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A VILLAGE CANNOT STAND WITHOUT A RIGHTEOUS MAN, NOR A CITY WITHOUT A SAINT: ORTHODOXY IN A SMALL RUSSIAN TOWN

This study is a part of the complex project “The Population of a Russian Small Town in the 21st Century” realized by the Center for Human Ecology of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology since 2017. A comprehensive approach to the problem of adapting the population to modern challenges was developed during field studies in 2017–2025 in small towns of Central Russia (Belev, Tula region; Staritsa, Tver region; Danilov and Poshekhonye, Yaroslavl region; Gorokhovets, Vladimir region). The program “History and Contemporary State of the Orthodox Church in Small Towns of the Central Russia” is one of the topics of the study. While planning the program, we focused on the events of the recent decades of the history — the years when churches and monasteries closed in Soviet times were transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church. Many of them were renovated and rebuilt from the ruins, and parish and monastic services were resumed. We were interested in how these processes affected citizens and, conversely, how churches and monasteries interacted with locals. We designed an expert survey questionnaire for priests, rectors and abbots of local churches, and a cluster of related questions was included in the mass survey questionnaire (300 people in each town in 2018–2021). Materials from the field studies in the small town of Belev (Tula region) in 2017–2019 provided the basis for the present paper.

Keywords: small towns, the Russian Church history, cultural heritage, restoration of monasteries and temples, Belev, Tula region, Russia

Author Info: Grigulevich, Nadezhda I. — Ph.D. in History, Senior Researcher, the Russian Academy of Sciences N. N. Miklouho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Moscow, Russian Federation). E-mail: nadia100@rambler.ru
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1562-9234>

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