

AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

STATISTICS

The data given for 1926 represent 13 active organizations of the African Orthodox Church, all reported as being in urban territory. The total membership was 1,568, comprising 689 males and 879 females. The classification by sex and by age was reported by all of the 13 churches, 11 of which reported members under 13 years of age.

The membership of this denomination includes all baptized persons, infants as well as adults.

As this is a new denomination, there are no comparative statistics.

State tables.—Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the statistics for the African Orthodox Church by States. Table 1 gives for each State the number and membership of the churches and the membership classified by sex. Table 2 gives for selected States the number and membership of the churches, and the membership classified as under 13 years of age and 13 years of age and over. Table 3 presents the church expenditures for 1926, showing separately the amounts expended for current expenses and improvements, and for benevolences, etc., and also gives the data for Sunday schools. Separate presentation in Table 3 is limited to those States in which 3 or more churches reported expenditures, in order to avoid disclosing the financial statistics of any individual church, and for this reason no table is given showing the value of church property and the debt on such property. The States omitted from Table 3 can be determined by referring to the complete list which appears in Table 1.

TABLE 1.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, AND MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, BY STATES, 1926: AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION AND STATE	Number of churches	Number of members	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP BY SEX		
			Male	Female	Males per 100 females ¹
United States.....	13	1,568	689	879	78.4
New England:					
Massachusetts.....	3	378	169	209	80.9
Connecticut.....	1	55	30	25	-----
Middle Atlantic:					
New York.....	6	916	388	528	73.5
East North Central:					
Illinois.....	1	46	24	22	-----
South Atlantic:					
Florida.....	2	173	78	95	-----

¹ Ratio not shown where number of females is less than 100.

TABLE 2.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, AND MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, BY STATES, 1926: AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches]

STATE	Number of churches	Number of members	MEMBERSHIP BY AGE		
			Under 13 years	13 years and over	Per cent under 13
United States.....	13	1,568	376	1,192	24.0
Massachusetts.....	3	378	56	322	14.8
New York.....	6	916	258	658	28.2
Other States.....	4	274	63	212	22.6

TABLE 3.—CHURCH EXPENDITURES AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS, BY STATES, 1926: AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting expenditures]

STATE	Total number of churches	EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR			SUNDAY SCHOOLS			
		Churches reporting	Total amount	For current expenses and improvements	For benevolences, missions, etc.	Churches reporting	Officers and teachers	Scholars
United States.....	13	13	\$19,368	\$18,211	\$1,157	11	49	445
Massachusetts.....	3	3	3,022	3,851	71	3	12	83
New York.....	6	6	13,027	12,061	966	5	26	263
Other States.....	4	4	2,419	2,299	120	3	11	79

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION¹

DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY

The African Orthodox Church came into existence in 1921, after a preliminary period of preparation. The Rev. Dr. George Alexander McGuire, for many years a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church, believing that Negro Episcopalians should conduct and control their own religious organization, as their Methodist and Baptist brethren have done for over a century, withdrew from the Anglican communion in 1919 and established a number of congregations in the United States, Canada, and Cuba, which he designated "Independent Episcopal." On September 2, 1921, the first General Synod was convened in the city of New York for the purpose of organizing a branch of the Holy Catholic Church which should be governed by persons of African descent and should gather in churchmen of this particular race in both hemispheres, yet not refuse persons of other racial groups who might voluntarily seek to enter its membership or receive its sacraments. At this synod the name "African Orthodox" was chosen as the distinctive title of the new church, and the organizer, the Rev. Dr. McGuire, was unanimously elected as its first bishop, receiving the consecration three weeks later from Archbishop Vilatte, whose episcopate had been derived from the West Syrian Jacobite Church of Antioch by special mandate of the patriarch, Peter Ignatius III. Thus the African Orthodox Church derived

¹ This statement was furnished by the Most Reverend Alexander, D. D., archbishop and primate, African Orthodox Church, and approved by him in its present form.

its apostolic succession and became episcopal in government and polity; and while it is autonomous and independent, it aspires to be recognized as an integral portion of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

DOCTRINE

The African Orthodox Church accepts the Holy Scriptures, as well as the Holy Tradition, as the source of divine truth; it accepts the Nicene Creed, without the "filioque" interpolation, as of obligation, but believes also in the symbols known as the Apostles' Creed and the Creed of St. Athanasius. It accepts the dogmatic decrees of the seven Ecumenical Councils held between the fourth and the eighth centuries. It receives as a portion of the original deposit of faith the seven sacraments. It holds that the Eucharist is both a sacrament and a sacrifice offered for the living and the dead. Marriage being one of the sacraments, it holds that there should be no dissolution of its bonds except for the cause of adultery or malicious desertion, and no priest may marry a divorced person unless he or she be the innocent party in a divorce granted by a proper court for the causes mentioned, and then only by permission of his bishop in each such case of remarriage.

The denomination has set forth its own sacred liturgy, with other rites and ceremonies. Generally speaking, it follows the Western rite and is a combination of Anglican, Roman, and, in a few instances, Greek Orthodox formularies, prepared with the special purpose of making an appeal to Negro Episcopalians and Roman Catholics. The mass is the chief service each Sunday, and in the bestowing of holy orders the Roman forms of ordination and consecration are followed. The vestments used in worship are those prescribed by the Western rite and the hymnal that which is known as "Hymns Ancient and Modern."

Membership is counted as in the Roman Catholic Church, not by communicants, but by the persons baptized.

ORGANIZATION

The polity of the African Orthodox Church conforms to that of all churches which regard the episcopacy as the central source of authority in matters spiritual and temporal. The bishop is the head of his diocese or jurisdiction, functioning also as president of his diocesan synod. Groups of dioceses form a province, over each of which there is an archbishop and primate, who presides over the provincial synod. At the head of the entire church, including all provinces, is the patriarch, who presides over the Pan-African Conclave of Archbishops and Bishops and is the acknowledged ruler of the African Orthodox Church of the world. At present there is an American province extending through Canada, the United States, and Latin America and an African province extending through the Union of South Africa, each with its own archbishop and primate. The patriarch at present is the organizer and first bishop mentioned above.

WORK

In the American province there are 3 bishops, 18 priests, 7 deacons, and 2 deaconesses. The congregations hold services in rented quarters in most cases, since the work receives no outside aid and since all property must be purchased by the membership. Already seven of these congregations have acquired property and all are raising building funds. In the earlier years the growth was slow, but now that the organization of the church has been completed there has been a marked increase, the membership of the whole American province being slightly over 3,000.

In the African province the work, which is an extension from the home field, begun in 1924, has grown to 14 congregations with 2,000 members. Over these are a bishop, 7 priests, 2 deacons, and several readers.

The legal headquarters of the African Orthodox Church are in Miami, Fla., in which State the charter of incorporation was granted, but the actual operating headquarters are located in New York City. A theological school is conducted to train men for the ministry; a periodical known as "The Negro Churchman" is published monthly, and the central government is administered from the metropolitan city.