

# Preface: Goal and Scope of this Atlas

In 1794, the foundation of a mission on Kodiak Island in Alaska by eight Orthodox monks from Russia marked the beginnings of organized Orthodox Church life in America. Today, the presence of over one million faithful gathered in some 2,400 local parishes that belong to more than twenty various national Orthodox Church bodies testifies to the firm establishment of Eastern Christianity in the United States. Various Eastern Orthodox Churches, their culturally and ethnically diverse parishes and monastic communities, have become an important part of the American religious landscape. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Christian Churches have been to a significant degree overlooked in academic studies and ignored by the “mainstream” American religious culture. At a popular level, “average” Americans are typically baffled by the complexity of Eastern Christianity, by the variety of the Orthodox Church bodies, and by the bewildering array of different ethnic traditions associated with the life of a local Orthodox parish.

The purpose of this work is to provide a clear overview of the various Orthodox Christian Churches in the United States for the wide—Orthodox and non-Orthodox, academic and non-academic—audience of readers. Simultaneously, this book is intended to be an atlas, a reference book and, to some extent, a thematic monograph. It is an atlas because it uses the language of cartography and contains numerous maps to show the historical development and present territorial patterns of Orthodox Church life in America. It is a reference book because it provides information on the American Orthodox Churches as well as up-to-date statistical data on their membership and geographic distribution. It is a thematic monograph because the articles in this book tell the story of the Orthodox Christian past and present in the United States.

Thematically, this book unfolds in four parts. Chapter one looks at a timeline of Orthodox Christianity in America. It provides a general overview of the historical development of the American Orthodox Churches and presents many interesting facts about particular churches, local communities, and personalities associated with Orthodoxy in America. Chapter two is an overview of twenty-one national Orthodox Church bodies. There are short articles with basic historic and other information

about each Church. The authors were asked to emphasize the most interesting and distinct features of each Orthodox Church. For each Church, we also provide two maps: a state-by-state map of parishes and a county-by-county map of membership. The third chapter is devoted to Orthodox monasteries in the United States. Today, there are more than eighty Orthodox monastic communities in America that are very different in terms of their size, geographic settings, patterns of everyday life, openness for outside visitors, etc. The chapter gives a general introduction into Orthodox monasticism in America and offers a systematic database for the eighty-one Orthodox monasteries in this country. The accompanying map shows their distribution across the country. Chapter four furnishes data from the 2010 US National Orthodox Census (we will talk more about this Census in “Data Presentation” section). Tables and maps in this chapter contain statistics of parishes, membership, and church attendance for twenty-one different national Orthodox Church bodies. This information is available state-by-state and county-by-county.

An internally diverse and complex family of Churches is covered in this work. Their individual histories on American soil, their current “niche” in the context of the wider American society and their mutual relations are subjects which are at times very sensitive. Further, due to various reasons, data collection within the American Orthodox community remains a difficult process. Compiling this Atlas, I have done my best to be objective and accurate in presenting data and information about each Church. Any constructive comments that readers may wish to make, as well as updates, on any subject included in this book are welcomed. Correspondence can be addressed to the principal researcher and editor of the Atlas at [akrindatch@aol.com](mailto:akrindatch@aol.com).

Organized religion has flourished in America from its very onset as a country. Very different religious communities have found it possible not simply to exist here but to express themselves freely in a wide variety of forms. We hope that this work will help readers to better recognize the distinct Orthodox “colors” and “flavors” within the bright and colorful American religious landscape.

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