The Growing Power of the Belarusian Orthodox Church – Belarus Photo Digest

According to official statistics, 59 percent of Belarusian citizens are Orthodox Christians. Yet many Orthodox churches stand empty, and as few as 18 percent of Orthodox believers regularly attend religious services.

Due to such low levels of religious fervour among the general public, state support has become key to helping the Orthodox Church maintain its dominance in Belarus’s society.

Prosecuted during the Communist period along with other religious denominations, the Orthodox Church has become one of the important pillars of the state ideology in modern day Belarus. Other denominations exert no comparable influence in the country. In 2004, the Orthodox Church signed an agreement with the government, allowing it to obtain exclusive rights of influence in education, health care, and crime prevention.

At the same time, the Belarusian Orthodox Church remains fully subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church. Following the onset of war in Ukraine, the Belarusian Church has voiced interest in self-governance and separation from Moscow. Unsurprisingly, Russia does not see eye to eye with Belarus on the issue.
A representative of the Orthodox Church is receiving an Honorary Citizenship award from the state at the 75th anniversary of the Minsk region in January 2013.
Infant baptism at an Orthodox Church in Maladzechna.
A woman is kissing the cross at a cemetery in Turau, Homel region.
Commemoration of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River (Epiphany) in the woods next to the village of Damanava, Vilejka district. The men are about to plunge into the holy spring.
Traditional Orthodox icons are decorated for Epiphany. In the absence of a donation box, believers put monetary contributions on the shelf with the icons.
The Belarusian Orthodox Church follows the Julian calendar and celebrates Epiphany on 19 January.
Parishioners are lighting candles in preparation for the Easter celebration in Zaskavichy, Minsk region.
Easter service in Zaskavichy.
A believer holds a decorated cross during the Easter service in Zaskavichy.
Easter Celebration in Zaskavichy.
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Belarusian Orthodox Priest in the church of Kreva, Hrodna region.
Maslenitsa celebration during the last week before the Great Lent in Vitsebsk region. Women are “burying an old man,” according to a pagan tradition, marking the end of winter. A greedy and salacious priest is one of the traditional participants in the ceremony.
An old Belarusian woman prays and lights a candle.
All Saints Church in Minsk, completed in 2008. President Lukashenka, who once identified himself as an “Orthodox atheist”, has attended several holiday celebrations in this church with his youngest son.

About the photographer: Siarhei Leskiec is a freelance photographer whose work focuses on everyday life, folk traditions, and rituals in the Belarusian countryside. Originally from Maladzeczna region, he received a history degree from the Belarusian State Pedagogical University.