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## **Converts to Orthodoxy: Statistics on Engagement**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to provide insights on the engagement of recent converts to Orthodox Christianity in the United States. By tracking the converts year by year, we hope to provide Orthodox Christian leaders with data on the engagement rates for different subsets of converts, analyzing by gender, age, family status, and reason for converting. This study was done in tandem with the study on convert numbers and demographics. We analyze the engagement of converts by their former religion, gender, age, method of reception, family status, and reasons for converting. Our data indicates that there is an overall upward trend of engagement for converts surveyed between 2013 and 2019.

**Data Sources:** The data for this study was gathered by compiling information from Orthodox clergy in 20 parishes across 6 different jurisdictions in 15 states during the summer and early fall of 2023. Consequently, converts who joined the church in the latter part of 2023 were not included, thus resulting in only partial data for 2023. Participating clergy provided data either through interviews with the OSI research team or by filling out a spreadsheet with the requested data and sending it to the OSI team. Clergy were asked to consult their metrical records for the years 2013-2023 to ensure that all adult (18+) converts during the time period were documented. We specifically sought out parishes where clergy (usually the main priest, but in two cases other clergy) had been personally present for the entire 2013-2023 time period to ensure that they had firsthand knowledge of each convert and, to the fullest extent possible, the current status of each convert. Although we gathered data on converts from 2013 until the fall of 2023, the converts from 2020-2023 were excluded from the comparative analysis between demographic groups to avoid any recency bias.

**Analysis of Engagement:** To measure “engagement,” we asked clergy to indicate, for each convert, whether he/she is currently:

- Still regularly attending services at the parish
- Still actively Orthodox but at a different parish
- Inactive, showing up now and then but not regularly
- No longer Orthodox
- Deceased
- Unknown

To calculate “engagement score,” we scored as follows:

- 1 for those individuals who are either actively attending the parish where they converted, or are active in another Orthodox parish
- 0.5 for those individuals who are still Orthodox but are inactive
- 0.25 for those individuals whose current status is unknown
- 0 for those individuals who are no longer Orthodox

For purposes of the engagement score, we ignored deceased individuals. The total number was then divided by the number of still-living converts, resulting in the engagement score.

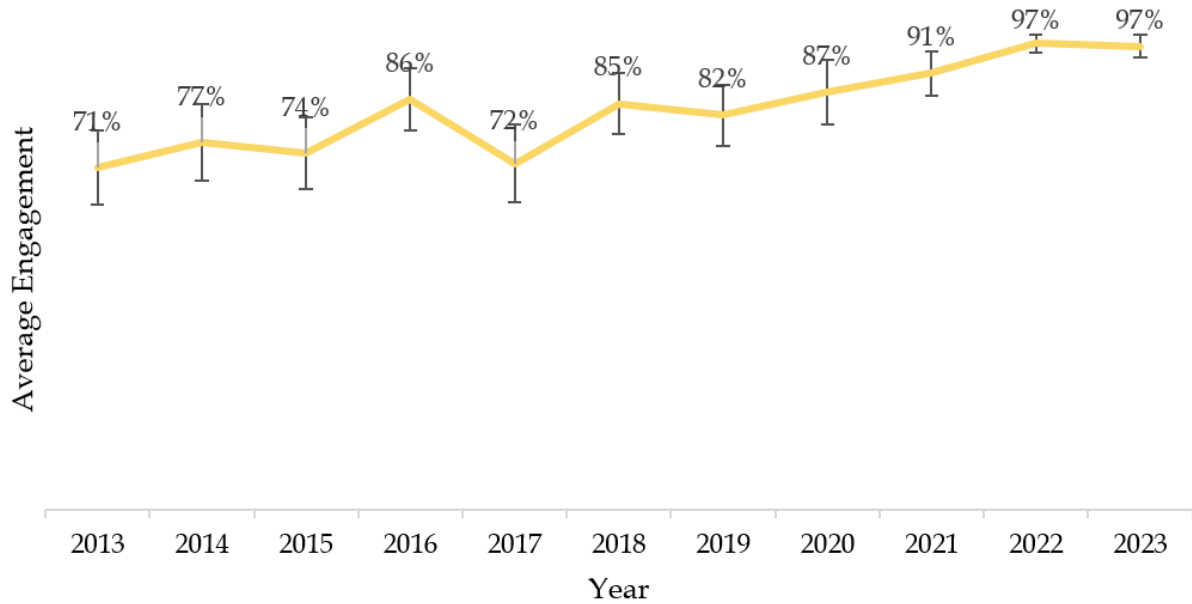
**Engagement Metrics:** We asked the priests of the parishes surveyed to assess the engagement of the converts. There were six categories, each assigned a particular probability score. They are as follows below:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Engagement Probability</b>
Priest who received the convert into the faith knows the individual and he or she is still active in the parish.	100%
The individual has left the parish where he or she was received into the faith and the priest knows that the convert is still active in their new parish.	100%
The individual is not a regular participant in the life of the parish. He or she attends services and programs sporadically.	50%
The priest who received the convert into the faith does not know how engaged the individual is.	25%
The convert is definitely no longer Orthodox or has completely stopped participation in the life of the Church.	0%
The convert has reposed since joining the Faith.	No score assigned; excluded from analysis.

This method of assigning a probability of engagement is rough, but it allows for some broad statistics on the likelihood of continuous engagement of converts after conversion.

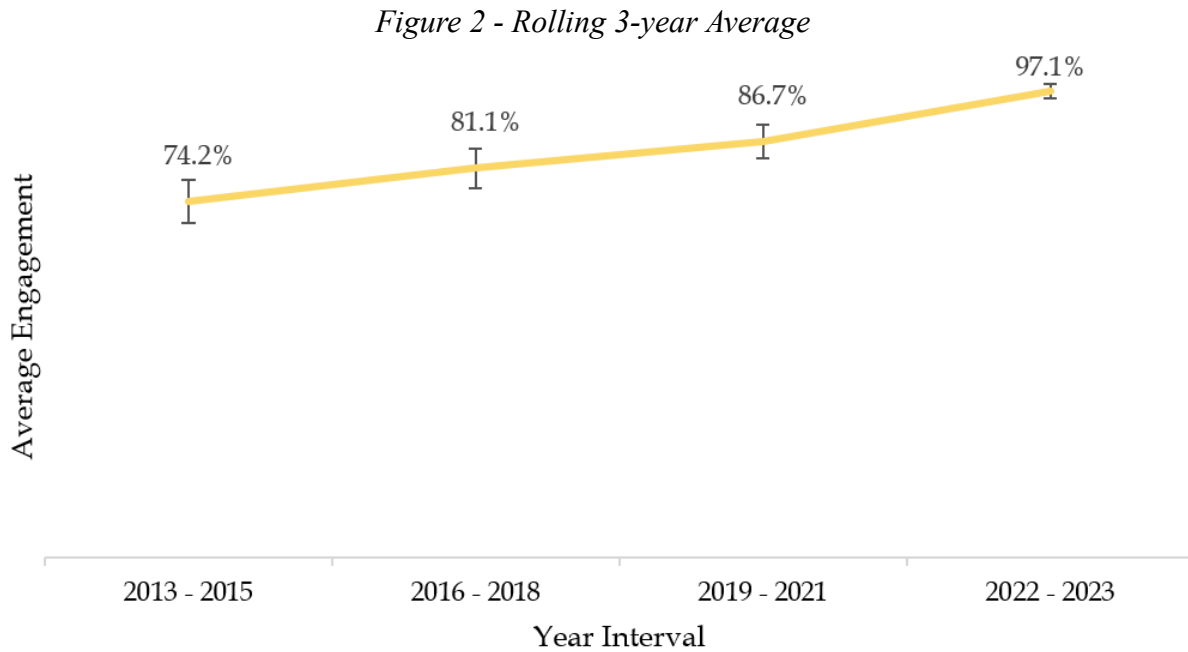
**Engagement By Recency:** Our findings indicate that those who converted in recent years are more likely to be engaged than their peers and are excluded from the correlations that follow to ensure that this recency effect does not skew our interpretations. As the graph below indicates, the average engagement of converts tends in the first two years after conversion, and then declines afterwards. The converts in 2022 and 2023 are highly engaged, and the more you go back in time, the less likely it is that a convert is still engaged.

Figure 1 - Engagement by Year of Conversion<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The error bars in the graph are 95% confidence intervals. The same applies for all subsequent graphs.

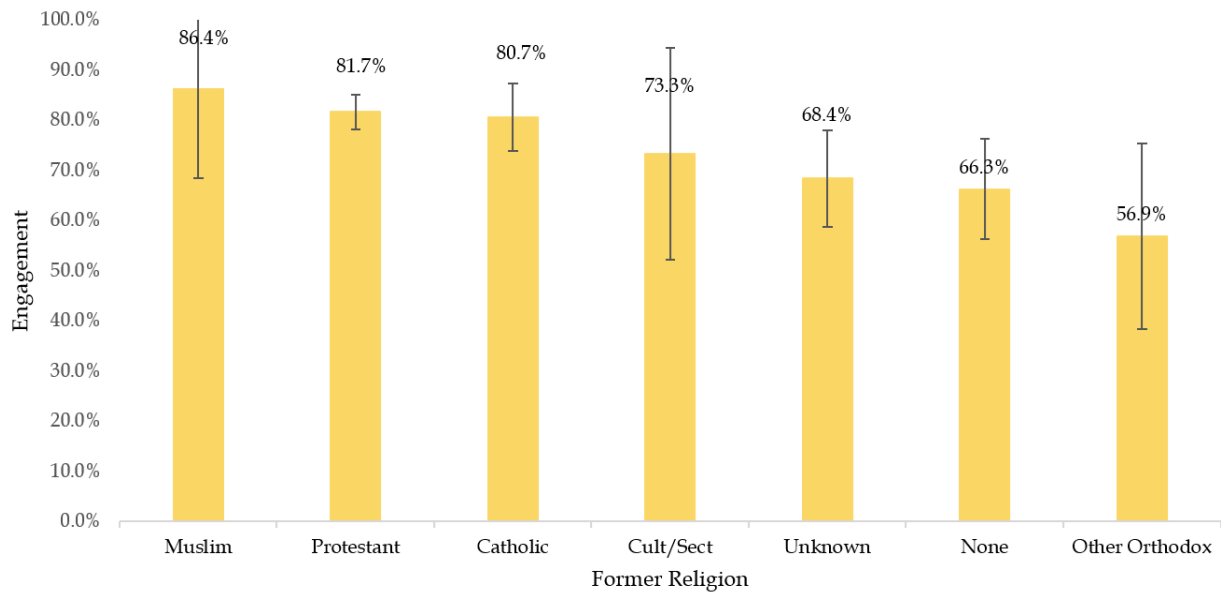
**Engagement by Recency, Rolling 3-year Average:** The rolling three year average reinforces the previous conclusion: those who more recently converted are significantly more likely to be engaged in their parish.



**Former Religion:** As stated above, for purposes of comparing engagement levels between demographic groups, we have only included the converts from 2013-2019 in the following analysis to remove any recency bias.

Former Protestants, making up well over half of the converts during 2013-2019, have nearly an 82% engagement rate, only surpassed by former Muslims. The sample sizes (N) are varied, as we would expect from the religious background breakdown discussed previously. Probably the most surprising result from this chart is that converts from Orthodox-adjacent sects like the Maronites and Copts were the least likely to remain engaged after conversion, even less likely than those who had no religion before conversion.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3 - Average Engagement by Former Religion

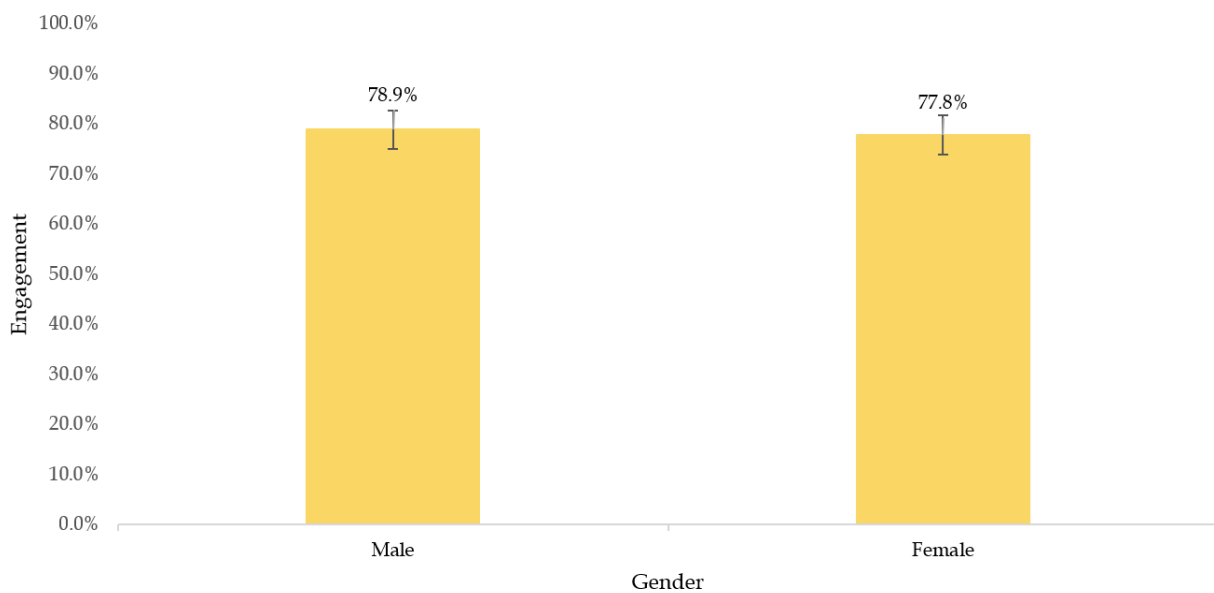


<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned observations should be taken with a grain of salt because the vast majority of differences were not statistically significant, as observed by the 95% confidence intervals overlapping. The only statistically significant difference in engagement was between Other Orthodox and Protestant converts.

<b>Table 5. Average Engagement by Former Religion</b>		
<b>Former Religion</b>	<b>Average Engagement</b>	<b>Number</b>
Islam	86.4%	11
Protestant	81.7%	379
Catholic	80.7%	96
Cult/Sect	73.3%	15
Unknown	68.4%	57
None	66.3%	46
Other Orthodox	56.9%	18
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>639</b>

**Gender:** Men were slightly more likely to be engaged than women after conversion, with an average engagement rate of 78.9%. Women had an average engagement rate of 77.8%.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the observed difference in engagement was not statistically significant because the confidence intervals intersect. Therefore we found no evidence of a meaningful difference in the engagement of men and women.

*Figure 4 - Engagement by Gender*

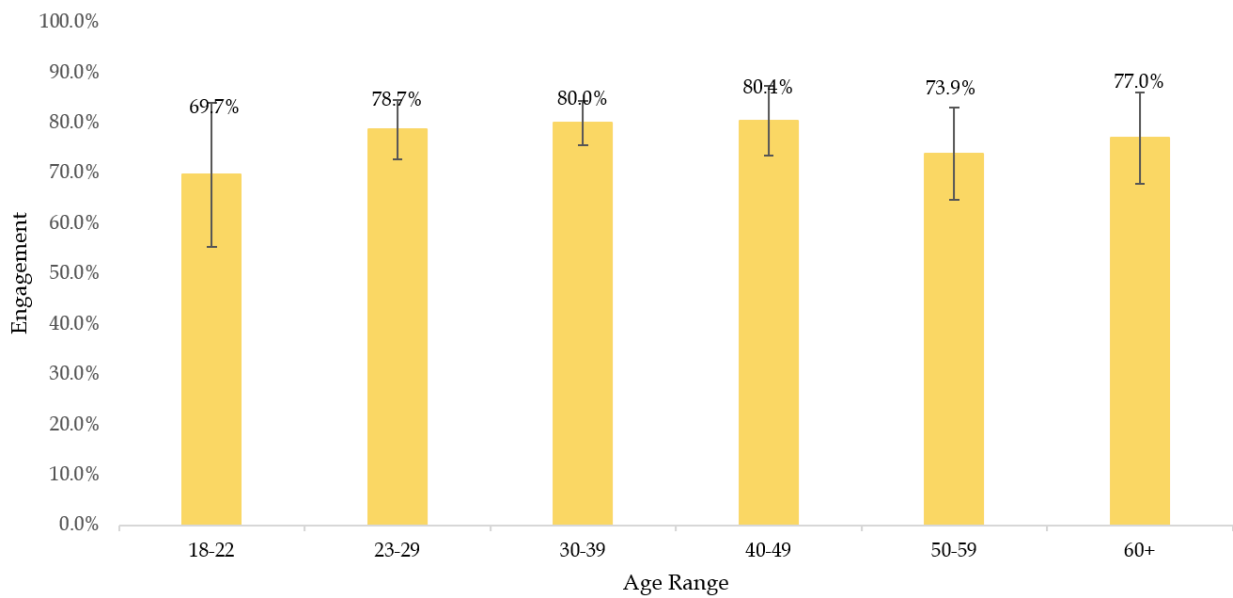


<sup>3</sup>Of the 622 converts between the years of 2013-2019, 319 were male and 303 were female.



**Age:** As above, we divided the converts into six different age categories. Young adults between the ages of 23-29 had the highest engagement, at 82.8%, whereas 18-22 year olds had the lowest engagement, at 68.2%. It should be noted that the sample size for the 18-22 year old age group is small, comprising only 11 of the converts. The aforementioned observations should be taken with a grain of salt because none of the observed differences were statistically significant - the 95% confidence intervals overlapped.

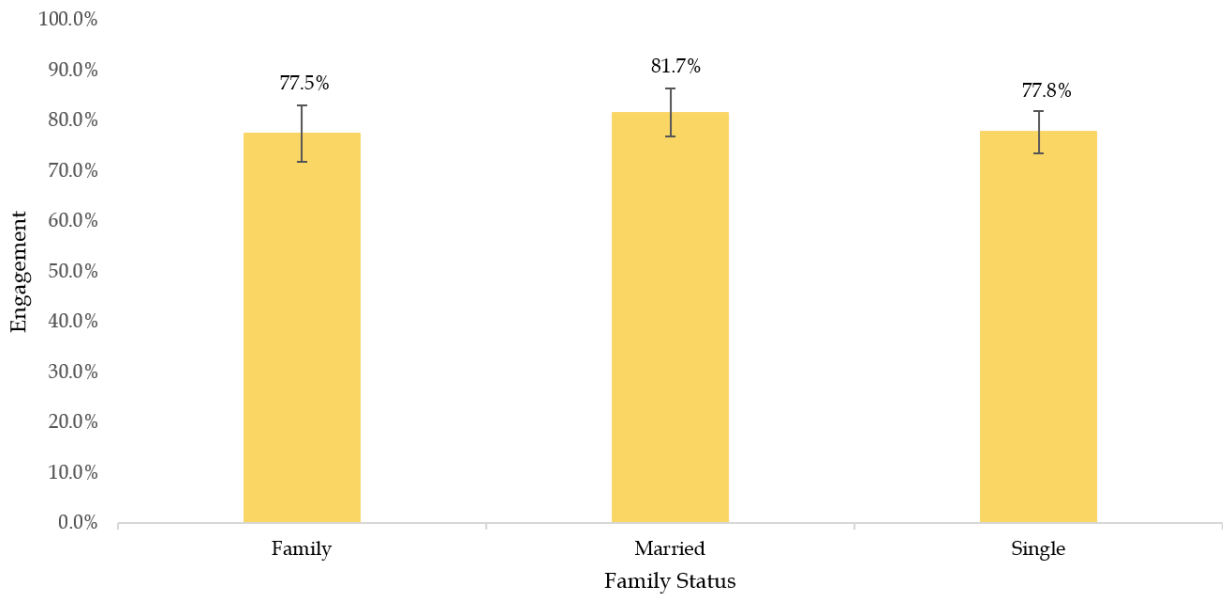
Figure 5 - Engagement by Age



<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Average Engagement</b>	<b>Number</b>
18-22	69.7%	33
23-29	78.7%	136
30-39	80.0%	219
40-49	80.4%	97
50-59	73.9%	68
60+	77.0%	63
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>635</b>

**Family Status:** Singles and those who joined the church married with children had roughly the same engagement rate. Married couples without children had the highest engagement rate, 81.7%. While these differences are interesting, they are not statistically significant and therefore may be due to fluctuations in the sample.

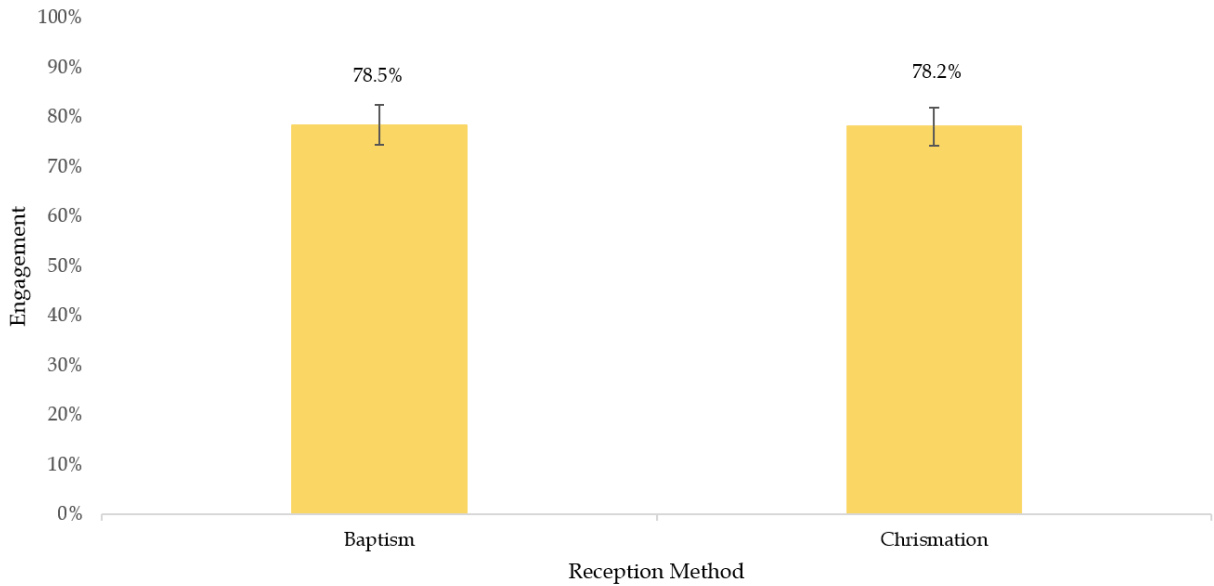
Figure 6 - Engagement by Family Status



<b>Table 7. Average Engagement by Family Status</b>		
<b>Family Status</b>	<b>Average Engagement</b>	<b>Number</b>
Single	77.5%	269
Married	81.7%	187
Married with Children	77.8%	160
<b>TOTAL</b>		639

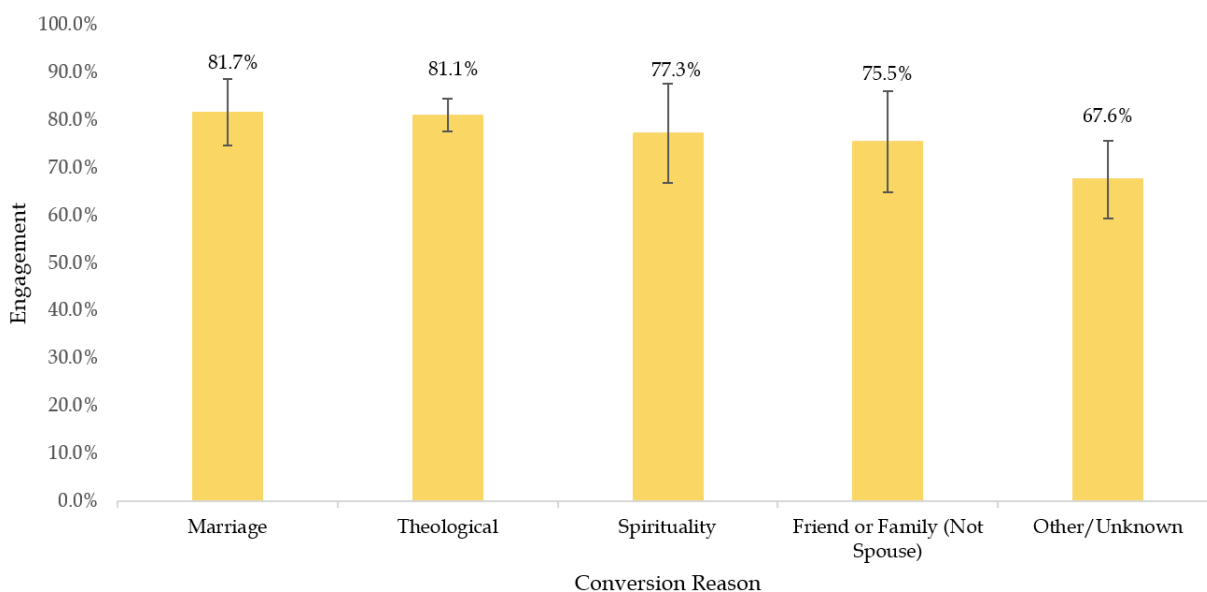
**Method of Reception:** There was no statistically significant difference in average engagement by method of reception, yielding 78.5% for those received by baptism, and 78.2% for those received by chrismation.

*Figure 7 - Engagement by Method of Reception*



**Reason for Converting:** Converts who listed Other/Unknown as their reason for conversion were the least likely to be engaged (67.6%), and, with the exception of the Marriage category, those who converted for theological reasons were the most likely to be engaged, with approximately an 81% engagement rate. Overall, the range of engagement across reasons for converting is not as high as the other divisions of engagement, indicating that the reason for conversion has a less significant impact on engagement than the other factors.

Figure 8 - Engagement by Reason for Converting



<b>Reason for Converting</b>	<b>Average Engagement</b>	<b>Number</b>
Theological	81.1%	351
Friend or Family (Not Spouse)	75.5%	48
Spirituality	77.3%	43
Marriage	81.7%	82
Other/Unknown	67.6%	98
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>622</b>

**Conclusions:** As expected, among our sample size we observed that engagement decreases over time. People within the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups were the most likely to be engaged, with an average engagement rate of over 80%. Notably, former Muslims were the most likely to be engaged, followed by former Protestants and then former Catholics.

We also found that when distinguishing by gender, family status, or method of reception, there was no statistically significant difference between the categories. Perhaps if this survey had been done over a longer period of time, we would have seen a more noticeable result, but as it stands, the slight differences observed were well within the 95% confidence intervals.

If a similar study is conducted in the future, more can be done on examining convert engagement over a longer period of time. Additionally, separating the reasons for converting into more specific categories may shed light on why it appears that the “Other/Unknown” category in our study was lower than the other reasons.