Orthodox Convert Survey Summary

Diocese of the Midwest Orthodox Church in America

# Demographics of Converts Taking Survey

* Age of when journey to Orthodoxy began
  + 21-30 – 37%
  + 31-40 – 26%
  + 41-50 – 15%
* Marital status
  + 53% Married
  + 31% Never Married
  + 9% Divorced
* Education
  + High School 12%
  + College or some college 53%
  + Masters or working toward 20%
  + PhD, JD or working toward 14%
* Previous Religious affiliation
  + Protestants 60%
  + Roman Catholic 22%
  + Episcopalian 12%
  + None/Agnostic 4%
  + Jewish 2%
* Why
  + Dissatisfied with current religious affiliation -15%
  + Seeking deeper spiritual life 15%
  + Read something about Orthodoxy 10%
  + Had contact with Orthodox person- 10%
  + Invited to Orthodox service 8%
* What they find attractive about the Orthodoxy
  + Historical continuity 92%
  + Structured/unchanging Liturgy 83%
  + Orthodoxy embodies “fullness of faith” 81%
  + Centrality of tradition 76%
  + Theology is mystical in nature 75%
* Almost entirely caucasian

# What did you find most attractive about Orthodoxy?

## Worship

* Praying the Scriptures, authentic worship.
* Authentic worship
* Worship where the focus was on the crucified and risen Lord (i.e. Eucharist), and not on how I was supposed to be a moral and good person.
* The experience of awe and sacred worship
* The fact that we pray for everything and everyone every service.
* The worship was most compelling! Through all the questions and things I didn't fully understand, I was awed by the beauty of the worship. It kept drawing me in, throughout all my doubts.
* The order and structure brought something into my life that I had never had before. The services of Lent, Holy Week, and Pascha mean so much to me that I cannot imagine being without them now.
* Lack of musical instruments.
* The beauty and truthfulness of the Divine Liturgy. It embodies more basic truths than 1000 Protestant sermons combined.
* I felt the physical participation (veneration of icons, crossing one's self, kneeling and prostration) at first very foreign and difficult, but later felt I more became a part of the Liturgy and service. I found the architecture and icons very conducive to worship.
* I loved the worship - the icons, prayers, music and people crossing themselves.
* I was converted entirely by the services of the Church. I sensed instantly that this was ancient, authentic and alive. The words "We have found the true faith" in the Divine Liturgy sum it all up. Although I had virtually no catechesis, as I read and learned more about Orthodoxy, each time I had the feeling, "Why, of course! That's exactly how it should be!" A friend told me, "You don't become Orthodox - you just find out you always were Orthodox." That was my feeling exactly.
* The Divine Liturgy was intriguing and attractive...especially when I understood what was going on. The history of the Church and Tradition also appealed to me.
* Music and the service being "solemn"
* the services were a sensory, mystical, beautiful experience,
* The devotion I saw among Orthodox worshipers.
* The fact that the whole body became part of the worship (prostrations, sign of the cross, kneeling.)
* The music, the music and the music. And did I say the music? It was so different than what I was used to and I regarded it as a challenge to learn, especially since I was doing it in Japanese.
* Corporate prayer. The daily cycle of worship and prayer.
* The fact that Orthodoxy is a way of life and the liturgy is experienced, not just attended and watched
* …what really drew me in was the ability to sing as a form of prayer. I can't express to you the joy I have in singing the various services. So as I said before, the music was the most attractive to me.
* The Liturgy being unbroken prayer worship. I did not have to maintain a defensive stance as I had to in Protestant Churches. I could trust the Liturgy for it produced the fruit of many Saints. The practical pursuit of living a God pleasing life. The ways of the world are not as mixed up in Orthodoxy as in Protestantism.
* Worship encompassing the five senses
* It correlates so closely with the Bible. It is ancient and unchanging. The Liturgy is all about God, not me. Everyone worships and prays facing the altar.
* After attending Divine Liturgy for the first time, we just had the feeling that this is true worship. The beauty of the service and the sense of entering the presence of God were amazing to us. We had many questions, fears, and doubts, but we continued attending because of the truths that we did see and slowly our questions were answered and our fears were relieved.

## Spiritual Life

* The organic, structured spiritual life was highly attractive.
* The mysterious nature of Orthodox faith.
* The feasts and the fasts and the various customs.
* I love the way everyone can participate on a day-to-day basis - the lectionary, the saint's days, the feasts and fasts - in general, the calendar. It helps make the faith a practicing one, in a structured way, every day of the week, not just on Sundays. It also works to prepare our hearts and minds for each approaching season. I love the icons, and the value the orthodox put on them. I love the veneration of God, of the saints, and of each other, largely lost in this generation.
* The Iconograpy and holiness of the Church building.
* The holistic approach of Orthodox Christianity which embraces the entirety of the human person. Also, the strong emphasis on communion with God, in Christ; the ability for us to encounter God right now, here, today.
* Music and the Eucharist. The experience of Christ "in our midst."
* Confession
* The mysticism: we have no need to explain everything.
* I wish that I could put this into words, but I feel that I cannot do Orthodoxy justice in doing so. There is just a transcendent sort of beauty about it, and also this pervasive feeling of "rightness".

## Theology/Doctrine

* Sound theology
* The deepness of Orthodox theology, it's history as a suffering church living out what Christ said in scripture, that if the world hates Him it will surely hate those who follow Him & the lives of the saints whose witness always points back to the origin of their faith: Christ, Jesus.
* Sacramental--world as sacrament--centrality of this world-view as opposed to simply a matter of jurisdiction & authority
* Very significant: doctrine of fall of man vs. western "total depravity and judicial notions of atonement." This always bothered me even in seminary.
* Salvation: Instead of the legalistic "He paid the penalty for our sin" is the beautiful "He became man, suffered, died and arose to destroy death and make it possible for us to become like Him."
* the doctrine was obviously the Truth; no original sin, no legalism
* The experiential nature of divine liturgy, the mysticism of the eastern church, the depth of its asceticism, it's communal nature, the soundness of it's doctrine, the rock solidness and depth of the church's traditions and teachings, and exploring all of these things as a part of a body of seekers of Christ.
* lack of arbitrary rules
* Depth of spirituality - fullness of life in Christ.
* Centering on Christ and the Eucharist rather than the priest
* The communion of saints was particularly attractive as that was the first thing I thought of when I entered an Orthodox Church for the first time. I loved seeing icons of the Saints, that brought back scripture from Hebrews concerning the "communion of saints." I think the communion service is very worshipful and inspiring. I love the Liturgy and the structure of the service. The choir adds much to the worship service. I love the baptismal services of the infants.
* the concept of freewill and responsibility combined with (potentially) beautiful worship and an understanding of beauty as as integral part of worship
* I've always thought that the Orthodox insistence on "mystery" as an epistemological fact, and not a fuzzy way of accommodating irrational beliefs, was far superior to the Western insistence on doctrinal definitions. That, to me, is THE great strength of Orthodoxy, because it accompanies a realistic acknowledgement of free will at the heart of even the most faithful adherent of tradition.
* The method of worship. The inclusion of the Saints in our lives. The concept of being "outside time". Realizing there was a whole different "world view" other than "Western", with an emphasis on mysticism (vs. rationalism). The empasis on mercy vs condemnation/judgment. The Harrowing of Hell and Christ conquering Satan.
* Orthodoxy gave me a whole new perspective (loving and merciful) on who God really is and who He is not. New way to view the Atonement.
* I was drawn to the clear teachings concerning morals and theology. The Church answered the questions that would be debated by college students and professors clearly and with the Scriptures within the other aspects of the Church's Tradition. Also, the understanding of sin and sanctity presented in the Church helped to realize how much of a sinner I was. This then lead to a more complete and joyful repentance.
* Worship. Free will. For many years I've felt that the evangelical movement was implicitly (and often explicitly) centered on "what can God do for me today"? Orthodoxy does not suffer from this illusion.
* Less power given to individual's personal theology. The place of Mary in the Church. Reverence and mystical nature of God affirmed, tradition, disciplines.
* had traditional theology DIFFERENT from Catholicism
* theological answers
* Philosophical.....Christ did not found a religion but brought the kingdom of God. All I want to do is save my soul and the Orthodox Church is the best place to do it. St. Seraphim said if you do that you will take thousands with you!
* Many intellectual things -- pro-environment, philosophical ideas, difference from western views of salvation; not merely ethical or social Christianity.
* The Orthodox Church has answers to questions that the Protestant denominations can't agree on and which are different in each denomination.
* The icons, the mystery, the logic of the theology

## Historical roots/Changeless

* Historical roots of Orthodoxy, especially in light of evangelicalism which essentially has no such roots.
* A feeling of connection with ancient Christianity
* It's always been there. It's the real thing. It wrote the bible.
* As a child it was beautiful and the people were all so nice and happy and the traditions were so special -- and as an adult that has not changed. The Catholic church kept changing and that became unattractive to me
* The historical continuity.
* Sacremental Theology and Historical continuity with the early church. Apostolic succession of Bishops.
* It's unchangeability, Understanding the scriptures by what the Fathers had to say about them. No theological fads like the protestants.
* The structure and Tradition of Orthodoxy were very attractive to me when I started investigating the faith. I liked the timeless aspect of the faith and the fact that things have remained the same over time. I also find the Liturgy to be incredibly beautiful and moving.
* The unity of the faith, preservation of her practices and theology, and claims to be the One and True faith, though daunting, at first, helped personally reconcile the understanding of a limited, isolated, independent and presumptuous experience of the western faiths' theology and experience.
* I think the sense of continuity with the church throughout history, and the Orthodox theology of redemption (that is, redemption of all of creation).
* It is so rich in traditions and history. Also, when attending the classes given by the priests, I knew this was the right church and I was being given the Truth. As opposed to the Catholic RCIA program where on the first day, we were told to draw a picture of God and were treated like elementary school children. It was taught by lay people. The priest, not once, taught a class and they focused on social programs. I never felt agitated after an Orthodox class and I did in the RICA program.
* The structure and sense that the Orthodox faith can be depended upon to not make changes in doctrine. I found the style of prayer very appealing.
* The Orthodox faith was the closest we could find to what we felt was the original church in theology and practice. The UNCHANGING church was the primary factor.
* the worldwide aspect of the church
* Intention to be consistent with faith and teaching of the very first Christians.
* The difficulty in changing doctrine and the services; the importance of Holy Tradition.
* The rootedness in the Bible and tradition. The beauty of the liturgy.
* The way Orthodoxy has come to us through the centuries maintaining the faith without splintering, not changing worship as modern life moves into our churches, the deeply beautiful liturgy.
* The beauty of the liturgy and the deep sense of spirituality. The sense of belonging to something that has continued with few changes since the time of the first Apostles.
* I was looking for a tradition that was established and did not change according to current society. I also needed a tradition that was more spiritual than typical Protestant traditions.
* Changeless adherence to the Resurrection.
* That it really is the faith and Church Jesus and the Apostles began. The Orthodox Church has held to the traditions handed down by the Apostles (2 Thess. 2:15).
* The diligence to preserve the tradition and doctrinal truths as handed down by the Apostles. Even though the worship and life is so different, in my spirit I have the sense that this is true worship. Its so beautiful.
* The involvement of all five senses in the worship experience. The rich theology in the Liturgical prayers, hymns, 1500 - 2000 years of consistency.
* The structure of the Liturgy, beauty of the Church, Apostolic tradition, ancient nature of the faith that is ongoing back to the time of Christ.
* I loved the fact that the Orthodox Christian faith is Apostolic and that its continuity goes back to the New Testament. I loved seeing the connection between Christian and Jewish Liturgical worship. As a convert I felt very welcomed.
* The historical continuity. The Truth, unwavering and yet non-polemical, not argumentative, the calm demeanor of Orthodox believers, Priests and Monastics.
* historical continuity with Christ and the Apostles
* I was tired of things changing in both the RC and Episcopalians. Especially with the morals part - Orthodoxy is a rock compared with the Episcopalians! I was tired of bad music!
* The Faith is unchanged since Jesus was here on earth.
* After an initial period of confusion (I was raised in a casual, non-liturgical church), I began feeling at home with the beauty of the liturgy. When I started studying, I was taken with the unchanging nature of the church.

# Behavior

* The Orthodox say what they do and do what they say.
* Orthodox people who were "for real" in their faith, excited about their life in Christ within the Orthodox church!
* Growing up experienced many empty words with no meaning, example "fasting and prayer" was spoken of in church, but was not practiced and without instructions
* The friendliness of people in the Orthodox churches I attended.
* What attracted me most was the love and joyfulness of various Orthodox Christians. I realized they had something different in their lives, which was different from mine. So, I wanted to have whatever they were having.
* Very friendly parish community and deeply devout traditions.
* A way of life that is lived--or, promised to.
* Warmth of the people
* Warmth and friendliness of the people and their willingness to include me in the life of the parish.
* The sincerity of most Orthodox that I met about their religion.
* Fervor: Priests on fire for God as they pray,
* The humbleness of the faith
* Without a doubt the most extraordinary draw was meeting people who were truly living out their faith. There was no pressure to join them, just warm welcomes and offers to explain any questions we had. The relationships among the priest and the parish members reflected that of a family who were on a common journey of faith. They were not perfect, but expressed the utmost sincerity in their support of each other. I felt incredibly blessed that they welcomed me and my husband to join their jour
* The continuity from the Apostles, thru the Councils, to the present. Firm beliefs not subject to votes every year. Having a Biblical basis for every part of the Liturgy.
* The love of the people in the parish.
* Priest can marry--he's more like one of us
* Sense of family and community
* Our priests are great at making it all easily accessible. They are very approachable.
* The fact that the whole faith is taken so seriously and God is held in such awe and deep reverence. (unlike some protestant churches where the whole thing is like a "show" or a fun time with joking, bands and singers, to amuse the people
* Seriousness. A more masculine form of piety. Beauty of the Liturgy and Church. Friendliness of the community. Willingness of the Priest to teach me... I was not even a Christian. I had to learn everything
* Actually it was the social group and the camaraderie that first attracted me. Being embraced by a group of like minded young adults. Also, when I seriously began attending the Liturgy we became members. That helped with the length of the service as we since we were actively involved. Even though the Liturgy was sung in Slovakian, it was the emotionality of the words that spoke.
* Anyone who prays "Lord have mercy" as much as we Orthodox do will have a sense of mercy and grant it.
* The icons, the chanting, the incense. I loved the mystic nature of the faith and I was drawn to the fact that Orthodoxy was truly a way of living day to day, not just something you did on Sundays.
* ... the community where I first attended services was so tremendously warm, welcoming and loving. It was the quality of Christian life that I encountered in the parish that really convinced me.
* The fact that worship involves the whole person, mind, body and soul. The realistic and human approach to human problems - the Church did not insist in getting into my bed and telling me what to do there; that living in a sham marriage is worse than getting a divorce; that children are blessings and not annoyances at services; that the priests knew my problems in an experiential sense and not just theoretical.

The emphasis on prayer. A depth of Christian worship and faith. A pastor who preached from the Bible and applied it to everyday life. A small mission community who were very welcoming. Being asked to join the choir and sing. A pastor/priest who exemplified the Christian life. The sheer depth of Christian faith and practice.

Basically summing up the previous answers: the deep, mystical spirituality, the sense that the Early Church was as close as yesterday, the consistency of belief (Holy Tradition), and the feeling that I had both finally reached the end of my near life-long quest for the fullness of the Christian Faith and the beginning of a new road into my future.

I attended the church my wife-to-be attended since my Lutheran "roots" were far behind me. I became immersed in all the Orthodox activities (singing in the choir, participating in Bible studies, financial contributions, allowing my children to be baptized Orthodox, etc.) and ultimately decided to convert after 11 years of marriage.

The timelessness of the Church and the consistency of the Faith. As a singer I was thrilled about an all sung Liturgy. This was only done in the Episcopal church when I was a little girl and only for high Holy Days. I also loved the chanting it reminded me of Temple. ( I grew up in a split tradition - luke warm Christianity and strong cultural Judaism.

Continuity, fullness of faith (not exclusion), community of believers (not individualistic and not "chain of command"), My experiences with my first Parish Priest were completely positive and the parish community was not just welcoming but thrilled to see us each time.   
The continuity of practice and theology from the time of Christ. The Tradition and traditions of the Church. The family type atmosphere of our parish. The services; beauty, length, meaning.

The beauty of the Liturgy, the unchanging unbroken history, being the original Church.

# What was Most Difficult

Since I was evangeilcal for the past twenty years, by far the hardest adjustment was Mary and the Saints. It's still hard, though I'm doing much better, since Mary, Saints, and Icons are ultimately about Christ. Also,

the entire ethnic feel that can come with Orthodoxy sometimes gives the impression that Orthodoxy is more about culture than the gospel. Perhaps this is because I'm a white, middle-aged American and don't fully understand the Russian or Greek culture.

Restricted roles of women's participation and service in the church. A very conservative political environment within the local parish.

face to face confessions,absorbing everything.

Ethnicity, language, traditionalism, false monasticism.

Protestant hammer home the "shall worship graven images", icons and symbols were difficult.   
  
Confessing your sins was difficult as I was untrained.

Not so much veneration of Mary, but the insistence upon:  
Her "sinlessness"

Her virginity in childbirth ("In giving birth/You preserved your virginity")

Her perpetual virginity, ie. her lack of sexual relations with Joseph after Christ's birth

Length of services. Use of Slavonic when not really many people understand or speak it.

Many things were difficult - the standing, veneration of Mary, kissing everything and everyone - but the people in the parish went out of their way to explain things, sometimes even before I would ask a question. They made sure I never felt embarrassed to ask something

I attend an old parish that was founded by Eastern Europeans. Many of the parishioners at the parish I attend do not and never will accept anyone who is even slightly different. They frequently argue that the church should go back to using Slavonic, which I see as their attempt to drive out any converts. As I was told, it is important to find people who will do things the way they have always been done at our parish.

Ethnicity

The first divine liturgy I attended seemed totally foreign, weird, and intimidating. I didn't know the proper church etiquette, which made me feel ill at ease. I didn't want to be membered, but always an outsider, because I was "plain old American". I found some of the music to be repetitive and dry. Since then, my heart has grown to love the church and it's practices, wooed by love and acceptance.

I did not have any

None really. I truly believe the Holy Spirit moved me to Orthodoxy and that I was to be open to the beliefs of the faith.

The verneration of the Saints, Mary, and icons. Especially Mary.

It was difficuly breaking the ice socially. I also struggled a litte with the ethnic component. I must say, though, that the church I attend is not very ethnic as Orthodox parishes go.

None that I can remember

Never feeling comfortable with the little things, like knowing what to do when. The feeling that it was an ethnic club we could never really belong to because our last name has only one syllable. The long and confusing liturgy.

The length of standing and the rigors of fasting.

The ethnicity. At times I felt feelings of judgement or skepticism, when I was only trying to learn and find my way.

as a child I could not understand the language; however, that was very curious to me -- sometimes I miss that even to this day

Fasting and confession. Still are.

Ethnicity. Difference in Western tradition. Unfamiliarity. Big difference in the tradition of modern Evangelical Protestantism.

some churches focus on ethnic pride...

How Mary figured into the church & why she is so highly requarded. Conforming my life to the life of the Church by means of fasting & confession, it's a process.

Extreme difference in service, fasting & confession

Closed communion was a new an difficult concept for me, but it was explained to me well and I came to understand the reasons. I had to learn to accept tradition rather than demanding a deatiled rule of "this is what you must do and believe." Ortrhodoxy is nuanced and flexible, not black-and-white. While this was hard to comprehend at first, it is also an abiding attraction of Orthodoxy.

It was difficult to understand why I couldn't receive communion at first. The liturgy was confusing at first, but I fell in love with the music.

Apophatic theology, Tradition, not just the bible (it was a saftey blanket), Mary, kissing icons (now I paint them! go figure)

I still have trouble with venerating icons. I understand the concept...but I'm not 100% sure it is correct. The attitude regarding saints is fine with me. But there is a potential for abuse there that I find disturbing and I think the Orthodox Church needs to provide instruction to cradle-born Orthodox as well we converts on this matter to prevent abuse.

The most difficult thing for me to understand was the idea of salvation. I had learned in the past that once a person is "saved," everything is done and over with. It was hard for me to learn and understand that salvation is an ongoing process.

The anti-Semitic undercurrents of the Holy Friday services. If I had been exposed to the flagrant anti-Semitism of much of Holy Friday matins earlier on in my conversion I would have run a mile. This is still a major problem for me -- I could never be a monastic because I would refuse to attend the Holy Friday services which I view as containing egregiously sinful material.

Having been un-churched when I first investigated Orthodoxy, I found basic elements of Christology and Trinitarian theology very hard to understand. Also, coming from a New Age background, the "scandal of particularity" in terms of the Incarnation was very difficult to grasp and come to terms with.

ethnicity, esp. as concerned language of service. Multi-jurisdictionalism in NA: a priest answered the question "Am I converting to Orthodoxy or, specifically, to Serbian Orthodoxy?" with "Serbian Orthodoxy." Hmmm...

Elements of faith: Theology of the Virgin Mary as venerable. The claims as the true faith.  
  
Experience in the church: Seeming disinterest in group prayers and conversation regarding experiences of faith and personal conversion.

The indifferent hospitality of Orthodox laity

The veneration of Mary and the Saints. May they forgive me!!

Veneration of saints and the Theotokos. I completely understood respecting them, especially the Theotokos, but the degree of devotion confused me. In the same line, kissing the priest's hand was difficult.

It took me a long time to be in a situation where I could attend services. This undoubtedly prolonged my conversion.

The elements of Orthodox worship which were foreign to what I had ever experienced before.

Nobody would really talk to me because I was not Russian.

In your face ethnic nationalism. The way some orthodox folks seem to see the church as their own private ethnic culture club, praying in a language I don't understand. My conversion has also caused estrangement and alianation from my heterodox friends and family. My Dad still seems to think I've jonied a cult.

confession, I go regularly but see to keep confessin the same sins--would community (group0 confession be less stressfull?

The Orthodox church seems more disorganized compared to the other denominations so that a new experience. I adapted however!

Having standards to live by was probably the most difficult. Not being able to do whatever without any feedback was difficult.

Confession, the emphasis on the Virgin Mary,

The accepted dictatorship role of the priest in the church. Not having a board of trustees who make the decisions for the church's physical plant and other non-spiritual tasks.

Venerating icons, the beliefs about the Theotokos, not understanding why non-Orthodox couldn't receive communion

Icons

complicated, no too many straight answers.

Big 3: Mary, Saints, Icons.

Just like anything else, understanding that it is ok to not know everything. To just trust God and believe that the truth will be revealed

The length of the services, the fasting. It STILL is the most difficult part.

Standing through a service.  
  
Traveling 60 miles both ways to attend services.  
  
Fasting.

Ethnicity - also overcoming my own families' anxiety about joining a Russian Church. An Ethnic group (not the Church) that had some very difficult history in dealing with the West (cold war), of which family didn't separate this out. Also there were members who would remind me of the organized pogroms against the Jews.

The Slavonic. I wanted to understand what was being said. The fasts. In the Serbian church frequent Communion wasn't done, a fact that I still find hard to understand. I attend an OCA church now so neither is a problem.

The role of Saints and the Virgin Mary where (are ?) hard for me as a (hopefully) ex-Protestant. But, I think Orthodox has the proper balance, I'm still working on it for myself. Having gone to one church who would not even call anyone Saint except Paul and the 12, I'm still getting used to all the concepts.

Many of the people (and priest) let their political views be known in church, literature and church email. They were very conservative. Imagine me, a social worker and my husband an environmentalist in this setting.  
  
  
A funny thing: they and we agree on all moral matters with the Orthodox church (what's right & wrong). Yet we disagree on ALL THINGS POLITICAL (how to achieve it in the world.)

We nearly quit early on when someone wrote in church lit. that environmentalists were like hitler.

Why it is more important to be ethnic than Christian.

hostility of Greeks toward non-Greeks

Confession, constraints on women, no flexibility, ethnic nature and separation of Orthodox churches

ethnicity

Wondering if I would get used to the chanting (OCA). It took me a month before I heard the words first and not the music. Then I joined the choir. In the church I now attend (Antiochian), there is no choir, only a couple of voices leading the chant--that too has been difficult. But the church is growing and before long we too will have a choir.

Initially I wanted to be a bit inconspicuous, but in reality I felt very much an outsider. A few folks were very kind, but overall I did not feel welcome. The ethnic tradition seemed (and at times still seems) too tightly entwined with the Faith, and that was something I could not accept, given that Orthodoxy was supposed to be universal. My ex-wife did not want our children to go to "my" church, as it smacked of the Roman church she rejected, and Orthodoxy was almost a cult to her.

Papal claims

How it would affect relationships with non-Orthodox family and friends, esp those who would not understand.  
  
Veneration of Mary and the saints.  
  
Length of services, but this became a lesser issue over time.

Confession, trying to attend muliple services.

i did not have a good understanding of obedience. This had to be taught to me by the priest who chrismated me before my chrismation. A very difficult lesson.

The lack of educational materials. The ignorance of the average parishioner as to the Orthodox faith. The lack of Biblical knowledge. The over-emphasis of culture. The lack of desire for spiritual growth and knowledge among the parishioners. The lack of interest in Bible (or any spiritual) studies.

Of course, I had to wrap my brain around the Body and Blood of Christ actually BEING the Body and Blood of Christ!  
  
  
  
Having to learn to re-interpret the scriptures in the Orthodox perspective

The Eastern Rite Liturgy was most confusing.

Parishioners seemed to be cold and detached. No real welcome from lay people until I had been there 2 months. Some confusion as to the many jurisdictions. Confusion about how cradle Orthodox were tied up in knots about language - some parishes viewed Slavonic as simply another church element, other parishes screamed bloody murder if anyone used anything other than English - even to the point of telling recent immigrants that they should either learn English or find another parish.

There were no elements of the faith with which I had any difficulties during my investigation or catechumenate. The one stumbling block was the use of languages other than English -- primarily Slavonic, Arabic, and Greek -- for significant portions of the services in the Orthodox parishes I visited. I am monolingual; if I felt a need to learn a second language, Spanish would make sense because I grew up in New Mexico, lived in Southern California, and see a need to evangelise the Hispanics.

Confession - difficult 20+ years ago and still difficult today.

I don't have an answer to this question. None of it was too difficult. It was like coming home. Not everything at home is ideal, but there was nothing of the nature of a serious barrier.

The difficulty of breaking into a highly ethnic parish where everyone is related. However, our current parish has been great and is pan-Orthodox. Pan-Orthodox parishes are much easier, in my opinion, to break into.

Knowing that I had only a limited fellowship with my non-Orthodox Protestant friends.

There isn't enough space. I would say that the Orthodox Church never needs to apologize for its differences with Western Christian theological and ecclesiastical principles. On the other hand, it also needs to acknowledge that the entire world has become "westernized" to the degree that all thought is now regarded as dynamic and capable of change. There is no such thing as a "fixed truth" that the human mind can comprehend, let alone formulate.

No longer found the saintly priests and the incredible old people of my past memory because I joined an Othodox Church in English, and made up of mostly converts.  
  
The converts seem so very intellectual, unlike my memory of the old Russian People whos faith kept them alive. They were all well educated, and lived through the Russian Revolution. I loved their stories about their lives, their faith, their values. They gave so much, shared so much.

Veneration of the Theotokos was the most difficult

I did not understand church Slavonic. I had no interest in learning it. But I wanted one religion in my home. Thank God for the OCA and priests who serve in English.

standing for so long. Seemed so foreign in many ways. Was very worried that I might be insulting or rejecting the faith I had grown up with. Only when a priest explained that it was not repudiating that faith but going beyond to the fullness of Christ's church that I was able to seriously consider converting.

Fasting  
  
Confession  
  
Veneration of Icons

In our youthful zeal we were unbalanced and ungrounded, often attempting to implement monastic practices in family life, which caused a lot of confusion and prelest. Understanding the different jurisdictions was difficult, as was the experience of the often viscious in-fighting among and within the different jurisdictions. Discovering corruption amoung church leaders we had trusted was also very difficult.

Standing for so long. Fasting. Getting oriented to what was going on during the Liturgy.

Ethnic jingoism; propensity to continue to argue over whose village was better in Macedonia (by people who never lived there), indifference to doctrinal issues on the part of "ethnics," not exactly a welcome but more of a toleration of me.

Confession to the Priest was most difficul and the extreme fasting during Lent were most difficult. They are still difficult for me, but I do them as much as I can. I live an hour and 20 minutes away from my Parish, so can't always get there during Pascha services. I'm 73 years old, and my husband is 75. Not so easy to get up and go as often.

I think it has been the veneration of Mary and the idea of regular confession. I now have embraced both of these and have no difficulties

Length of services, tho not a problem now. The icon screen seemed alienating, tho not now. The veneration of the icons seemed strange, tho not now. Being excluded from communion was odd, but now it makes sense. Really, the more one learns, the more it all makes sense.

Length of services  
  
Language used in parts of the services (Arabic)

I still have trouble with the notions of not ordaining women, and also the attitude of the church towards homosexuals, but these are not significant enough to curb my interest. I also believe that there is room for change yet in the Orthodox church.

The "you not Greek, get out!" attitude I experienced when visited GOA parishes. I still avoid them as much as possible. GOA parishes in my area are VERY ethnic and most have services entirely (or mostly) in Greek.

Fasting  
  
Confession  
  
Bowing

- Lack of Information on Parish in Area  
  
- Understanding the Liturgy and what I should be doing, what it meant

Slavonic

Exclusive Eucharist

Veneration of Mary

The "arrogance" of the Orthodox Church in their refusal to acknowledge the presence of Christ in Protestant churches. I first found Christ in a Protestant church. My experience is that I found Christ in more fullness in the Orthodox Church than in the church of my childhood. The phrase "The True Church" is difficult for me to understand.

Replacement of old world culture for the Gospel in the parish experience.

I was always being asked "what are you". I had a very hard time understanding what they meant, and only figured it out after many had walked away from me in disgust. I kept answering - I'm a mother, a wife...... Then, when I finally figured it out, I would answer that I was part Russian Jew and part Scottish. They always would say something like, "Oh okay you are Russian that's good".

A possible inbalance in the veneration of Mary

Foreign languages in some of the churches I visited. I was understanding of it, but on the other hand, I am not going to feel as comfortable with it.

I believe that trying to understand fasting traditions was a bit complex, but not impossible.

Many in the parish, incl. leadership, were against the preist, who was a good man, and teaching the truth with love.

Prayer to the Saints and all theology concerning the Theotokos were the most difficult. The veneration of icons and holy things were next most difficult things for me to participate in and understand.

Understanding the liturgy.

venerating and praying to Mary & saints; seeing that Orthodoxy is traditional, not reactionary

I was afraid of being viewed as an outsider (ethnically) until I realized that God did not intend the Orthodox Church just for Greeks, Russians, Serbs, etc. (DUH) Also, being from a Protestant background (including Mennonites ) icons were seen as next door to idolatry. Living in Kansas there are few Orthodox. None of my friends or relatives were Orthodox.

I had the most trouble with the music. Troparians, etc. and the tones. I found it most difficult to learn the tones (especially a capella) and in our parish there were so many papers to keep shuffling and I couldn't follow well at all.

The standing for those long periods of time was hard at first.

The complexity of the service.

the dedication of services leading up to Pascha

Many of Orthodoxy's statements and practices (the idea of "embodying the fullness of faith", lack of communion with other churches, exclusion from the Eucharist) seem to assert the belief that "Orthodox are the only real Christians in the world." While there is a real and understandable sense in which this is true from the Orthodox point of view, this attitude may be one of the greatest obstacles for non-Orthodox persons who \*know\* they fully believe in and have committed their lives to Christ.

Praying to Saints, Praying to Mary, kissing Icons, kissing the Priest's hand and confession to another person.

Orthodoxy is not visitor friendly, seems cultish and unattainable for ordinary folks.

Getting lost in the Liturgy

Cultural aspects, fear of the unknown. It's just very different from protestant worship and while I believe it is better it's hard to let go of my old ways. My family is not Orthodox and I don't want to cause any turmoil.

The ethnicity, esp. among Greeks, Serbs and Ukrainians.

ALL THE WORK! The many services, the fasting, confession etc. It was quite daunting in the beginning. I remember thinking "Am I really up to this level of thinking, am I really up to this level of spiritual commitment"? Being a protestant is much easier.

I believe the ethnic divisions of the Church are destructive. Greek vs. Romanian etc. It is un-Christ like.

Prayers directed toward the saints and Mary, veneration of relics. But with time I began to understand the significance and beauty of these aspects of worship.

Some of the Church's teaching about Mary. But most of all the lack of a unified Orthodox Church here in America. The different jurisdictions are hereticaly close to protestant denominations. I think the Church is not the place to talk about Greek, Russian or any other culture. We are supposed to worship God. I also think the different jurisdictions in America is deplorable. There should be only one Orthodox Church in America using the English language.

Trying to find answers to every question and instead being told to wait, to have patience, to understand via faith and prayer.

Becaouse the Liturgy was sung in Slovanik, it was difficult to truly know the Liturgy. Even with a translated Liturgy book it was difficult to relate to the meaning of the prayers.

Standing during the majority of the Liturgy, especially those more than 1 1/2 hours and fasting

I come from a Lutheran background which has a much fuller and more ecumenical hymnody. I still miss that. I also was put off by the lack of easy to follow Liturgical resources in the pews.

No difficulty. I investigated for a long time. Leaving old friends from my old church was the hardest.

The "otherness" of it and the extent to which I might "fit in" and be accepted by them. My wife's disinterest with it.

One on one confession still remains difficult. Ethnicity and lack of member acceptance was the most difficult challenge to overcome.

None

Praying to Saints. When I read the theology of the Church on venerating and praying to the Saints and the Theotokos it makes sense. Some of the prayers I have read seem like they go beyond veneration and become worship.

Not knowing about the religion was difficult at first, but as the years went by, it became a lot easier to adjust.

It's complexity and my absolute ignorance. My western mind did not grasp the spirituality, history doctrine, the total sobriety, none of it. It was all foreign (not ethnically), but theologically and spiritually foreign. But, it felt right.

ethnicity  
  
feeling very much like an outsider  
  
unwelcome in some contexts  
  
culture shock  
  
chanting

t was very difficult at first to not be "ethnic" in a very ethnic church. People were mostly very kind and accepting but I was obviously "different". I also missed not having the opportunity to grow up Orthodox.

Standing so long. Repetition of prayers. Unfamiliar with the history and Saints. Fasting and understanding the point of it on an experiential level.

I began attending a Russian Orthodox Church and had a very difficult time understanding the Liturgy since it was primarily served in Russian.

What I didn't understand: Icons, Mary, salvation outside of the Orthodox Church. I was drawn to the Church and more so back to Christ and had to study to understand before I found certain things not to be difficult.

The Church was heavily embedded in the ethnicity of the parishioners, not the religion. Macedonian was spoken during the services which I do not speak.

Praying to Saints and Mary, fasting.

The fact I could not take communion. Fasting ideals were difficult to grasp. A lot of things going on at once can be overwhelming. A few aspects of the Liturgy are difficult to digest such as some feast days, some points in the extended Liturgy I feel are very antisemitic. I would like to see some modifications in the Liturgy that addresses some of the antisemitic sentiments, especially in the extended Pascha and Pentecost Liturgy.

It was the language problem. Most of the service was in Serbian. Periods of fasting. Seen as an outsider, almost all were Orthodox from birth.

The discipline

Length of the Liturgy and standing the entire service

The length of the Liturgy, and standing the entire service.

I

Liturgical traditions

The only problem for me might have been the language, but since my earliest experience was Holy Trinity Church (OCA) in Detroit, mostly English and then St. Mark, entirely in English language was not a problem.