

## Highlights of Findings from the Study "Exploring Orthodox Generosity: Giving in US Orthodox Parishes"

Based on the national survey of 2,825 Orthodox Church members (lay parishioners) representing all US Orthodox jurisdictions

- ❖ In 2014, a typical (median) Orthodox household gave \$2000 to its local parish community in regular giving. That is, half of all Orthodox households gave more than \$2000 per year and half of them gave less than that to their parishes. In addition, a typical Orthodox household gave \$150 in 2014 to Orthodox organizations or causes (other than their parishes) and \$200 to non-Orthodox charities, not-for-profits or social causes;
- ❖ Comparing the three main jurisdictions (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Antiochian Archdiocese and Orthodox Church in America), members of the Antiochian Archdiocese and Orthodox Church in America made the highest contributions to their parishes. In both of these jurisdictions, an average household gave about \$3,000 to a parish in regular contributions in 2014. By comparison, an average (median) GOA household contributed \$1,500 to a parish in regular giving in 2014;
- ❖ When donations to a parish are measured as a percentage of income, higher income households are less generous than lower-income households. A typical (median) Orthodox household earning between \$30,000 and \$49,999 gives 3.75% of its income to the parish, whereas households in the \$90,000 - \$109,999 income category give 2.5%;
- ❖ Converts to Orthodoxy give almost twice as much annually to their churches as "cradle" Orthodox when measured in actual dollar amounts (\$2,800 versus \$ 1,500 per average household) and they give more than twice as much when donations are measured as a percentage of a household's income (4.9% versus 2.2%);
- ❖ The tendency to be generous to one's parish is *statistically strongly related* to being a generous giver to causes and organizations outside of the parish community. That is, parishioners who are more generous contributors to their parishes are also more generous givers to causes outside the parish;

- ❖ The degree of involvement with a parish is a very strong predictor of how much people give to their churches. An average household of a person who feels that he/she is "less involved in the parish than majority of parishioners" gives annually about \$750 (or about 1% of a household income) to his/her parish, compared to \$2000 or 3% of income among those who are "involved similarly to majority of parishioners" and \$2465 (or 3.33% of household's income) donated by those who said that they are "more involved in the parish than majority of parishioners;"
- ❖ Personal beliefs and personal theology have a very strong impact on how much a Church member gives to his/her parish. Church members who state that "using the money and material possessions in ways that please God" is part of their spiritual life give on average 2.5 times more to their parish communities than persons who hold the view that "money and material possessions have nothing to do with spiritual and religious issues;"
- ❖ When it comes to the major personal motives to give to the Church, 60% of parishioners give to the Church because this is part of their religious convictions and they believe that "it is what God expects of us." The remaining 40% of church members contribute to their parish communities mainly because of pragmatic reason to pay bills and to take care of the needs of their parish communities;
- ❖ Church members who give to their parishes out of a feeling that they "need to give to the Church" contribute to their parishes much more than those who give in order to simply "address the needs of their parishes and to pay parish's bills;"
- ❖ The culture of giving to the Church because of personal religious convictions and an internal "need to give" is the dominant culture in parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese and the Orthodox Church in America. In GOA churches, the adherents of a pragmatic approach to giving—"I give because my parish has needs"—are as vocal as those who give because of religious reasons and an internal "need to give;"
- ❖ Nearly half of converts to Orthodoxy support the concept of tithing (10% of income given to the church) in comparison with less than one-third (30%) of cradle Orthodox who support this idea;
- ❖ US Orthodox parishes use two different approaches when they motivate parishioners to give to the Church. They either ask church members "to give for spiritual reasons" or "to give to

address parish's needs." These two approaches are nearly equally common in US Orthodox church life: 53% of respondents said that "When my parish talks about donating money, it talks mostly about people's responsibility to address the needs of the parish," while 47% of study participants reported "When my parish talks about donating money, it talks mostly about vision for the parish's mission, future and opportunities for spiritual growth;

- ❖ Parishes that encourage members to be more generous because it will enhance church's mission and create more opportunities for spiritual growth receive MUCH HIGHER contributions from parishioners than the parishes asking members to give because various needs of a parish community should be addressed. The average per-household annual contribution in parishes where talks about money are "mostly about vision for the parish's mission, future and opportunities for spiritual growth" is \$2,400. To compare, the per household average annual contribution in parishes where talks about money are "mostly about people's responsibility to address the needs of the parish" is \$1,650;
- ❖ Three characteristics of an Orthodox parish have the *strongest positive influence on greater giving*. These three characteristics are:
  - a) being a parish that cares about and supports members in times of difficulties and needs;
  - b) being a parish with a participatory and inclusive process of decision making where all members (not only parish leadership) are engaged in discussion, deliberation and actual decisions;
  - c) being a parish that is successful in engaging its members in various volunteer positions and tasks;
- ❖ In both measures of giving (as actual dollar amount or as percentage of the household's income), parishioners who pledge contribute significantly more to their parishes (\$2,400 per average household a year or 3.15% of household's income) than those church members who give to their parishes "spontaneously" and without advance planning (\$1,500 or 2.55% of income);
- ❖ The majority of parishioners (54%) would be comfortable with the idea of monthly automatic transfers of agreed-upon sums from their checking accounts into a parish account. Only one in

three respondents (33%) said "I don't like this idea." The remaining 13% were "not sure" about this option;

- ❖ Of various techniques and tactics that a parish can use to achieve greater giving from members, by far the most efficient is clergy (either the parish priest or bishop) approaching members in person. Forty percent (40%) of respondents reported that *"If I were personally asked by my parish priest or bishop"* they would likely give more.
- ❖ The study looked at 18 different areas in the life of an Orthodox parish and examined how (if at all) changes and improvements in each of these areas would affect giving among parishioners. The **top three desirable changes** in the life of American Orthodox parishes that would spark generosity and result in greater giving of church members are all related to the problem of excessive insularity of local parishes and their weak engagement in the outside community. That is, **the top three methods** that an Orthodox parish can employ in order to inspire parishioners to give more are: a) greater social outreach into local community, b) stronger emphasis on mission and evangelism programs, and c) creating joint programs and ministries with other nearby Orthodox parishes. **Less than half of US Orthodox church members** are satisfied with the present situation in these three areas of their parish life.