

= Orthodox Church in America =

The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) is an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox church in North America . The OCA consists of more than 700 parishes , missions , communities , monasteries and institutions in the United States and Canada . In 2011 , it had an estimated 84 @, @ 900 members in the United States .

The OCA began when eight Russian Orthodox monks established a mission in Alaska , then part of Russian America , in 1794 . This became a diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church after the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 . By the late 19th century , the Russian Orthodox Church had grown in other areas of the United States due to the arrival of immigrants from areas of Eastern and Central Europe , many of them formerly of the Eastern Catholic churches (" Greek Catholics ") , and from the Middle East . These immigrants , regardless of nationality or ethnic background , were united under a single North American diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church .

After the Bolshevik Revolution , Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow directed all Russian Orthodox churches outside of Russia to govern themselves autonomously . Orthodox churches in America became a self @-@ governing Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in America in 1924 under the leadership of Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky) , popularly called the Metropolia . The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in America was granted autocephaly by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1970 , and renamed the Orthodox Church in America . Its hierarchs are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America .

= = Official name = =

According to the April 1970 Tomos of Autocephaly granted by the Russian Orthodox Church , the official name of the Church is The Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America . The more comprehensive March 1970 Agreement of Tomos of Autocephaly , however , states in Article VIII that the legal name of the Church was changed to " Orthodox Church in America " (with no definite article) .

In 2005 , Tikhon (Fitzgerald) , then Bishop of the OCA Diocese of the West , commented that the official name of the jurisdiction is The Orthodox Church in America (TOCA) , but the definite article was dropped due to a printing error . The former uses (Orthodox Church in America and OCA) remain the most common both within and outside the jurisdiction .

= = History = =

= = = Missionary work = = =

The first Native Americans to become Orthodox were the Aleuts living in contact with Siberian fur traders in the mid 18th century . They had been baptized mostly by their Orthodox trading partners or during occasional visits by priests serving aboard exploring vessels of the Russian navy . Russian colony in Alaska was established in 1784 by merchant Grigory Shelikhov . Shelikhov 's attempt to colonize Kodiak Island was met with resistance by the native population . He returned to Russia and installed Alexandr Baranov as director of the colony . In order to convince the Russian imperial court of the seriousness of his colonial ambitions , Shelikhov recruited volunteers from the Valaam , an environment that appears strikingly similar to the Kodiak archipelago 's landscape , and Konevitsa monasteries to travel to the new colony .

The volunteers , led by Archimandrite Joasaph (Bolotov) , departed Saint Petersburg on December 21 , 1793 , and arrived at Kodiak Island on September 24 , 1794 . When they arrived they were shocked by the harsh treatment of the Kodiak natives at the hands of the Russian settlers and Baranov . They sent reports to Shelikhov detailing the abuse of the local population , but were ignored . In response , however , the Holy Synod created an auxiliary episcopal see in Alaska in

1796 , and elected Fr . Joasaph as bishop . Fr . Joasaph and a small party returned to Russia in 1798 for his consecration , and to offer first @-@ hand accounts of what they had seen . During their return voyage to the colony in May 1799 , their ship sank and all aboard died . In 1800 , Baranov placed the remaining monks under house arrest , and forbade them to have any further contact with the local population .

Despite the lack of leadership , the Orthodox mission in Alaska continued to grow . In 1811 , however , the Holy Synod officially closed the episcopal see . It was not until 1823 that the Holy Synod sent instructions for a new priest to travel to Alaska . John Veniaminov of Irkutsk volunteered for the journey , and left Russia in May 1823 . He and his family arrived at Unalaska Island on July 29 , 1824 . In 1840 , after the death of his wife , Veniaminov accepted monastic tonsure and , taking the name Innocent , ordination as the Bishop of Kamchatka , the Kurile and Aleutian Islands , making him the first ruling bishop of the Alaskan mission since Bishop Joasaph . Bishop Innocent was elevated to archbishop in 1850 . For his missionary and scholarly work that had focused on blending indigenous Alaskan languages and cultures with Orthodox tradition , Innocent became a saint of the Orthodox Church in America in 1977 , and is referred to as the Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to the Americas .

= = = Growth = = =

In 1868 , the first Orthodox church in the continental United States was established in San Francisco , California . Numerous parishes were established across the country throughout the rest of the 19th century . Although these parishes were typically multi @-@ ethnic , most received support from the missionary diocese . In 1872 the diocesan see was relocated from Alaska to the city of San Francisco , California in the United States . The mission itself was instituted as a separate Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands on June 10 , 1870 , subsequent to the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867 . In November 1870 , the first Orthodox church in New York City was consecrated .

Eastern @-@ Rite Catholicism was viewed with suspicion by several Latin @-@ Rite bishops in the United States ; some , such as Archbishop John Ireland of Saint Paul , Minnesota , were actually hostile , especially concerning the matter of married clergy . In 1891 , Alexis Toth brought a group of 361 Eastern Catholics into Orthodoxy . From then until his death in 1909 , Toth brought approximately 20 @,@ 000 Eastern Catholics from 65 independent communities to Orthodoxy . By 1917 , 163 Eastern @-@ Rite Catholic parishes consisting of more than 100 @,@ 000 faithful had been converted . For his efforts , Toth was glorified as a saint by the OCA in 1994 .

In recognition of the expansion of the Church beyond Alaska , Bishop Tikhon (Belavin) petitioned the Holy Synod to change the diocese 's title to the Diocese of the Aleutians and North America . This was approved in February 1900 . He consecrated an auxiliary bishop for Alaska in 1903 , and in 1904 he consecrated Raphael Hawaweeny to administer to the Arab parishes . In 1905 , Bishop Tikhon relocated the diocesan administration from San Francisco to New York City .

In a report to the Holy Synod that year , Bishop Tikhon proposed dramatic changes in the operation of the diocese . Recognizing the needs of the growing multi @-@ ethnic Orthodox community , he recommended reforming the missionary diocese into a self @-@ supporting American diocese , composed of numerous ethnic auxiliary dioceses . His plan called for Russian (New York) , Arab (Brooklyn) , Serbian (Chicago) , and Greek dioceses . Additionally , he called for the formation of a governing council , composed of clergy and laity , which would meet to discuss administrative and canonical issues . On March 5 , 1907 , the first All @-@ American Sobor convened in Mayfield , Pennsylvania . Following Archbishop Tikhon 's reassignment to Russia that year , however , few of his reforms were implemented .

During this period , education and charity was a focus of the diocese . In 1905 , Archbishop Tikhon oversaw the creation of an Orthodox seminary in Minneapolis , Minnesota . St. Platon 's Seminary moved from Minneapolis to Tenafly , New Jersey in 1912 and enrolled 78 students from then until 1923 . In 1916 , an unaccredited Russian Women 's College was established in Brooklyn . An immigrant society and orphanage also were established , as well as the first Orthodox monasteries

in the United States (Saint Tikhon 's Monastery for men in 1905 and Holy Virgin Protection for women in 1915) .

By 1917 , the American diocese was the largest in the Russian Orthodox Church . It had grown from ten parishes in 1890 to more than 350 . Most of the funding for the diocese was provided by Russian Church , via the Imperial Missionary Society . The connections between the American diocese and the Russian Church would be severely compromised by the events of that year .

= = = Revolution and turmoil = = =

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent establishment of the Communist Soviet government ushered in a period of repression for the Russian Orthodox Church . Church property was confiscated , and when Patriarch Tikhon resisted , he was imprisoned from April 1922 until June 1923 . On November 20 , 1920 , Patriarch Tikhon formally authorized Russian Orthodox bishops to set up temporarily independent organizations , until such time as normal communications with and governance from the patriarchate could be restored .

Ethnic groups within the American diocese began to re @-@ align themselves with other national churches . In 1918 , a group of Ukrainians in Canada formed the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church in Canada , and in 1922 , the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America was established . In 1926 , the Serbs aligned with the Serbian Orthodox Church .

In Soviet Russia , a splinter group known as the Living Church gained official state recognition in place of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1922 . In the United States , a group of Living Church clergy led by John Kedrovsky attempted to depose ruling American hierarch Bishop Alexander (Nemolovsky) . Bishop Alexander , in addition to the political and ethnic struggles of his diocese , had also to deal with mounting Church debt as a result of the loss of funds from the Russian Church . He was forced to mortgage Church property to pay creditors , and was replaced in 1922 by Archbishop Platon (Rozhdestvensky) , who had previously served as archbishop of the diocese from 1907 to 1914 .

After Archbishop Platon 's return , he was elected Metropolitan of All America and Canada at the third All @-@ American Sobor in November 1922 . Soon after , Communist authorities in Russia (in collaboration with the Living Church) attempted to seize Church assets in the United States . In response , the fourth All @-@ American Sobor convened in April 1924 . During the Sobor , the historic step of declaring the North American diocese to be temporarily self @-@ governing was taken . This was meant to be necessary only until relations with the Russian Church could be normalized , and the justification for the move was the earlier decree by Patriarch Tikhon . The diocese was officially incorporated as the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America .

Despite the conditions set out by Tikhon 's decree for this temporary autonomy not being met , the American diocese of the Russian church declared self @-@ governance in 1924 , against the protests of the patriarchate , with which it had communication and which was capable of governance had its American branch been willing . The refusal of the American branch to submit to the patriarchate thus based itself officially on a document whose conditions it had not met . In reality , however , it was a fear of Communism and a belief that the patriarchate had been compromised which fueled the rebellion , paired with a desire on the part of the Metropolia to dissociate itself from the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) of which it had been part .

Despite the declaration of self @-@ governance , Kedrovsky and the Living Church were awarded the Church 's diocesan cathedral in New York City . To prevent further loss of property , the diocese allowed individual parishes to take ownership of their properties , which made them effectively independent . This , combined with the increasing number of ethnic parishes aligning themselves with other Orthodox jurisdictions (as well as some non @-@ Orthodox) , led to a unique situation in Orthodox America whereby multiple jurisdictions overlapped geographically . The remainder of the American Church became known informally as the Metropolia (or under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan) . Following Patriarch Tikhon 's death , the Russian Orthodox Church , led by Metropolitan Sergius , began cooperating with the Soviet government . In 1933 , the Russian Church declared the Metropolia to be schismatic .

A third Russian Church , the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Church Abroad (also known as the Karlovtsy Synod and later , the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia or ROCOR) , formed in 1921 . The Synod saw itself as representing all Russian Orthodox abroad , including the Metropolia . The Metropolia cooperated with the Synod at first but severed relations with them in 1926 , citing the Synod 's increasing claims of authority in America . The Synod , for its part , suspended Metropolitan Platon and his clergy . In 1935 , an agreement entitled " Temporary Regulations of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad " was signed that normalized relations between the Metropolia and the ROCOR . The 6th All @-@ American Sobor , held in 1937 , affirmed that while the Metropolia remained autonomous , it reported to the ROCOR in matters of faith .

The ROCOR , forced to leave Yugoslavia toward the end of World War II , eventually established its base of operations in New York City . In 1946 , it was decided at the 7th All @-@ American Sobor that the Metropolia would sever its ties with the ROCOR and attempt to return to the Patriarchate of Moscow . This return was proposed with the stipulation that the Metropolia be allowed to retain its autonomy . When this condition was not met , the Metropolia continued as a self @-@ governing Church .

Although there were periodic attempts at reconciliation between the Metropolia and the Russian Church over the next few decades , no serious progress was made . During this time , the ethnic character of the Metropolia began to change . Since many Russian immigrants to America aligned themselves with the vocally anti @-@ Communist ROCOR , the Metropolia experienced its growth increasingly through the addition of English @-@ speaking converts . As a result , the ethnic makeup of the Metropolia began to shift away from a purely Slavic one that had included mainly Russians , Ukrainians , Galicians , and Rusyns .

= = = Move toward unity and independence = = =

Prior to the 13th All @-@ American Sobor in November 1967 , a proposal was prepared to change the name of the Church from the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America to the " Orthodox Church in America " . The Council of Bishops , already aware of the proposal , forbade a vote on the matter . After much debate however , a non @-@ binding straw poll was permitted . The result of the poll was decidedly in favor of the name change . As a result , the decision to deal with the matter at another Sobor (to be held in two years) was made .

In the early 1960s , the Metropolia resumed communication with the Patriarch of Moscow . In 1968 , the Metropolia and the Russian Church communicated informally to resolve long @-@ standing differences . Representatives from the Metropolia sought the right of self @-@ governance , as well as the removal of Russian jurisdiction from all matters concerning the American Church . Official negotiations on the matter began in 1969 . On April 10 , 1970 , Patriarch Alexius I and fourteen bishops of the Russian Church 's Holy Synod signed the official Tomos of Autocephaly , which made the newly renamed Orthodox Church in America the fifteenth autocephalous Orthodox Church . The name change , as well as the granting of autocephaly , was officially accepted at the 14th All @-@ American Sobor (also known as the 1st All @-@ American Council in recognition of the Church 's new @-@ found independence) in October 1970 . The OCA 's autocephaly is currently recognized only by a minor share of other autocephalous Orthodox Churches . All canonical Orthodox Churches recognize the OCA as canonical and its sacraments as valid , however .

Within the past twenty years , the OCA has established more than 220 new parishes . It was a member of the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA) , together with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America , the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America (AOCA) and the other member jurisdictions . In 2010 , SCOBA was dissolved with the creation of the new Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America , which was mandated by Orthodox Patriarchates in 2009 at a meeting in Switzerland . Serious consideration has been given recently to a possible merger between the OCA and the AOCA . Both groups share a significant common history , in that a Syrian priest , Raphael Hawaweeny , was sent by the Moscow Patriarchate in the late 19th century as a missionary to Arabic @-@ speaking Orthodox Christians living in North America . Raphael was ordained a bishop in 1904 , and his flock

eventually became the AOCA . Bishop Raphael was canonized in March 2000 by the OCA as St. Raphael of Brooklyn .

= = = Financial scandal = = =

In 2005 , former treasurer , Protodeacon Eric Wheeler publicly accused the OCA administration of financial misconduct . Wheeler alleged that millions of dollars in donations to the church were improperly used for personal expenses or to cover shortfalls in church accounts .

A 32 @-@ page report was released on September 3 , 2008 , that addressed the financial scandal and recommended " discipline " for five individuals including then @-@ primate Metropolitan Herman , his predecessor Metropolitan Theodosius and two former treasurers as well as a former comptroller . The same report recommended then @-@ primate Metropolitan Herman immediately resign or retire from his post or risk being defrocked .

One day after the report was released , Metropolitan Herman resigned from his position as Metropolitan . That November , the OCA elected a new Primate at its 15th Annual All @-@ American Council . Metropolitan Jonah (Paffhausen) was chosen because he had recently been appointed as a bishop (only 11 days prior) and was viewed to not be involved with the previous financial scandal . Metropolitan Jonah immediately took a strong stance against the previous scandal and became a very public metropolitan , seeking to repair damage done by the previous scandal and bring the OCA into the public realm . Metropolitan Jonah also sought to improve relations with non @-@ Orthodox groups and especially sought to repair the relations between the OCA and traditional Anglican groups . He was invited twice to speak at the conference of the Anglican Church of North America , in 2009 and 2012 .

Less than four years after his election , Metropolitan Jonah was asked by the Holy Synod , in a unanimous decision , to resign from his position . While wary of initially releasing information about the resignation , the Holy Synod felt prompted to release a public statement about his release due to rumors that had spread about their intentions . The statement they released on the official website of the OCA detailed several administrative decisions Metropolitan Jonah had made that the Holy Synod felt put the church and its members at risk . In the statement , the Holy Synod clarified the reason they withheld information initially was to protect the reputation and integrity of Metropolitan Jonah as well as protect anyone involved in the specific decisions made by him .

On November 13 , 2012 , an extraordinary All @-@ American Council elected Archbishop Tikhon Mollard of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania as the Metropolitan of All @-@ America and Canada . He was installed on January 27 , 2013 . Metropolitan Tikhon is a convert to the Orthodox faith and a long @-@ time monk of St. Tikhon 's Monastery in South Canaan , Pennsylvania .

= = = Recognition of autocephaly = = =

Currently , the Russian , Bulgarian , Georgian , Polish , Serbian , and Czech and Slovak churches recognize the autocephaly of the OCA , though the Bulgarian , Russian , and Serbian patriarchates continue to maintain parishes inside the OCA 's claimed jurisdiction . Among the churches that do not recognize it is the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople , which argues that the Russian Church did not have the authority to grant autocephaly , partly because the Russian Church at the time was considered to be heavily influenced by the Soviet government . The Ecumenical Patriarch also cites Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon , which asserted the jurisdiction of the bishop of Constantinople in dioceses located " among the barbarians " (i.e. outside the Roman Empire) , is cited as the source of the Ecumenical Patriarchate 's authority in the matter .

Apologists for the OCA 's autocephaly claim that the decree did not need the approval of the Ecumenical Patriarchate , as it was an internal matter for the Russian Orthodox Church to decide . Many autocephalous churches , the Russian Church included , were not recognized as such for many years , albeit their autocephaly was granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate .

= = Membership = =

The exact number of OCA parishioners is debated . According to the 2006 edition of the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches , the OCA has 1 @, @ 064 @, @ 000 members , an increase of 6 @. @ 4 percent from 2005 . This figure places the OCA as the 24th largest Christian denomination in the United States , and the second largest Eastern Orthodox church in the country , after the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America .

In 2000 , a study by Alexei D. Krindatch , of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute , presented a substantially lower figure ? 115 @, @ 100 adherents (baptized Orthodox who attend services on at least an occasional basis and their children) and 39 @, @ 400 full members (persons older than 18 , paying annual Church membership fees) . The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese , by comparison , was listed as having 440 @, @ 000 adherents . In response to the study , an OCA representative stated the Church had " around 750 @, @ 000 adults and children . "

In 2004 , Jonathan Ivanoff stated in a presentation at the OCA 's Evangelization Conference that the Church 's census population in 2004 was 27 @, @ 169 , and that membership from 1990 ? 2000 declined 13 percent . It further stated that the OCA population in the continental United States declined between six and nine percent per year .

In 2011 , The Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Churches , published by Holy Cross Orthodox Press and based on research by Alexei Krindatch , was released . It has extensive data on various Orthodox Churches in the United States , including both Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox groups (as well as groups considered uncanonical by those two groups) . The publication is endorsed by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops and is being used by various Assembly committees as part of their research and planning . The Atlas lists the United States membership of the OCA as 84 @, @ 900 , 33 @, @ 800 of which it says are regular church attendees . It lists the OCA as having 551 parishes and 19 monasteries in the United States . It also indicates the states with the heaviest concentration of OCA parishes are , in order : Alaska (with 86) , Pennsylvania (with 83) , California (with 43) and New York (with 41) .

= = Structure = =

= = = Episcopacy = = =

The supreme canonical authority of the OCA is the Holy Synod of Bishops , composed of all the church 's diocesan bishops . The ex officio chairman of the Holy Synod is the metropolitan . The Holy Synod meets twice annually , however special sessions can be called either by the metropolitan or at the request of at least three diocesan bishops .

= = = Metropolitan = = =

The primate of the OCA is the metropolitan . He also serves as the bishop of one of the Church 's dioceses . With the other bishops of the Church , the metropolitan is considered the first among equals . His official title is " Metropolitan of All @-@ America and Canada . " His role is to manage the welfare of the Church , and to act as its representative with other Orthodox Churches , religious organizations , and secular authorities . The metropolitan is elected , when necessary , by the Holy Synod at an All @-@ American Council (a general council of OCA clergy and laity) . There are no age or term limits for the metropolitan , and he may retire at any time , but usually does so only for health @-@ related reasons .

= = = Dioceses = = =

The diocese is the basic church body that comprises all the parishes of a determined geographical area . It is governed by the Diocesan Bishop , with the assistance of a Diocesan Assembly and a Diocesan Council . The OCA is currently composed of twelve geographic and three ethnic dioceses

. The boundaries of the ethnic dioceses overlap those of certain geographic ones . These dioceses are the result of smaller ethnic jurisdictions joining the OCA at some point in its history , usually after having broken from other bodies . Dioceses are established by the Holy Synod whenever needed , and the Synod may also modify the boundaries of an existing diocese .

= = = All @-@ American Council = = =

According to the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America , the All @-@ American Council is the " highest legislative and administrative authority within the Church . " The Council is composed roughly of the Metropolitan , all bishops , priests , and selected lay delegates . The purpose of the All @-@ American Council is to discuss and vote on Church matters . When necessary , the Council has also elected new metropolitans .

The period between All @-@ American Councils is set at three years , although this is not always the case . The first thirteen Councils (held from 1907 ? 1970) are referred to as All @-@ American Sobors , reflecting the American Church 's jurisdictional ties to the Russian Orthodox Church . The fourteenth Sobor (held in 1970) is jointly known as the 1st All @-@ American Council , reflecting the autocephalous status of the OCA . The most recent All @-@ American Council (16th) was held in November 2012 , at which time Metropolitan Tikhon (Mollard) was elected .

= = = Metropolitan Council = = =

The Metropolitan Council is the permanent executive body of the Church 's administration . It is tasked with implementing the decisions of the All @-@ American Council , as well as handling the Church 's budgetary concerns . The Council is headed by a chairman (the current Metropolitan) , and is composed of the OCA 's chancellor , secretary , treasurer , and selected clergy and lay delegates . It usually meets twice per year , but in December 2006 a rare joint meeting between the Metropolitan Council and the Holy Synod of Bishops was held .