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Abstract: This study aims to provide insights on converts to the Orthodox Christian Faith throughout the United States. By analyzing the number of conversions year by year, we hope to provide Orthodox Christian leaders with data on the numbers of converts and other demographic information, such as comparisons of male and female conversion rates, the reasons converts give for joining the Orthodox Church, and whether they were received through baptism or chrismation only.

Data Sources and Analysis: 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.

Findings: Our findings indicate that during the 2013-2019 time period, the change in the total number of converts was not statistically significant. There were two outlier years; a sharp dropoff in conversions in 2020 (undoubtedly due to the pandemic), and a significant increase in 2022. Regarding male and female converts, there is parity between the two until 2022, when male conversions had a significantly higher z-score (i.e. that year, the number of male converts deviated significantly from the average number of converts per year). The mode in which converts were received follows a similar pattern—no statistical difference between baptisms and chrismations until 2022, where there was a notable increase in the number of baptisms when compared to chrismations. This divergence between baptisms and chrismations continued into 2023.

Figure 1 - Numbers of Converts from 2013 to 2023



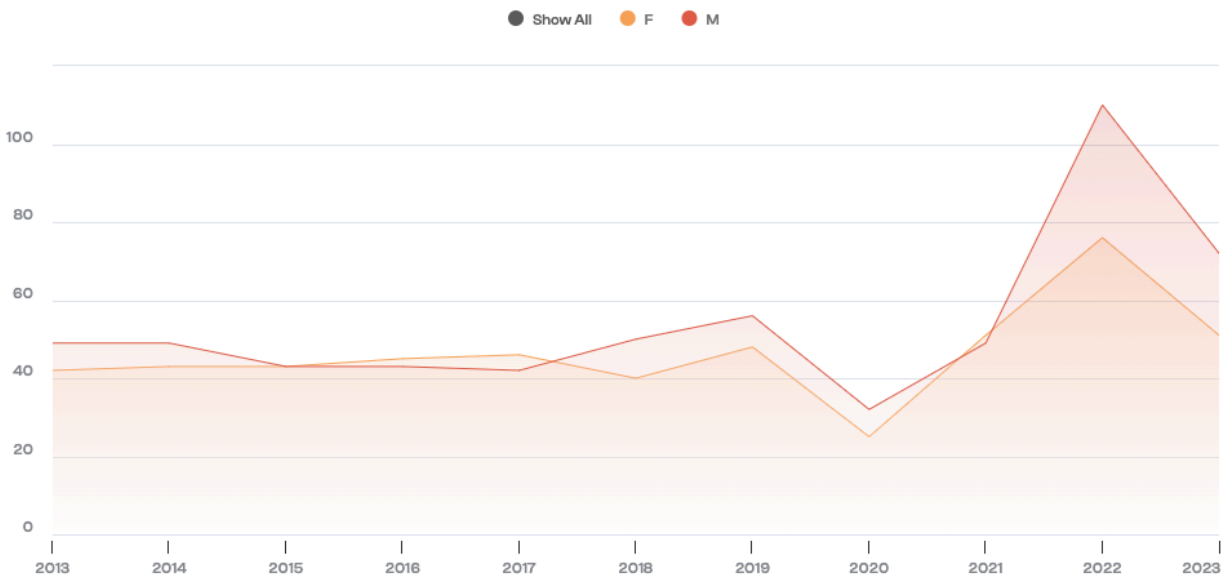
Additional findings from the demographic data include:

- The majority of converts (62%) since 2013 are under 40 at the time of their conversion.
- The vast majority of converts (73%) are joining the faith without minor children.
- The majority of converts (65%) come from a Protestant background prior to becoming Orthodox.
- The majority (60%) have studied the Orthodox faith and have theological reasons for converting.

Demographics of Converts

Males vs. Females: Between the years of 2013-2020, the difference between numbers of male and female converts was slight, shifting from more male converts in 2013 and 2014 to fewer in 2016 and 2017. In 2018, there was a more dramatic shift back in the direction of male converts, which persisted until 2023.¹ The year with the lowest number of converts was 2020 (33 male, 26 female), but the following year there was a rebound back to the previous levels, both for males and females. In fact, the only year that is an outlier of high male converts is 2022, which had over twice as many converts as the previous year and a z-score of 12.36. Although there is not enough data to determine if there is a difference between the rates of male and female conversions after 2020, there appears to be a more marked increase in the number of male converts compared to female converts when looking at the z-scores.

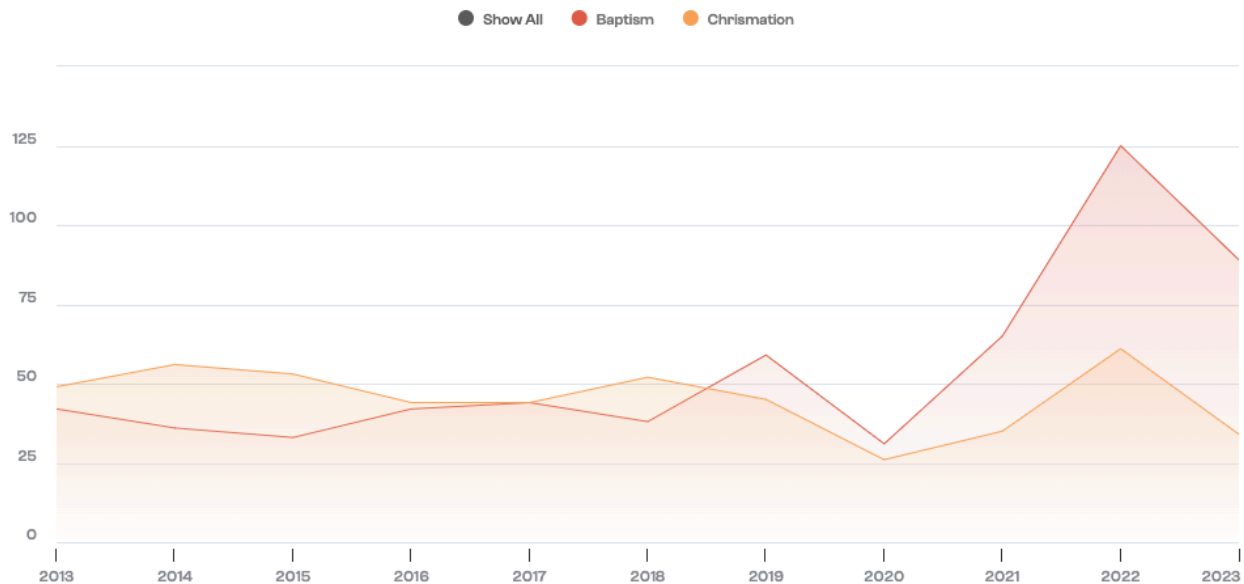
Figure 2 - Male and Female Conversion Rates Compared



¹ In 2015, as the graph indicates, there were an equal number of male and female converts (43).

Chrismation vs. Baptism: Overall, there was no statistical difference between baptism and chrismation rates during the period of 2013-2019. As with the gender demographics, there is not sufficient data to do a statistical test to determine if there was a difference in the way people were received after the COVID-19 pandemic, but based on the data we have, it appears there is an increase in the share of baptisms relative to chrismations after 2020. The most notable year was 2022, where there were 125 receptions via baptism, and 61 receptions via chrismation. Prior to 2019, the number of baptisms was less than or equal to the number of chrismations; after 2020, it appears that there are substantially more baptisms than chrismations. There are several possible explanations for this:² One is that new converts since 2020 are disproportionately converting in parishes that will baptize them (whether intentionally or not). This is not something that could be measured by our survey, so our data does not shed any light on whether this has been occurring. A second possibility is that one or more of the parishes surveyed have changed their policy to baptize converts from Protestant/Catholics backgrounds. Based on our data, this seems to be the case. Out of the 20 parishes surveyed, 6 have shifted from a substantial amount of chrismations to few-to-no chrismations.

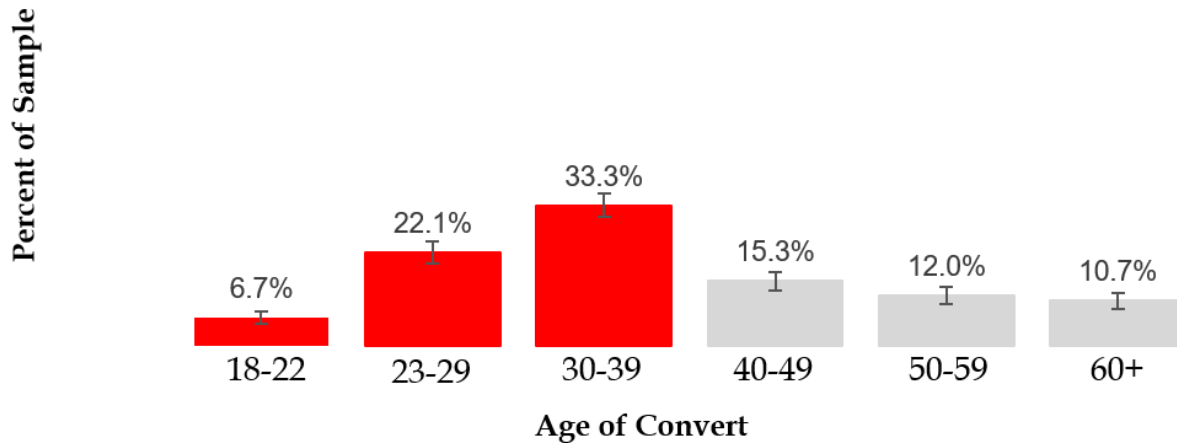
Figure 3 - Baptism and Chrismation Rates Compared



² These explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Age: The survey was conducted with the following age categories: 18-22, 23-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+. We aggregated the converts over the years surveyed (2013-2023). The plurality (33%) of the converts were in the 30-39 category, whereas the least number of converts came from the 18-22 age group. In all, 66% of the converts since 2013 were under the age of 40.

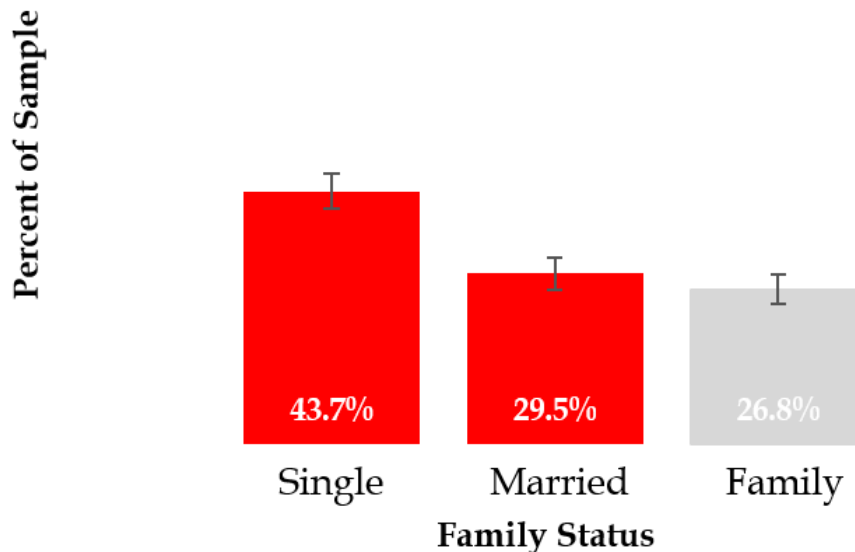
Figure 4 - 66% of Converts Since 2013 Are Below 40



Family Status

We divided the converts into three groups: single, married with minor children, and married without minor children. Aggregating over the years surveyed, we found that 44% of converts joined the faith unmarried. An additional 29% are married but without minor children, and only 27% have started a family before joining the Church. This is not surprising given the age demographics; according to the US Census Bureau, the median age of Americans at their first marriage has been steadily increasing, and now rests at 30.5 for men, and 28.1 for women.³ Approximately 28% of the converts in our study were under the median age of first marriage.

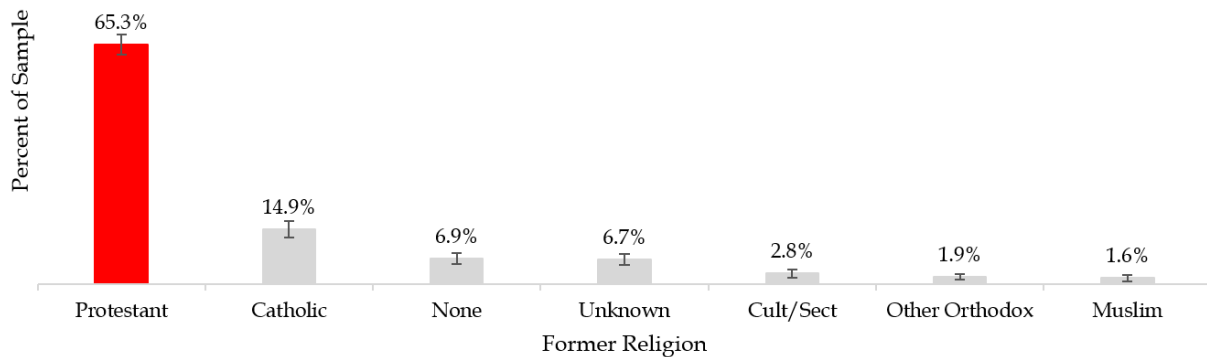
Figure 5 - 73% of Converts Since 2013 Are Joining Without Children



³ US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1890 to 1940, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1947 to 2023. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/time-series/demo/families-and-households/ms-2.pdf>.

Background: Given the preponderance of Protestant Christians in the US, it is no surprise that the majority of the converts surveyed (65%) came from a Protestant background. 15% of those surveyed came from a Catholic background. Our data does not indicate the full religious background of the converts, but simply the previous religious affiliation. In some cases, this may have been the person’s religious affiliation immediately prior to becoming Orthodox, but in other cases it may have been the childhood religious affiliation.⁴ Thus, more work can be done to track the progression of converts as they come into the Church.

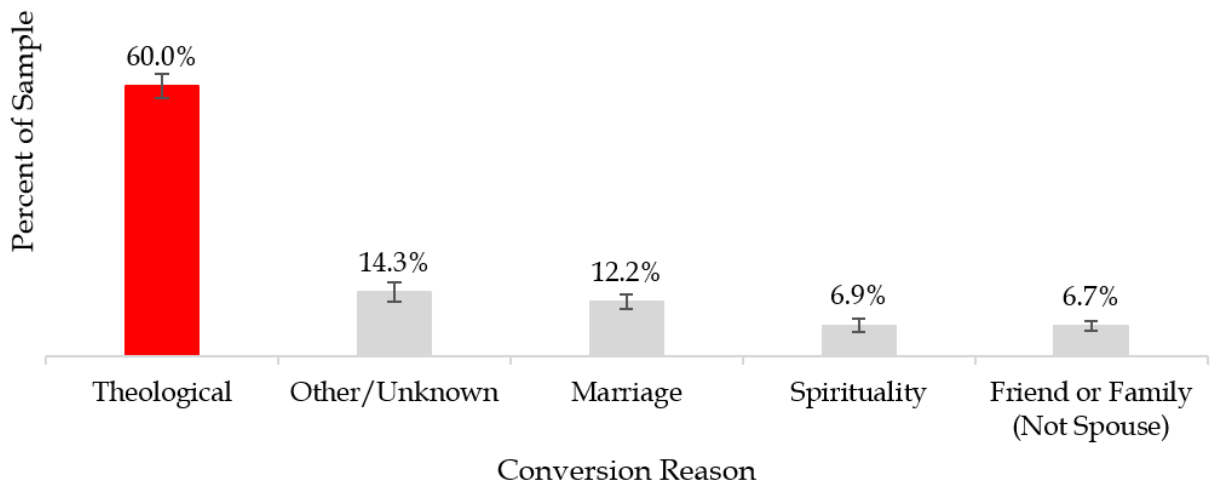
Figure 6 - The Majority of Converts Since 2013 Are From Protestantism



⁴ For example, in some parishes, if a person was baptized as a Roman Catholic but later became atheist, the priest kept a record of the prior baptism as Roman Catholic and would classify the individual as Roman Catholic for purposes of this study. In other parishes, the same person may have been classified as a former atheist, since this was their background immediately prior to becoming Orthodox.

Reasons for Converting: In addition to the previous religious affiliation of the converts, we also collected data on the reasons for conversion. Every convert has a unique journey and so it is impossible to capture the nuances of the reasons for conversion in a study of this nature, but we are able to get a general idea of why those in the study converted to Orthodoxy. We split the reasons for converting into five categories - Theological, Marriage, Friend or Family (not spouse), Spirituality, and Other/Unknown. Of these, 60% of those surveyed responded that they had theological reasons for converting. 12% converted for marriage, 6.86% converted for the spirituality of Orthodoxy, and 6.68% described friend(s) or family as the stated reason for conversion. The remaining 14% were Other/Unknown.

Figure 7 - The Majority of Converts Since 2013 Converted For Theological Reasons



Appendix: Figures and Data

The error bars in all graphics are within the 95% confidence intervals of the appropriate type for the data displayed (binomial for proportions, normal for integers).

Convert Numbers by Year: The number of converts per year did not change significantly from 2013-2019. In this data set there were an average of 91.1 ± 6.0 converts per year. The number of converts dropped in 2020 (59 converts) but recovered in 2021 (100 converts).⁵ Between 2013-2019 and 2021 there were no outlier years. In 2022 (186 converts) and 2023 (124 converts) we saw a much higher number of conversions compared to the baseline. Table 1 lists the z-score for each year compared to 2013-2019. Outlier years ($>\pm 3$ SD) are noted with an asterisk.

The chart from page 2 is reproduced below for reference.



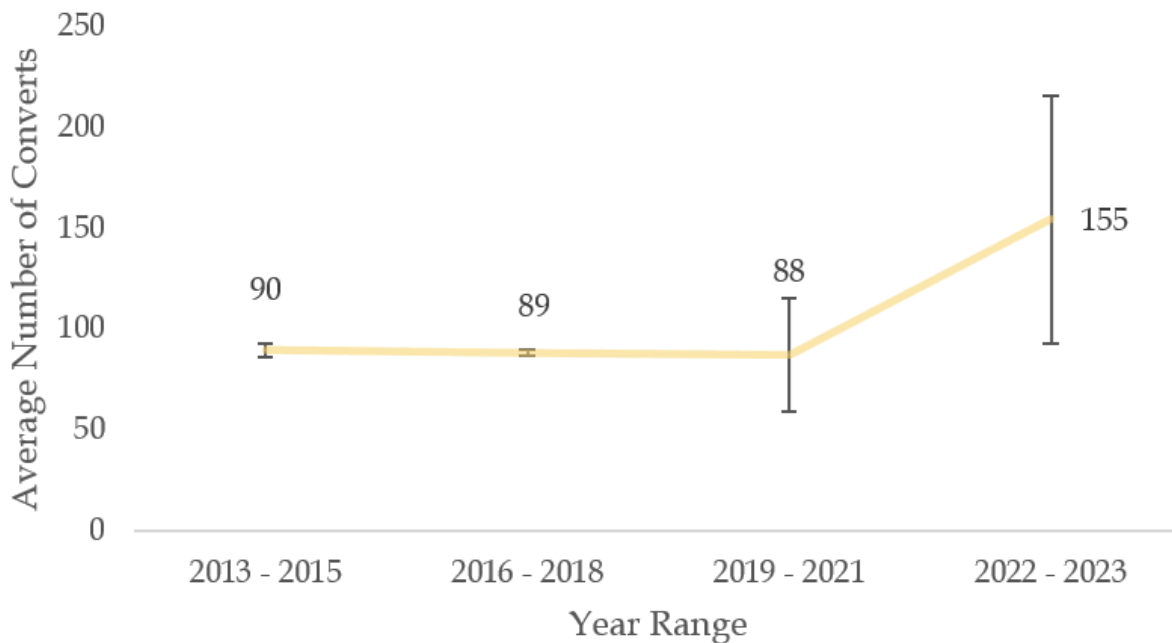
⁵ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March 2020, most churches were not allowed to hold congregated services, which explains the low numbers of converts in 2020.

Table 1. Number of converts over time.		
Year	Number of Converts	Z-Score
2013	91	-0.02
2014	91	-0.02
2015	86	-0.86
2016	88	-0.53
2017	88	-0.53
2018	90	-0.19
2019	104	2.16
2020	59*	-5.40
2021	100	1.49
2022	186*	15.93
2023	124*	5.52

Overall Conversions Over Time, Rolling 3 Year Average: The average number of converts per year was steady from 2013 to 2021, hovering around 89 converts per year. A marked increase took place in 2022-2023, where the average number of converts per year in the sample rose to 155. However, the variance in the sample between 2022-2023 and the comparatively smaller year band make it so that no statistically significant difference was observed. As a result, while in this sample the average number of converts per year rose by 43% in 2022-2023, it is not possible to know if the overall average of converts per year rose across all parishes in the USA to the same degree.

Figure 8 - Average Number of Converts by Year (Range)

Error Bars Are 95% Confidence Intervals



Conversions of Males & Females Over Time: The number of conversions between males and females was not statistically different between males and females during the period of 2013-2019 ($p = 0.11$). In 2020, when the overall number of converts decreased significantly, compared to the “normal” male conversion rate, there was less of an impact seen to male conversion. There is not sufficient data to do a statistical test to determine if there is a difference between the rate of male and female conversion before and after COVID however there appears to be an increase in the number of male converts compared to female converts when looking at z-scores. Using 2013-2019 as a baseline, the number of male converts in 2022 and 2023 were both outliers (12.4 SDs from the mean and 4.9 SDs, respectively) compared to the 2013-2019. For female converts however, only 2022 saw an outlier number of female converts while 2023 was within the “normal” range (5.6 SDs and 0.90 SDs, respectively). Table 2 shows the z-score for each year by gender compared to 2013-2019. Outlier years ($> \pm 3$ SD) are noted with an asterisk.

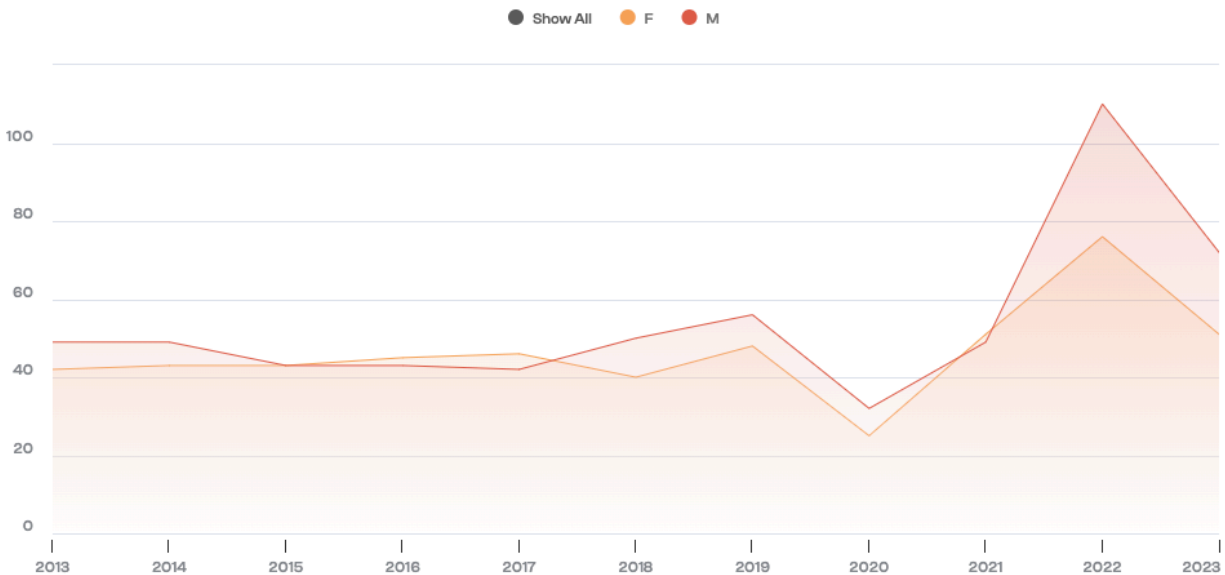


Table 2. Male and Female Converts Over Time				
Year	Number of Male Converts	Z-Score	Number of Female Converts	Z-Score
2013	49	0.31	42	-1.07
2014	49	0.31	42	-1.07
2015	43	-0.87	43	-0.87
2016	43	-0.87	45	-0.48
2017	42	-1.07	46	-0.28
2018	50	0.51	40	-1.47
2019	56	1.69	48	0.11
2020	33	-2.85	26*	-4.23
2021	49	0.31	51	0.71
2022	110*	12.36	76*	5.64
2023	72*	4.85	52	0.90

Mode of Conversion Over Time: The way converts were received was not statistically different between baptism and chrismation during the period of 2013-2019 ($p = 0.08$). There is not sufficient data to do a statistical test to determine if there is a difference between the way people were received before and after COVID however, there appears to be an increase in the number of baptisms compared to chrismations when looking at z-scores. Using 2013-2019 as a baseline, the number of people received by baptism in 2022 and 2023 were both outliers (9.9 SDs from the mean and 5.6 SDs, respectively) compared to the 2013-2019. For people received through chrismation however, the number of chrismations appears to be lower than the “normal” rate of conversion by chrismation seen in 2013-2019. Table 3 shows the z-score for each year by mode of conversion compared to 2013-2019. Outlier years ($>\pm 3$ SD) are noted with an asterisk.

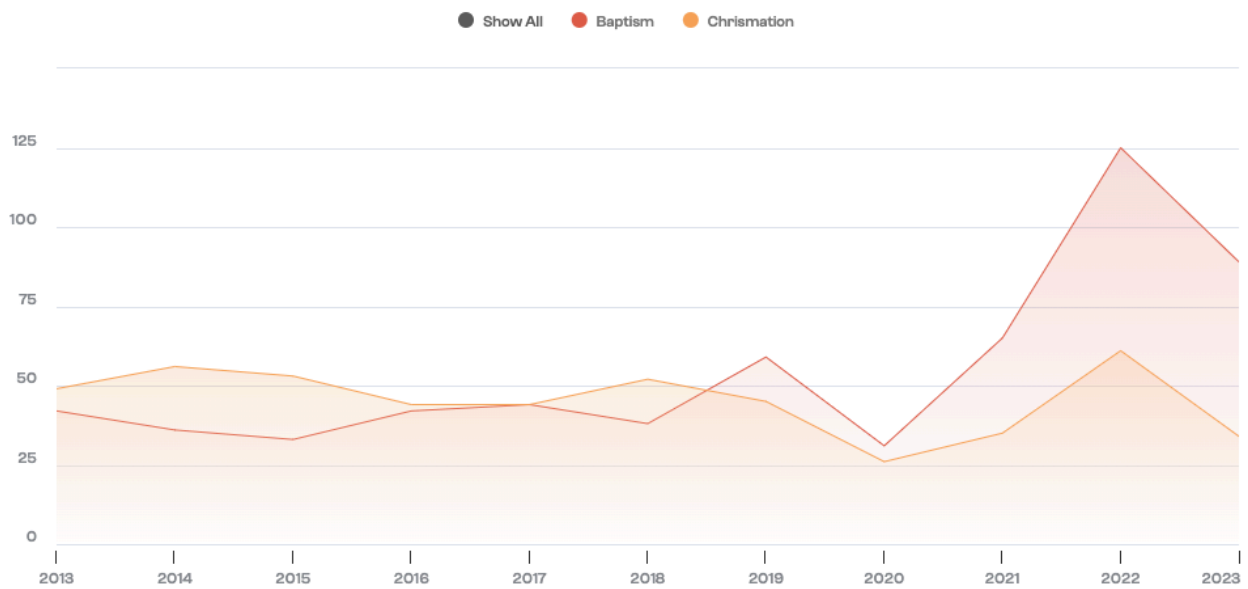


Table 3. Modes of Conversion Over Time				
Year	Baptism	Z-Score	Chrismation	Z-Score
2013	42	0.00	49	0.03
2014	36	-0.71	55	1.34
2015	33	-1.07	53	0.90
2016	42	0.00	44	-1.06
2017	44	0.24	44	-1.06
2018	38	-0.47	52	0.68
2019	59	2.02	45	-0.84
2020	31	-1.31	28*	-4.54
2021	65	2.73	35*	-3.01
2022	125*	9.85	61	2.64
2023	89*	5.58	35*	-3.01