

# Attitudes Towards Orthodox Church Unity in America:

## What We Know, Do Not Know, and Should Know



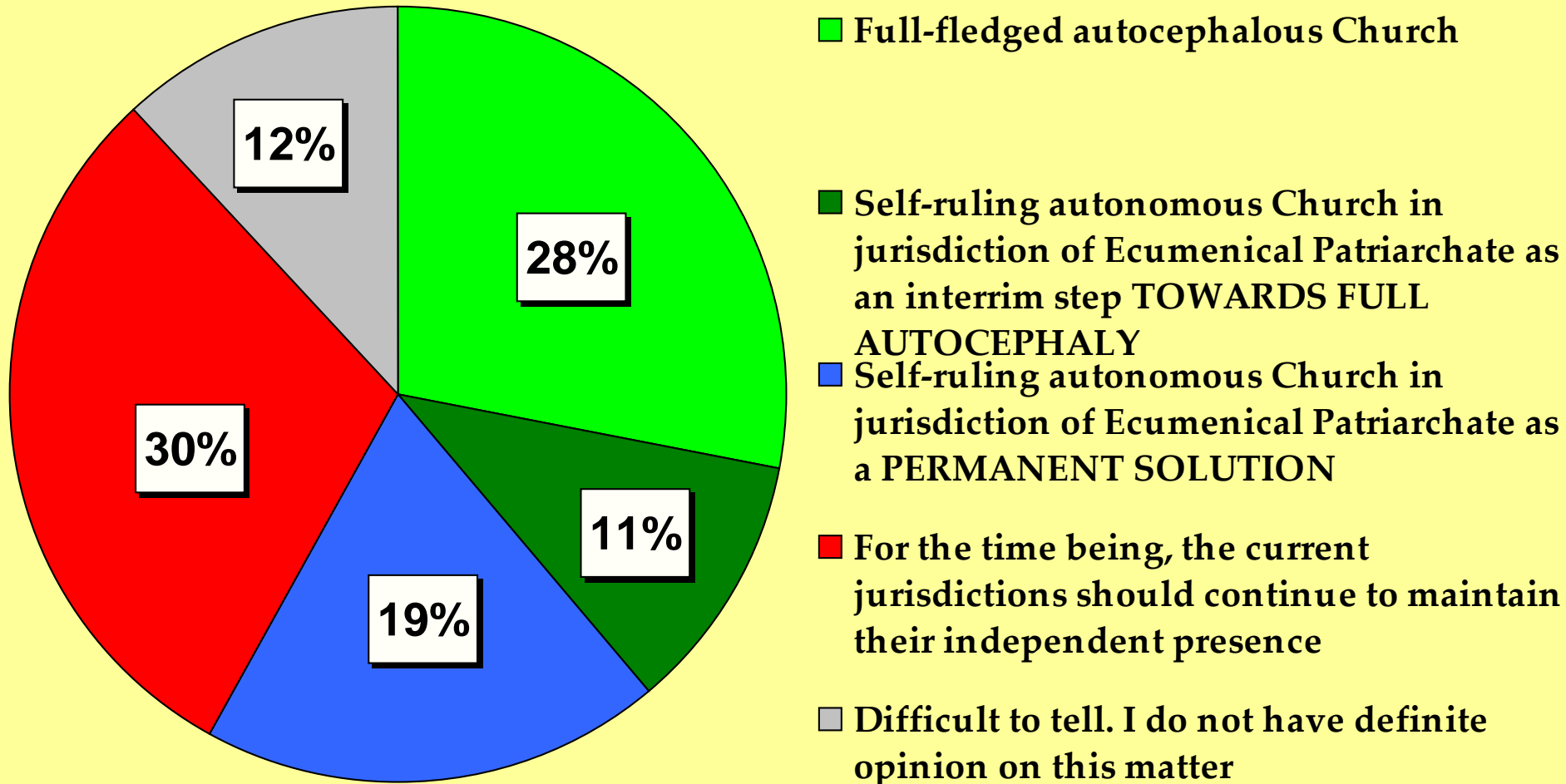
# Source of Data

- Excerpt from my study, “Orthodox Christian Churches in 21st Century America,” conducted for Assembly of Canonical Bishops
- The study was publicly released in 2018. Available for download from [www.orthodoxreality.org](http://www.orthodoxreality.org)
- Perspectives of both parish clergy and hierarchs on Orthodox Church unity in America were examined
- 580 American Orthodox parish priests participated in this study via online survey
- Data on opinions of American Orthodox Bishops were obtained from a special study conducted by the Committee for Canonical Regional Planning

# US Orthodox Bishops fell into three groups in their attitudes towards Orthodox Church unity in America:

a) move towards full autocephaly (39% of bishops); b) be united under Constantinople (19%); c) no need for the change (30%)

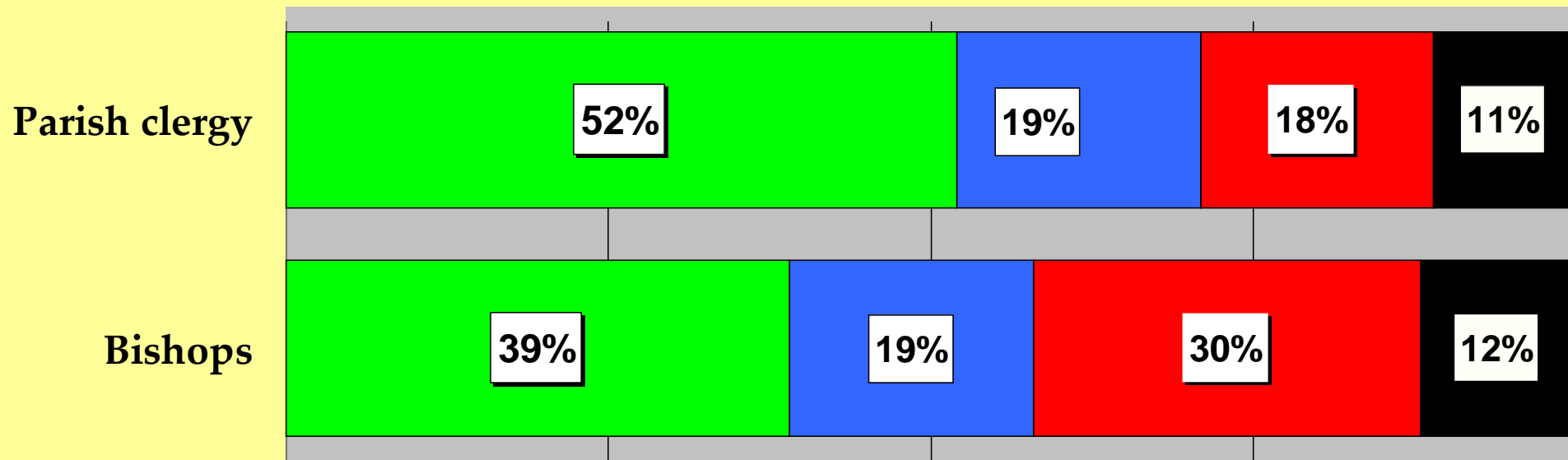
## What is your personal vision for the future of Orthodox Church in the United States?



# More Orthodox Parish Clergy than Bishops Support Church Unity in America

## What is your personal vision for the future of the Orthodox Church in the USA?

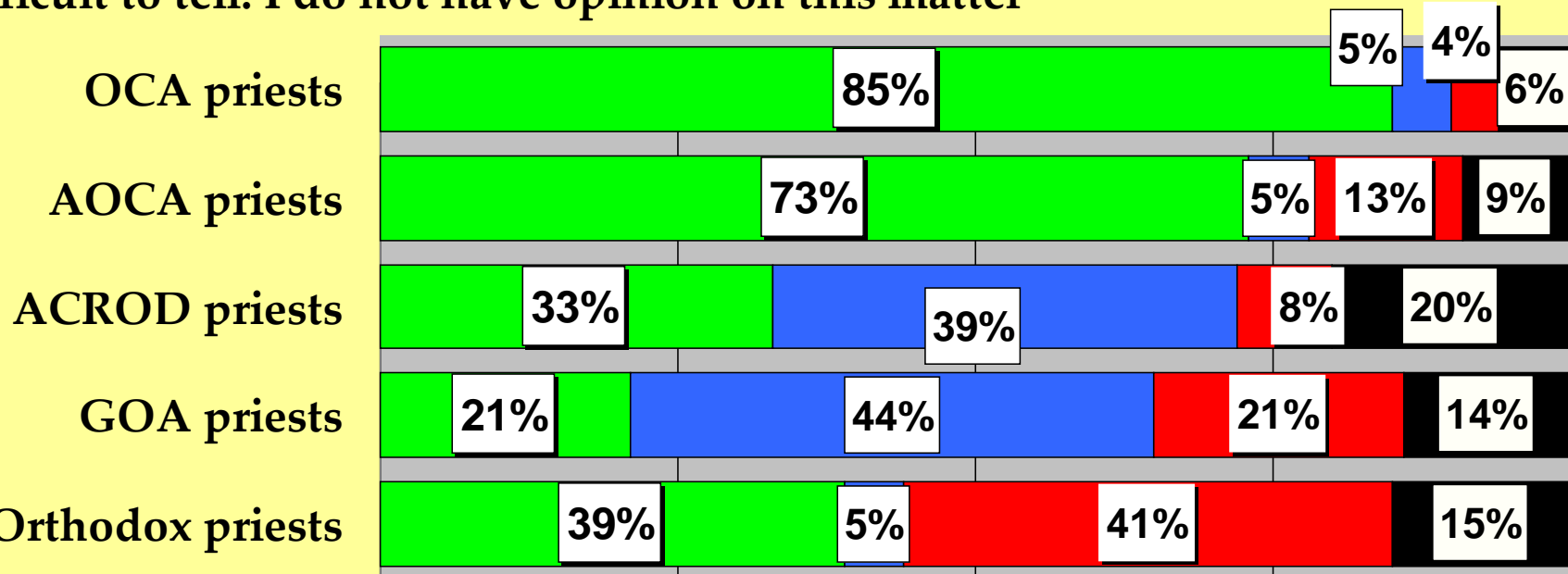
- Full-fledged autocephalous church
- Self-ruling autonomous Church in jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarchate
- There is no need for creating a united Church. Current jurisdictions should continue to maintain its independent presence
- Difficult to tell. I do not have opinion on this matter



# Parish Clergy of Various Jurisdictions Have Different Opinions about Orthodox Church Unity in America

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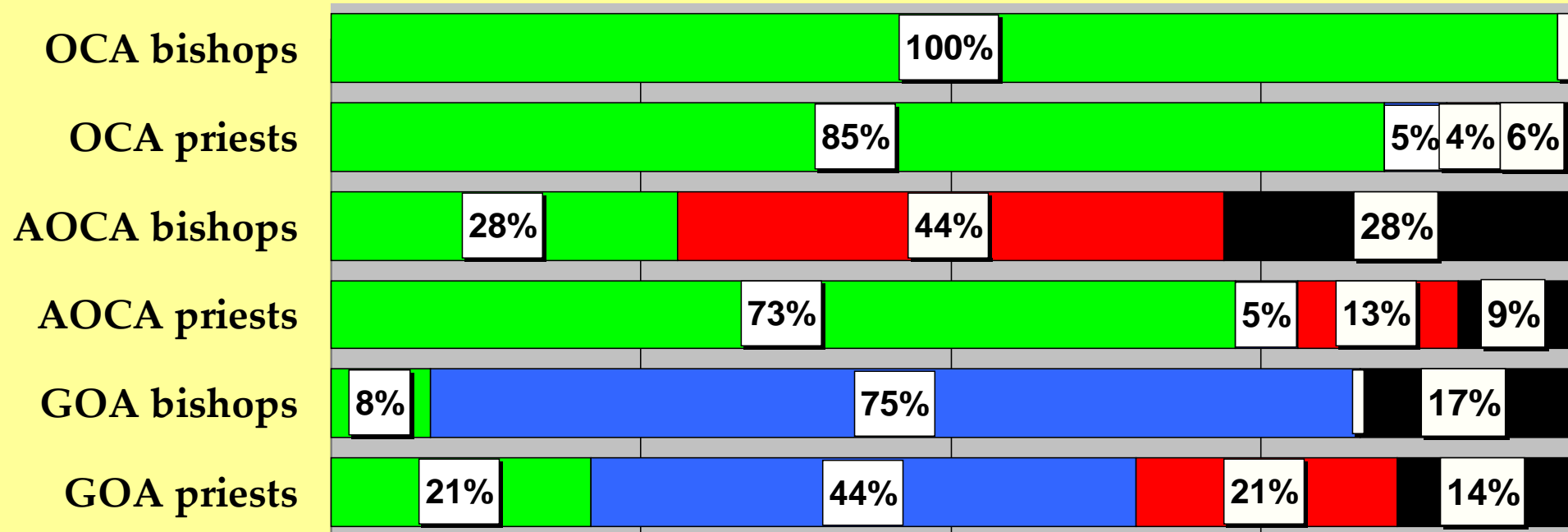
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# In Some Jurisdictions, Parish Clergy and Bishops Are in Agreement about Church Unity. In Others, They Are Not

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# Younger Clergy Are More Supportive of Orthodox Church Unity

Percentage (%) of clergy who support creation of unified American Church

- Priests younger than 40
- Priests 41-60
- Priests older than 60



## What We Do Not Know, but Should Know in Order to Find Ways to Move Forward

- Realistically, what is the reach of OCL? What % of American Orthodox clergy and laity are aware and supportive of OCL?
- What % of Orthodox laity (and even clergy) are aware that the entire “issue” of Church unity exist at all?
- Of those who – in theory – are aware of this issue, how many truly care one way or the other? OCL has an email list of about 5,800 (presumably “supporters”) and conventional mailing list of 3,600. But only 321 signed declaration + only AOCA, GOA, OCA people
- Crucial question: beyond current limited reach of OCL, what can make the idea of a unified American Church attractive (“sellable”) to a wide variety of different Orthodox constituencies: clergy vs. laity, various age categories, cradle vs. converts, US born vs. immigrants, members of various jurisdictions?



## **Different Orthodox Audiences May Have Particular Appreciation for Various Perceived Benefits Which a Unified and Independent American Church Could Offer to Them**

- **Greater independence of the local parish community (in line with tradition of American congregationalism)?**
- **Greater role of laity in church administration/election of bishops?**
- **New forms of and greater participation of laity in sacramental ministry?**
- **Stronger emphasis on relevant social/political issues facing America?**
- **More connections and better ties between Orthodox parishes and the lives of their local communities/neighborhoods?**
- **Stronger focus of the Church on external mission rather than on the internal workings?**

# **Different Orthodox Audiences May Have Particular Appreciation for Various Perceived Benefits Which a Unified and Independent American Church Could Offer to Them**

- **The chance for a new life for small and dying parishes by merging them together (especially, for number of children/young people in the parish)?**
- **A more welcoming, racially diverse, and inclusive American Orthodox Church?**
- **Strengthened relationships among young Orthodox Church members across the board?**
- **BOTTOM LINE: OCL needs to find out what would be appealing to different (targeted) Orthodox audiences when promoting Church unity in America**