bulgarian Diocese (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 OCA Dioceses: Number of Adherents and Regular Attendees (2020)



The OCA dioceses vary greatly in terms of the percentage of regular attendees among total adherents. Figure 3 shows that the Archdiocese of Washington DC and the Diocese of the South have the highest proportion of members who participate in the parishes on a regular basis (69% and 58% respectively). On the opposite end are the Albanian Archdiocese and the Diocese of Alaska where less than one-quarter of parishioners attend their churches regularly.

Figure 3 Percentage of Regular Attendees among Total Adherents



Because of such significant variations in the percentage of regular attendees among total adherents, the “contribution” of each diocese to total OCA membership depends on how membership is measured: by all adherents or only by the regular attendees. Figures 4a and 4b on the next page demonstrate this.

If one thinks about church membership in terms of all adherents, then the Romanian Episcopate and the Diocese of Alaska together account for one-third (33.5%) of OCA parishioners. But counting only more committed church members (i.e. regular attendees), the share of these two Dioceses in the entire OCA is much smaller: just 23.1%. Instead, the “major contributors” to OCA membership by this measure are the Diocese of the South and the Diocese of the Midwest, each of which accounts for 15.9% of OCA regular attendees.

Figure 4a. Share of each Diocese in Total OCA Adherents (2020)

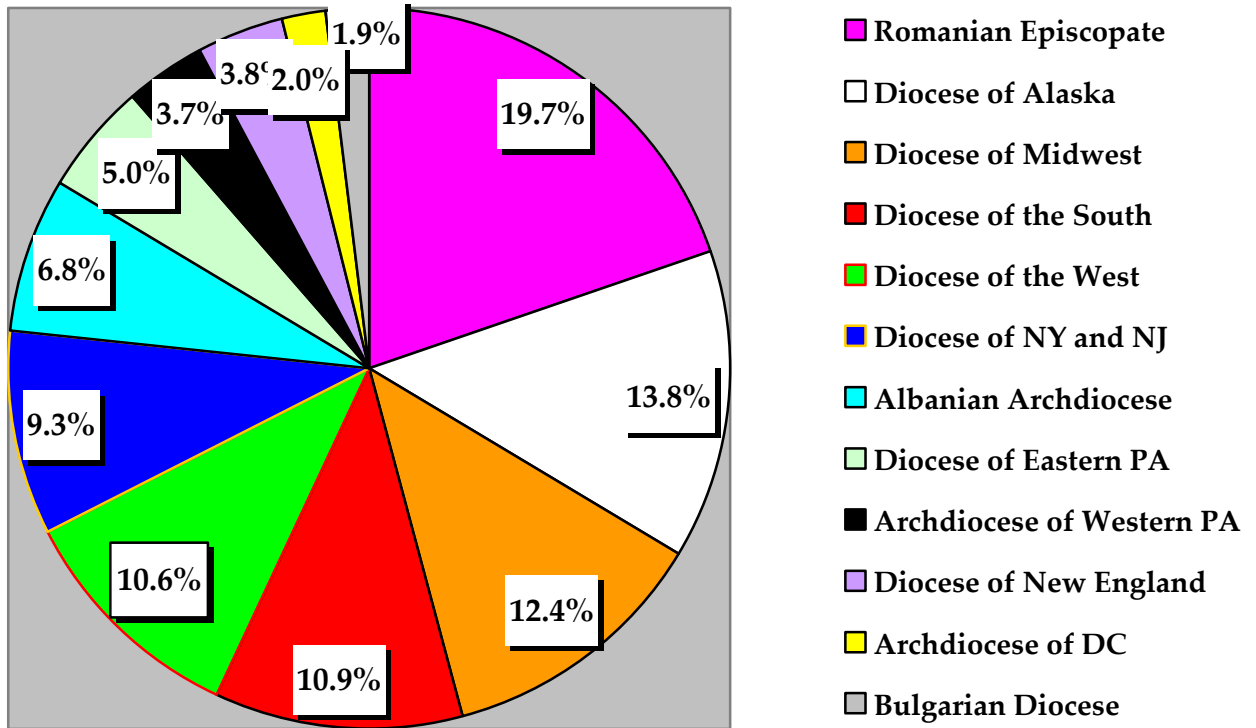
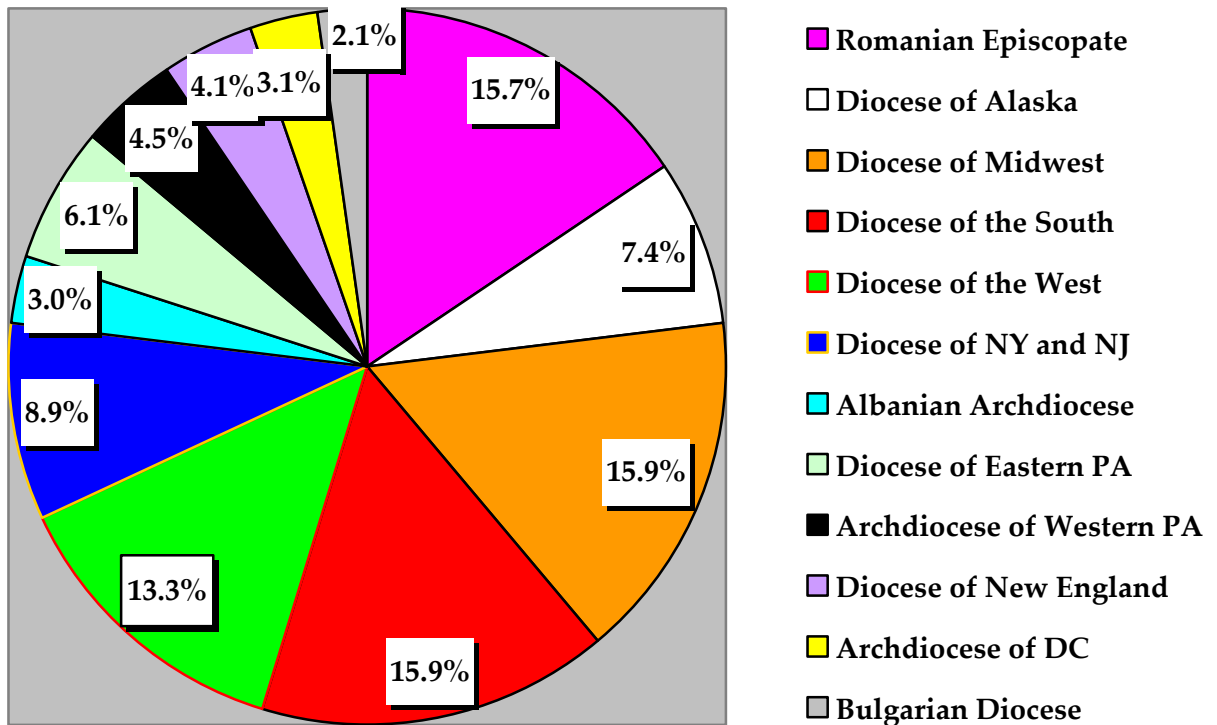


Figure 4b Share of Each Diocese in the Number of OCA Regular Attendees

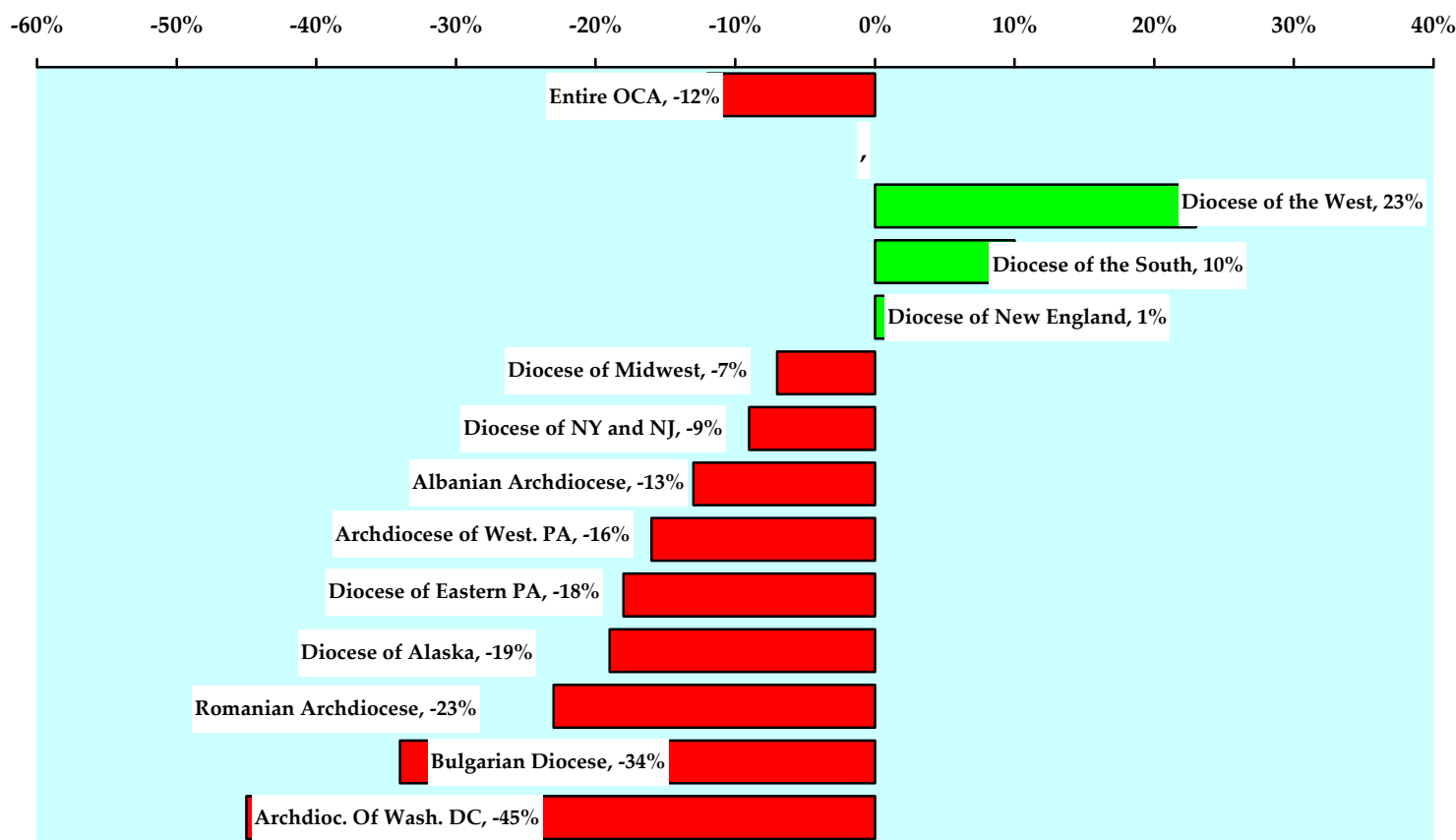


OCA Dioceses: from 2010 to 2020

Earlier we reported that between 2010 and 2020 the OCA overall experienced a membership decline of -12% in the number of all adherents and -3% in the number of regular attendees. However, this dynamic was quite different for various dioceses: some of them grew, while some suffered significant losses.

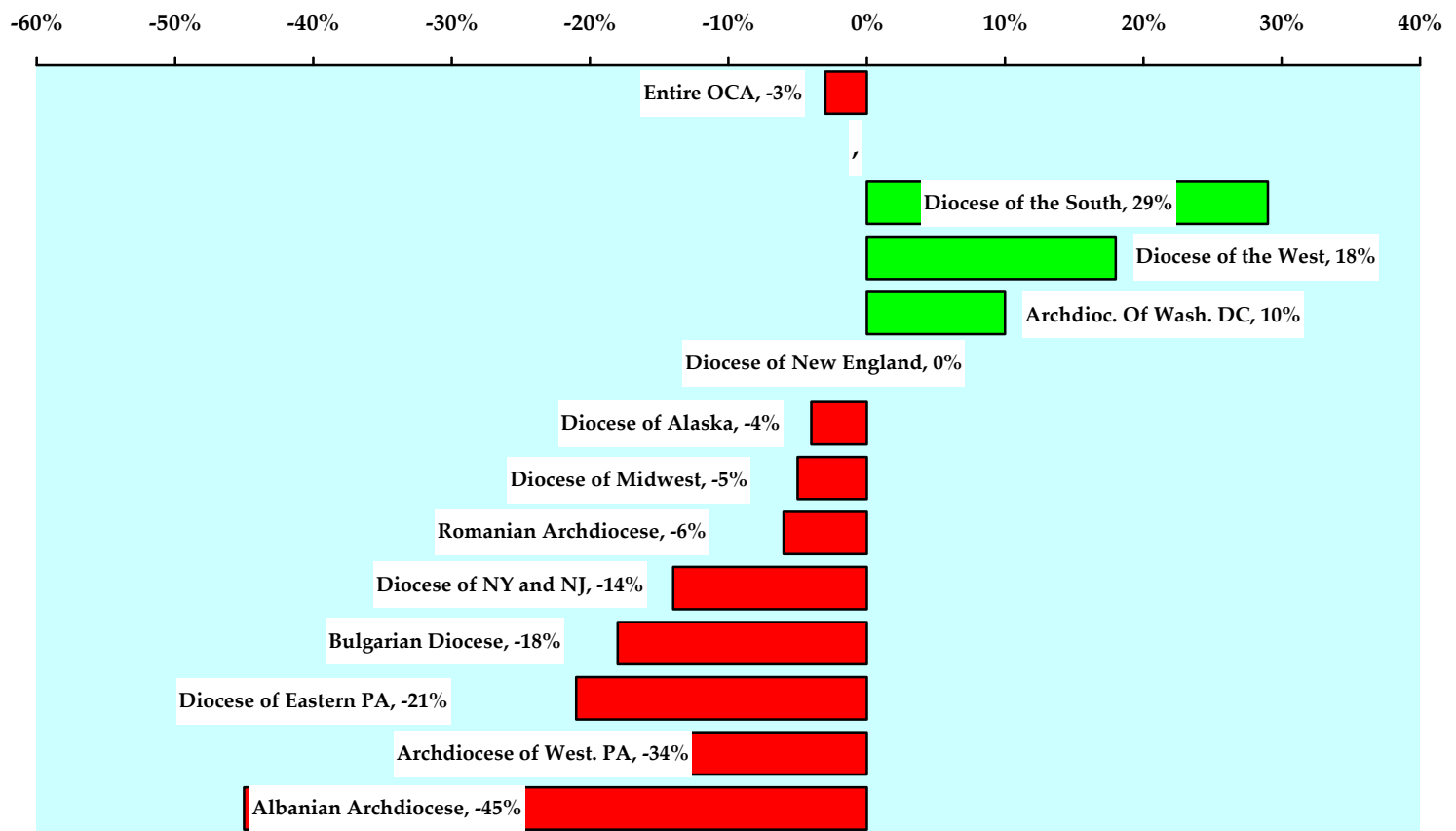
Judging by 2010-2020 changes in total adherents, three dioceses are “in green:” Diocese of the West (+23%), Diocese of the South (+10%), and Diocese of New England (+1%).

Figure 5a Percentage Changes in Total Adherents between 2010 and 2020 (2010=100%)



Looking at changes in regular attendees (Figure 5b), those showing growth were: Diocese of the South (+29%), Diocese of the West (+18%), and Archdiocese of Washington, DC (+10%). The latter case is especially interesting, because it was also the Archdiocese of Washington DC that (among all OCA dioceses) experienced the greatest losses in total adherents (- 45%). In other words, from 2010-2020 in the Archdiocese, a vast number of occasionally/marginally involved parishioners departed from their churches altogether,⁴ but, at the same time, there was an increase (although less massive) in parishioners who demonstrate stronger church commitment.

Figure 5b Percentage Changes in Number of Regular Attendees between 2010 and 2020 (2010=100%)



⁴ Including, of course, also such reason as deaths or moving to other areas of the country.

As a result of these uneven changes in members, the relative “weight” of various Dioceses in the entire OCA membership has changed significantly in the past decade. Fig. 6a, 6b and 6c help to visualize these 2010-2020 changes.

Figure 6a OCA Dioceses: Number of Adherents in 2020 vs. 2010

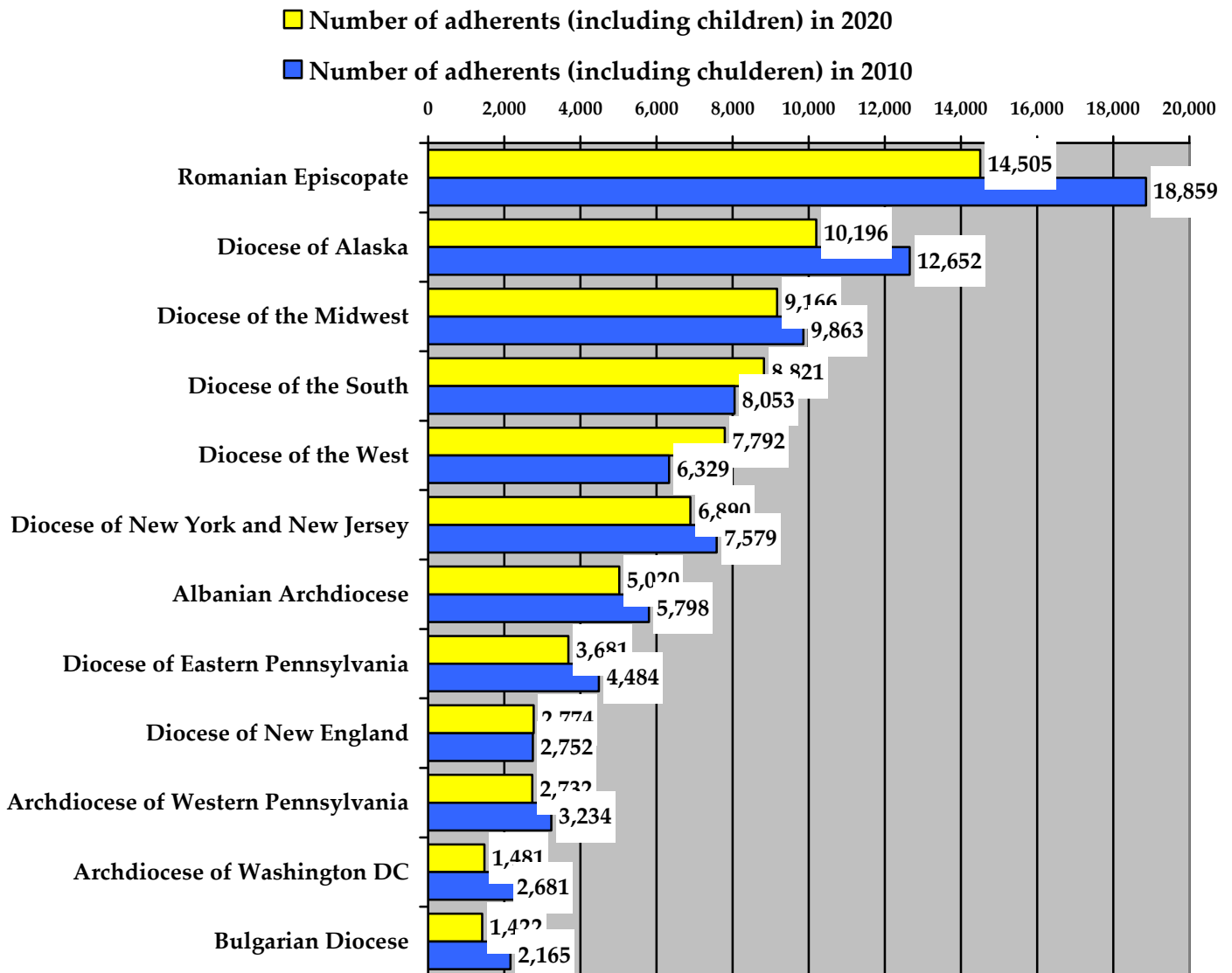


Figure 6b Share of each Diocese in total OCA Adherents in 2010

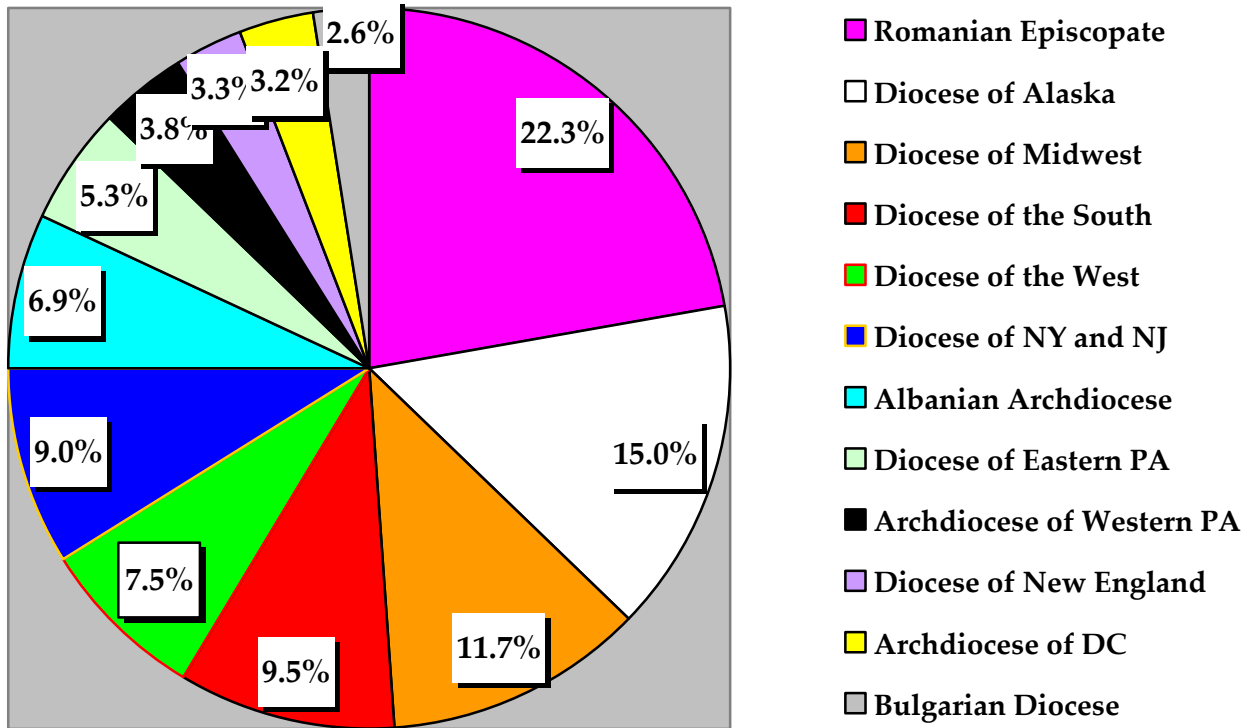
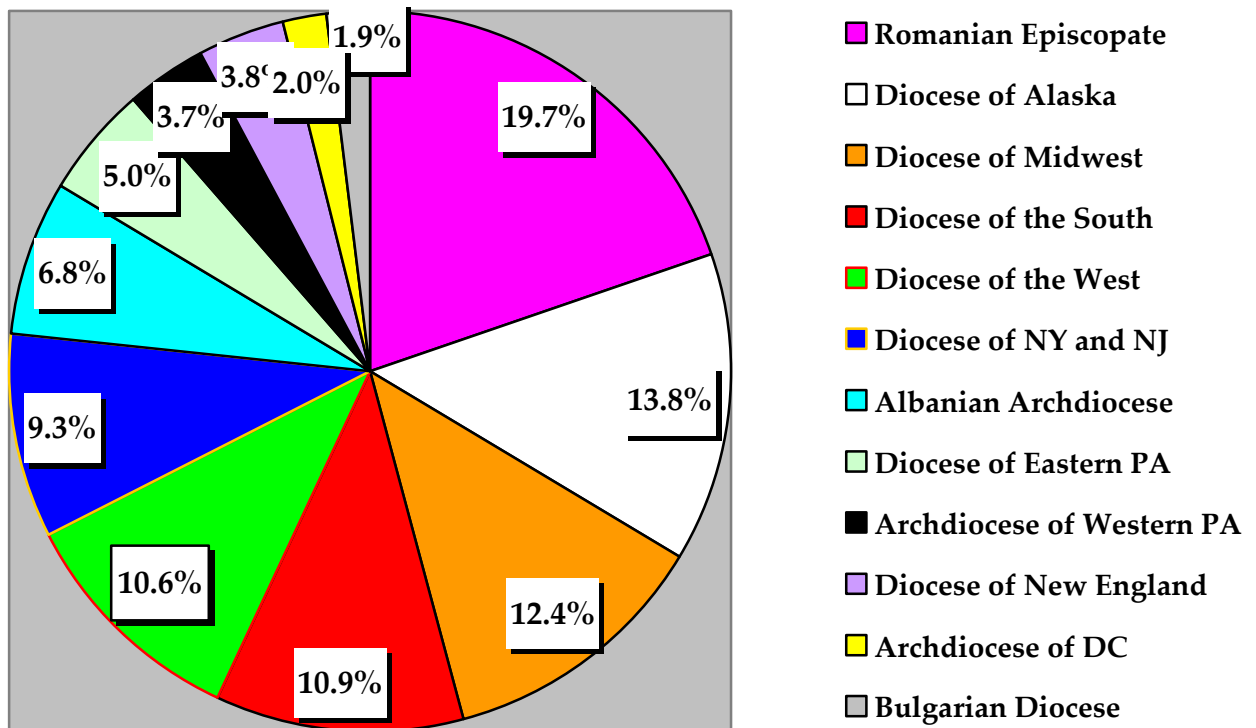


Figure 6c Share of Each Diocese in total OCA Adherents in 2020



OCA Geography

The OCA has parishes or missions in almost all states except Idaho, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming. At the same time, her parishes and members are especially concentrated in certain areas of the country. Therefore, the geography of OCA churches and parishioners does not mirror that of the general US population.

Specifically, in 2020 nearly half of all OCA adherents (48.1%) were in just five states: Alaska (16.3%), Pennsylvania (10.3%), Ohio (8%), New York (6.8%), and California (6.7%). In comparison, only a quarter (25.8%) of the general US population lives in these five states.

The same five states also have the largest numbers of OCA parishes. Combined, these five states account for 48.8% OCA parishes: Alaska (14.9%), Pennsylvania (13.8%), New York (7%), California (6.8%), and Ohio (6.3%). The disparity between the percentage of adherents versus percentage of parishes in each state is due to differences in the average size of a parish in each state. For example, Pennsylvania's parishes tend to be smaller than the national OCA average, so this state has smaller share of members (10.3%) than the share of parishes (13.8%). Conversely, Ohio has larger parishes than the national OCA average, so it has greater share of members (8%) than would be expected from its share of parishes (just 6.3%).

While in 2020, the "big five" had nearly half of all adherents, they had only 40.4% of regular attendees: Pennsylvania (11.5%), Ohio (7.6%), Alaska (7.6%), California (7.2%), and New York (6.5%). Thus, regular attendees are somewhat less geographically concentrated in just the five "big" OCA states than are total adherents.

What does this disparity mean? If certain state has a lower share of OCA regular attendees compared to its share of all adherents, this means that (on average) the parishes in this state have lower rates of church attendance. For example, Alaska accounts for only 7.6% of regular attendees, even though it has 16.3% of all OCA adherents. This shows that the rates of church attendance in Alaskan parishes are less than half of the OCA national average. New York and Ohio also follow this pattern. However, Pennsylvania presents the opposite case. This state has a greater share (11.5%) of OCA regular attendees than it does of all OCA adherents (10.3%), indicating that parishioners in Pennsylvania's parishes attend more regularly than the national average. The same pattern is true for California.

Overall, which states have the highest and which have the lowest rates of church attendance? The top five states by the percentage of regular attendees among all adherents are Vermont (83%), Maine (78%), Louisiana (70%), Delaware (70%), and Colorado (69%). States with the lowest rates of attendance are Alaska (20%), Massachusetts (26%), Connecticut (39%), Ohio (40%) and New York (40%).

In conclusion, we offer readers several maps to help visualize both the current geography of OCA members and parishes, as well as the major geographic changes between the first Census of US Orthodox Parishes in 2010 and the 2020 Census. Map 1 is the so-called “cartogram map.” It is a US map where each state is resized proportionate to the number of OCA adherents in this state. For example, the OCA has 3,707 adherents in Michigan and 2,557 in Texas. Accordingly, on this map Michigan is shown as 1.5 times larger than Texas.

Map 2 depicts the concentration of adherents by county in the USA. The red-colored counties have the largest numbers of OCA adherents. Combined, the 35 red-colored counties account for half (50%) of all OCA adherents. The blue counties show the remaining counties with OCA parishes and missions, accounting for the other half.

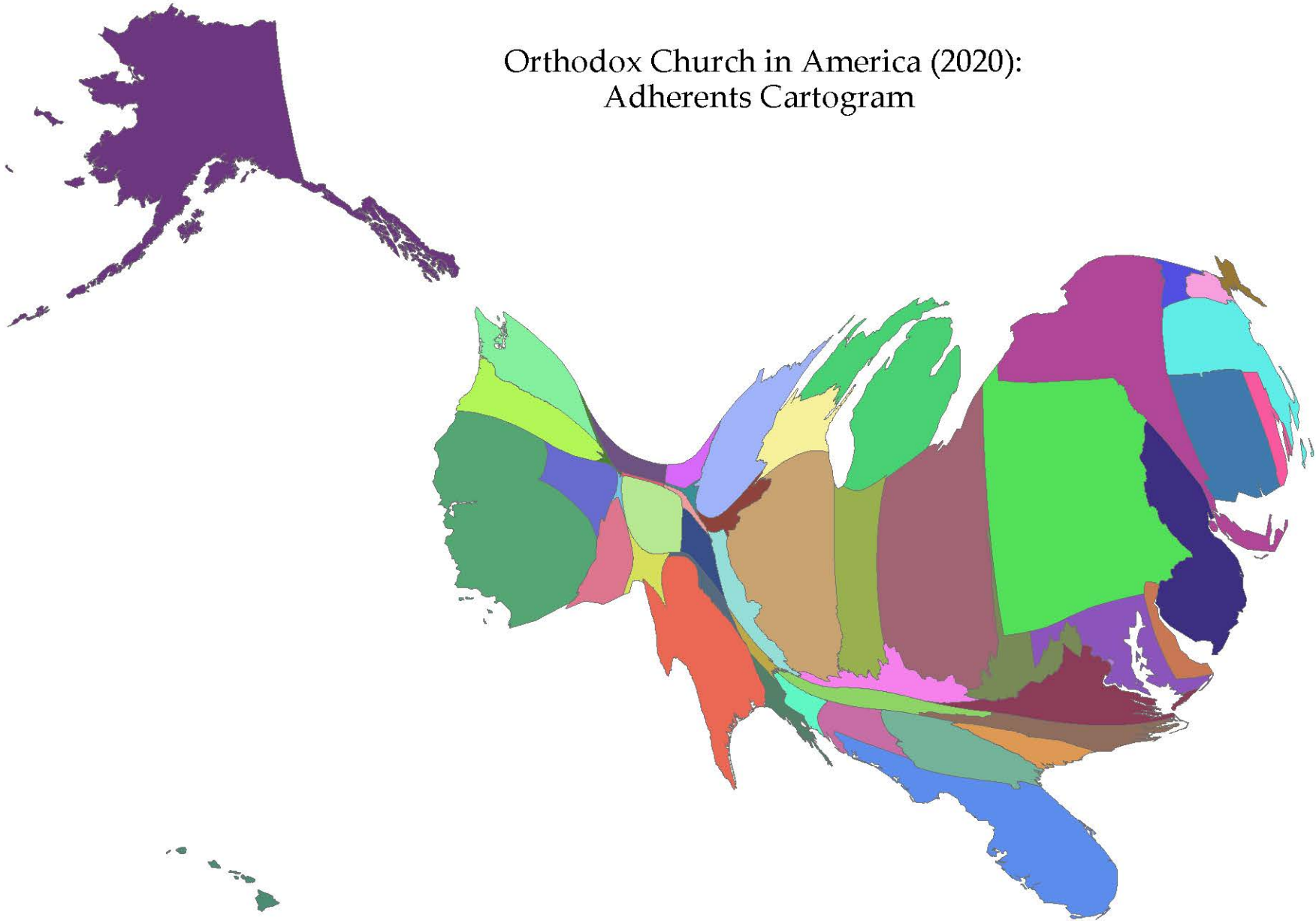
Map 3 shows the total number of OCA adherents per county, for all counties with OCA parishes or missions.

Maps 4 and 5 show the geography and total number of OCA parishes and missions in each US county.

Maps 6 and 7 show most important county-by-county changes in the geography of OCA parishes and membership between 2010 and now. During this decade, the OCA “entered” and established parishes and missions in 24 new counties (colored in green). During the same period, however, 20 counties “lost” OCA parishes and missions (colored in red). As a result, in 2020, the OCA had parishes and missions in 316 counties in comparison with 312 counties 10 years ago. In some counties, there were significant changes in the total number of OCA adherents: either impressive growth (more than +50%) or dramatic decline (more than -50%). These counties are colored in light green and pink respectively.

Finally, Map 8 shows the percentage of OCA adherents in each county’s total population.

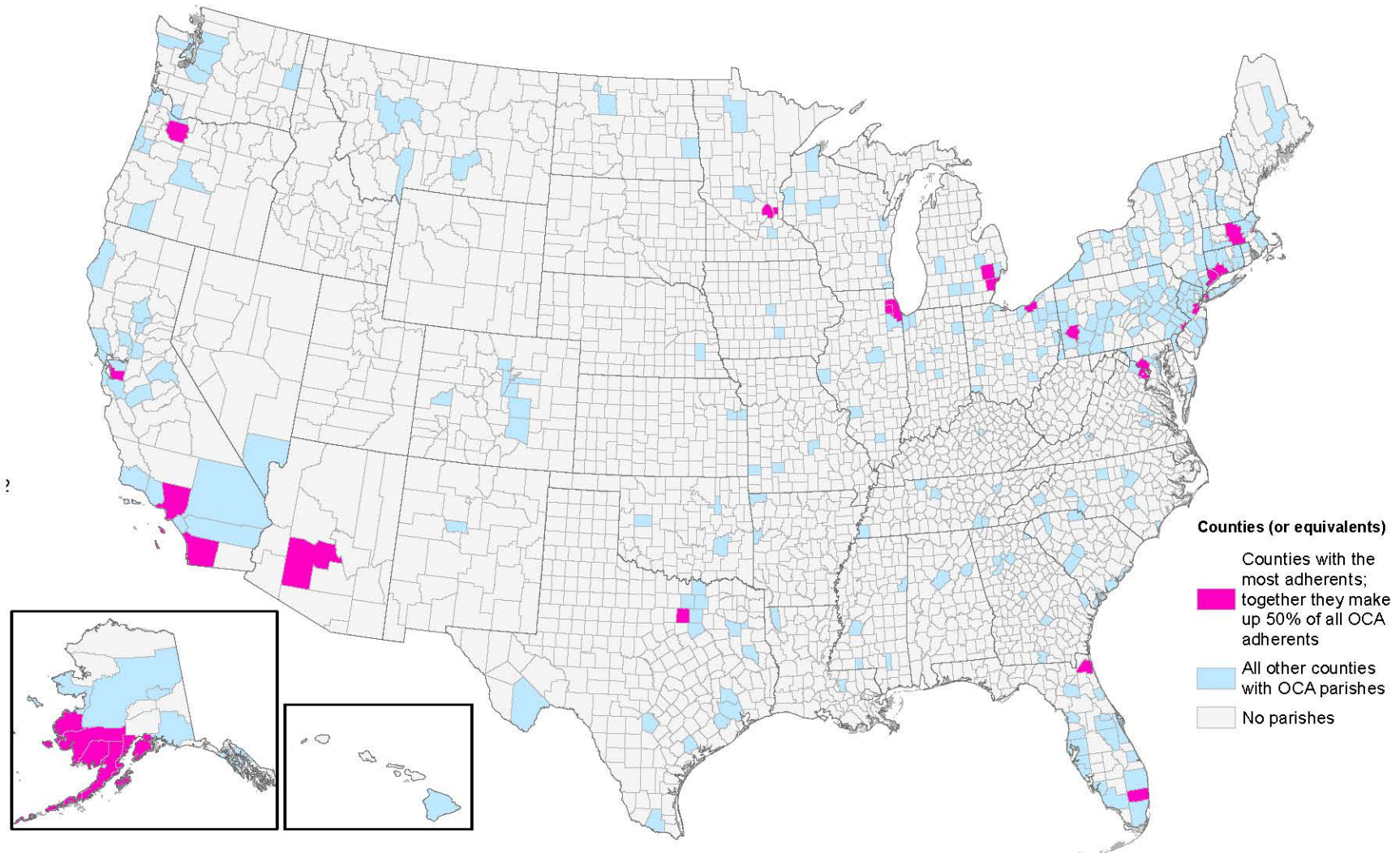
Orthodox Church in America (2020): Adherents Cartogram



©Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
2020 U.S. Religion Census: A County-level Enumeration
of Religious Congregations and Adherents
Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

Adherents Cartogram resizes each state proportionate to the number of OCA adherents reported in that state in the 2020 U.S. Religion Census.

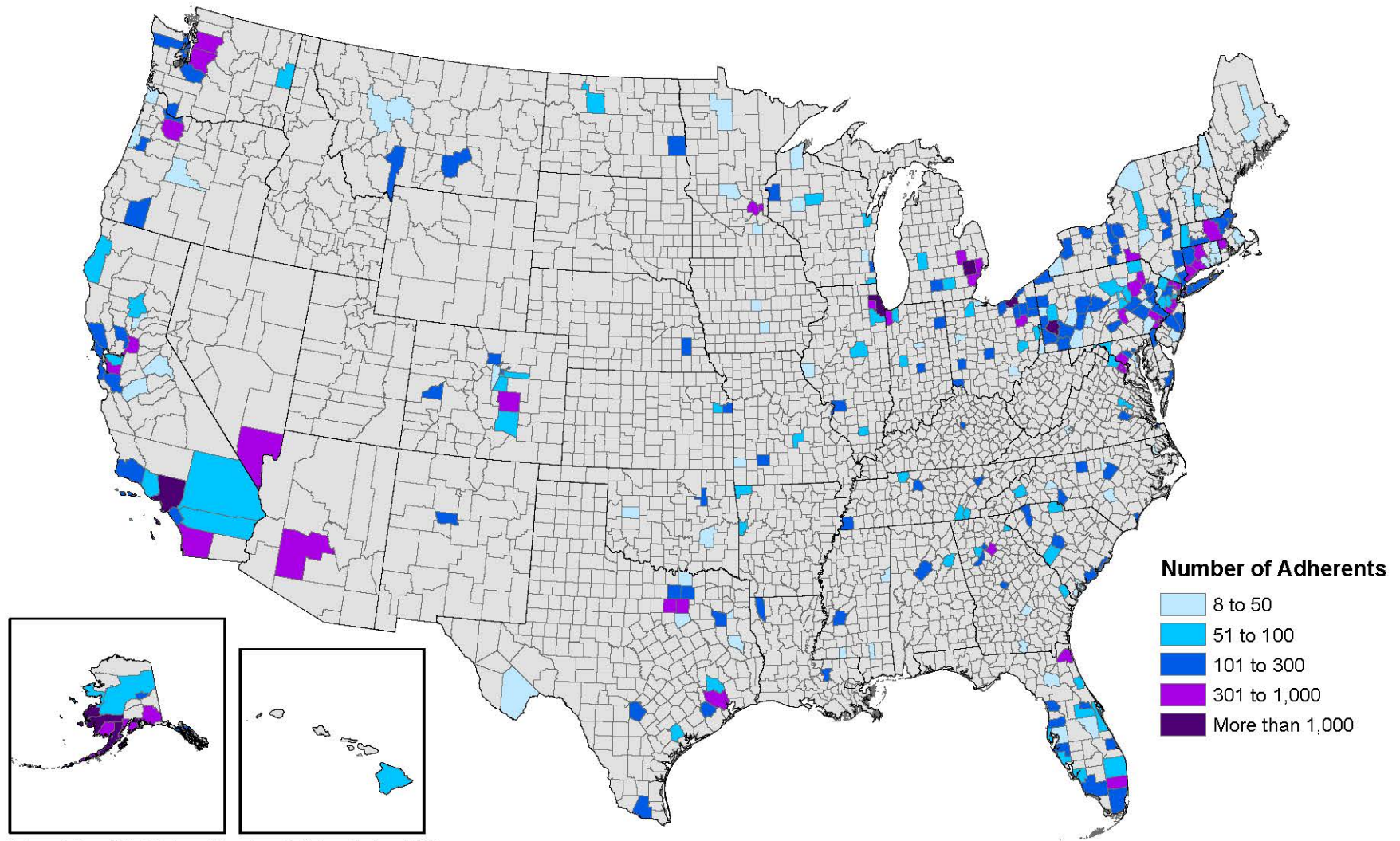
Orthodox Church in America: Geographic Concentration of Adherents in 2020 (by US Counties)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
 2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
 Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

In 2020, OCA had parishes in 316 counties. Of these, the 36 counties with the most adherents (colored red), when added together, account for half of all OCA adherents.

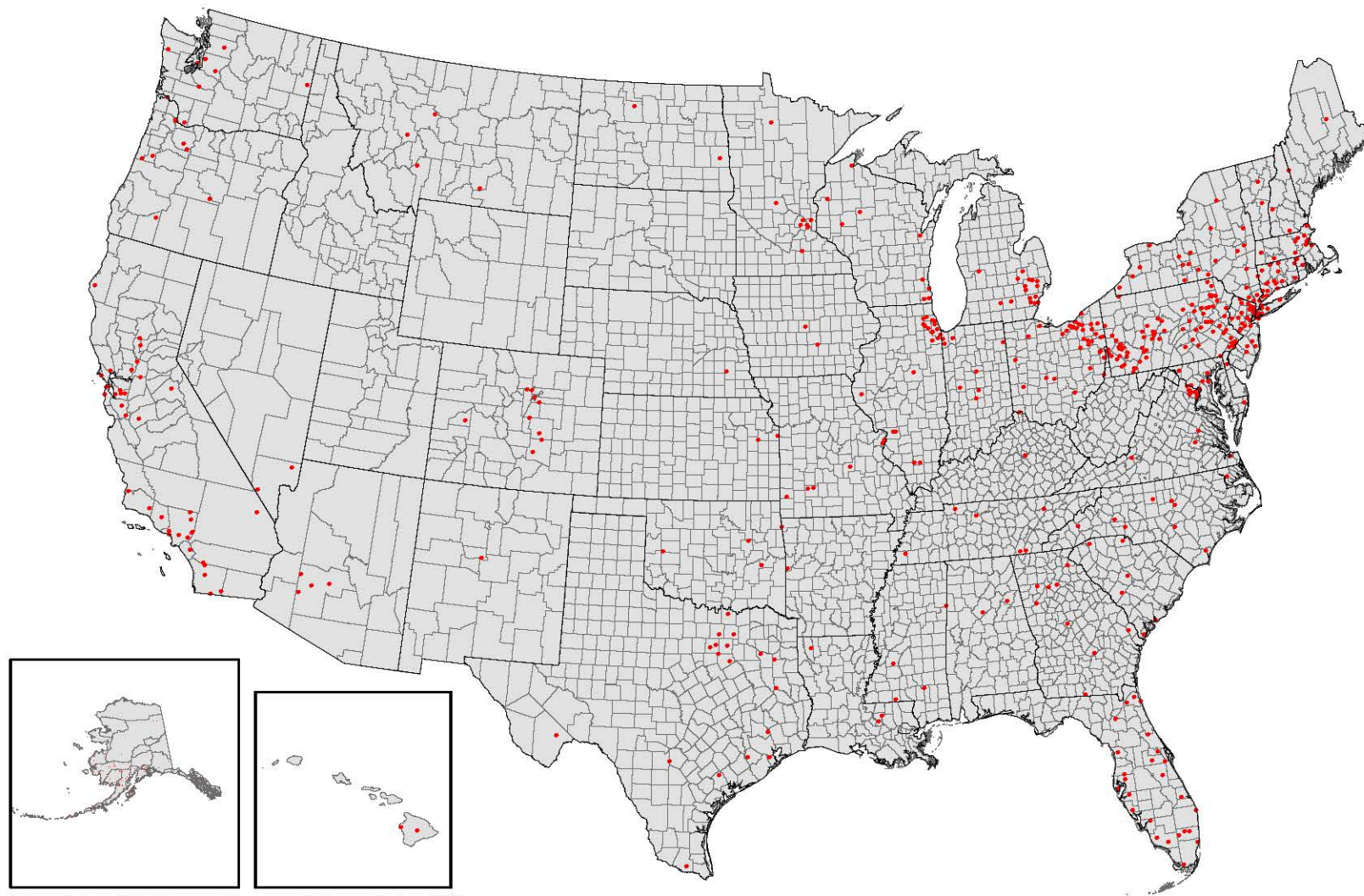
Orthodox Church in America: Number of Adherents in 2020 (by US Counties)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
 2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
 Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

In 2020, OCA had 559 parishes in 316 counties. 74,415 adherents total were reported by the parishes.

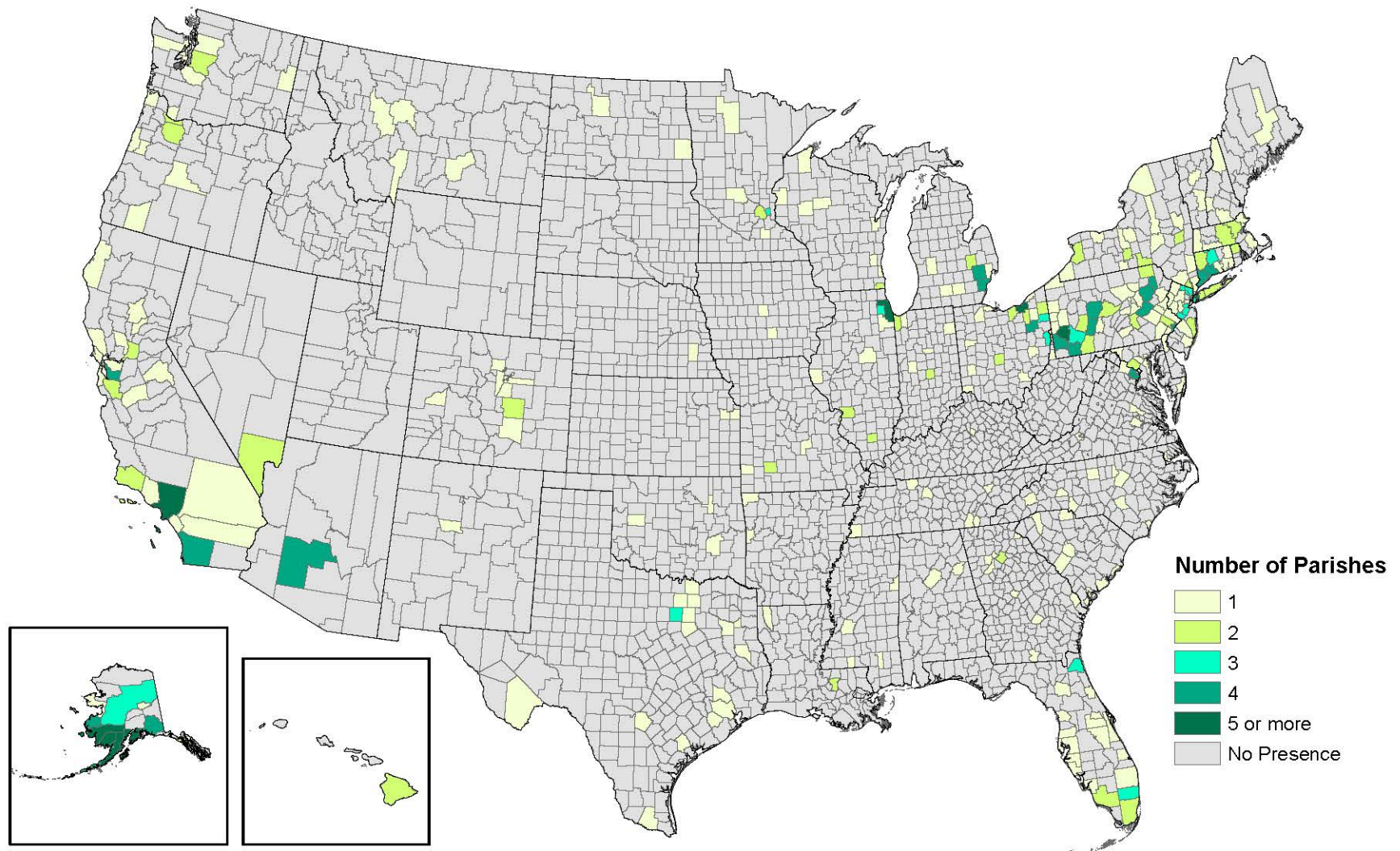
Orthodox Church in America: 2020 Location of Parishes in the United States (by US Counties)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

In 2020, 559 parishes were situated in 316 counties and reported 74,415 total adherents.
Dots are randomly placed within each county to represent parishes.

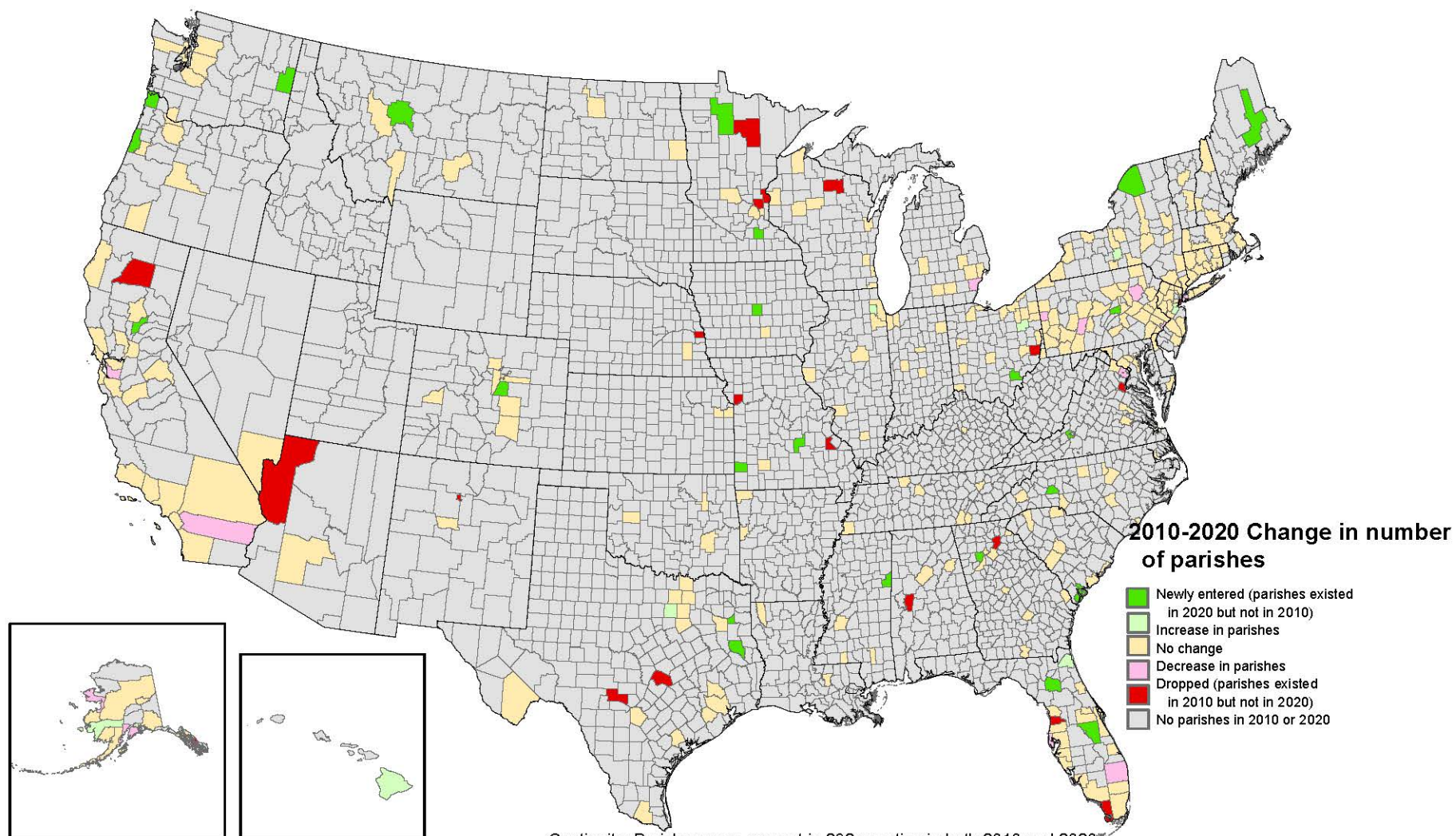
Orthodox Church in America: US Counties with Parishes (2020)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
 2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
 Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

In 2020, 559 parishes were situated in 316 counties and reported 74,415 total adherents.

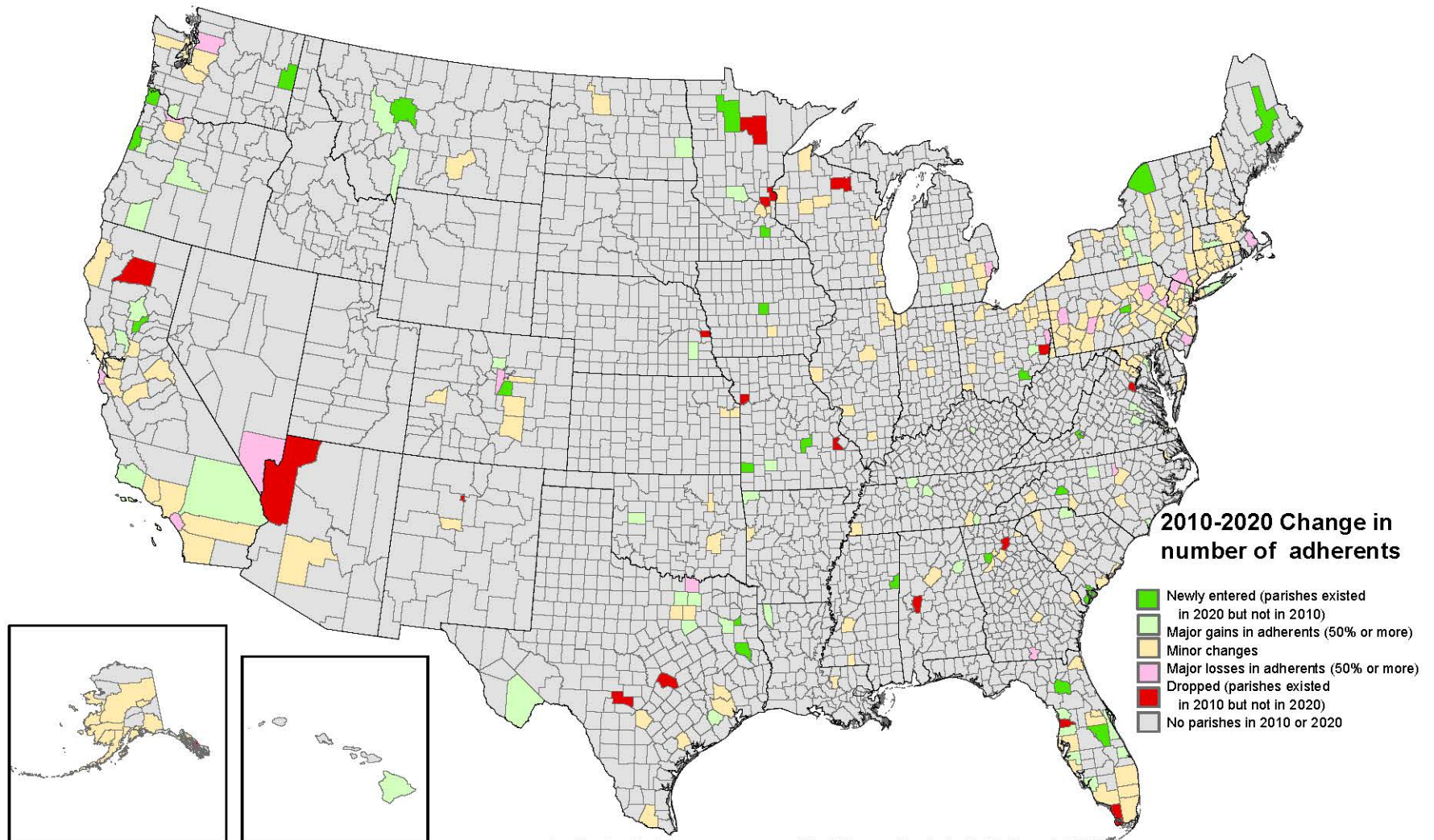
Orthodox Church in America: 2010-2020 Change in Numbers of Parishes (by US Counties)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
 2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
 Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

Continuity: Parishes were present in 292 counties in both 2010 and 2020
 Gains: Parishes were present in 24 counties in 2020, but not in 2010
 Losses: Parishes were present in 20 counties in 2010, but not in 2020

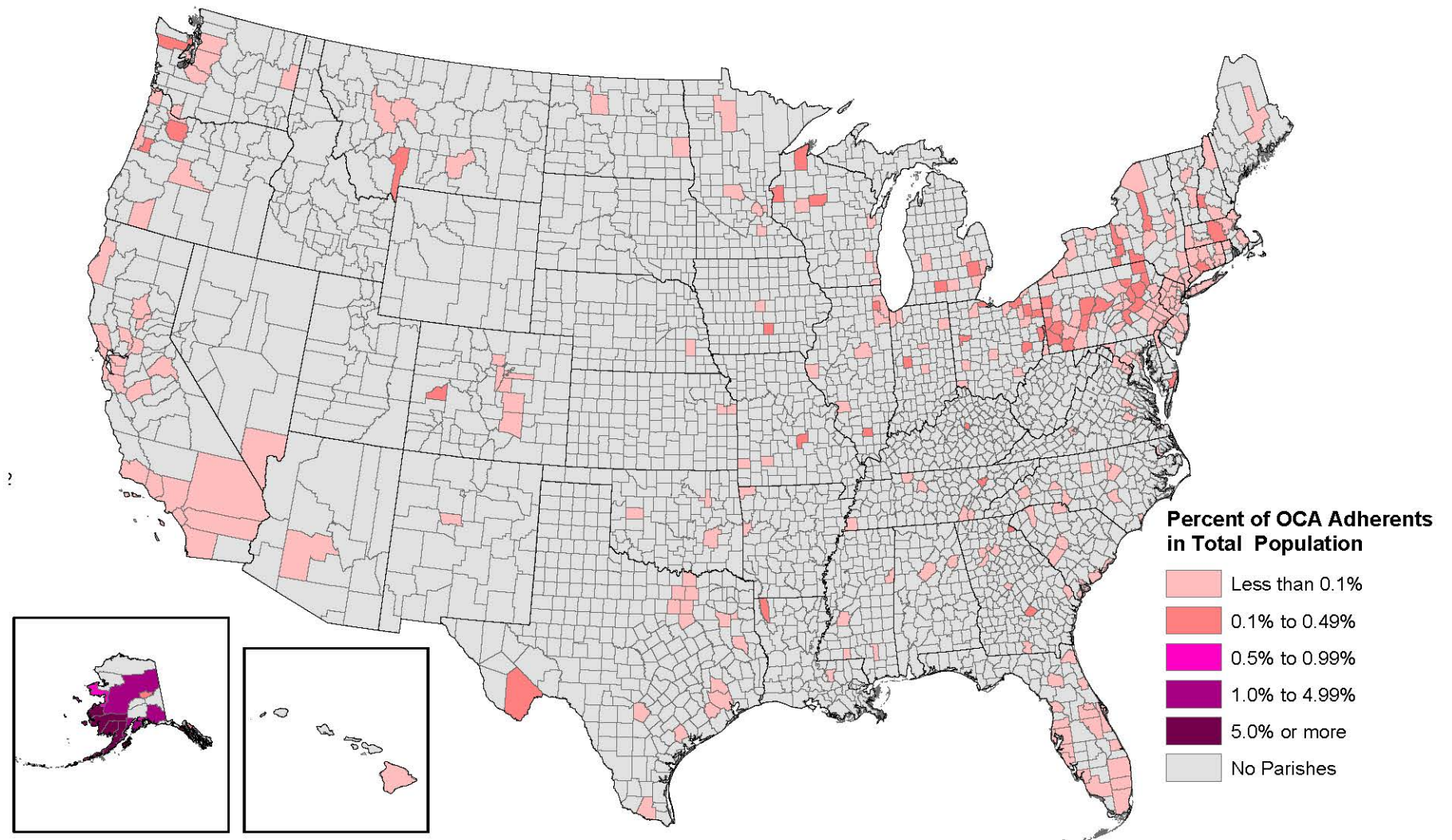
Orthodox Church in America: 2010-2020 Change in Number of Adherents (by US Counties)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
 2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
 Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

Continuity: Parishes were present in 292 counties in both 2010 and 2020
 Gains: Parishes were present in 24 counties in 2020, but not in 2010
 Losses: Parishes were present in 20 counties in 2010, but not in 2020

Orthodox Church in America: Adherents as Percent of Total Population in 2020 (by US Counties)



© Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2020
 2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study
 Created by Dale E. Jones using ESRI ArcMap

In 2020, OCA had 559 parishes in 316 counties. 74,415 adherents total were reported by the parishes.