

Beloved Presvyteres,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the National Sisterhood of Presvyteres National Retreat here in Richmond, Virginia. It is especially meaningful for me that one of my first acts as a newly-enthroned Metropolitan is to have the great honor of welcoming you to the Sacred Metropolis of New Jersey and hosting this retreat, which is so well-deserved, and which I pray will be a great blessing to you all.

In my enthronement address just one month ago, I stressed that one of the first priorities of my hierarchical ministry will be the care and cultivation of the priests under my *omophorion*. They are, as I said, “my first and immediate companions and collaborators in the service of God and man, and therefore are also first in my pastoral concern.” No hierarch can be in every parish, and so we must ensure that the priests who oversee the parishes entrusted to us are spiritually nourished and thriving, in order that they may be effective ministers of the gospel. In this most important ministry, you as Presvyteres and we as the hierarchs of our Sacred Eparchy, must be partners in supporting your husbands’ ministries. And it is in a setting such as this retreat, we pray, that you will be fed and sustained for the very unique ministry that you exercise.

We all know how difficult the life of a priest and his family can be. A recent survey<sup>1</sup> of pastors of various Christian denominations identified the central role of the family as crucial to the pastors’ ability to perform his ministry. Among those who were suffering burnout and contemplating leaving full-time ministry, nearly half cited as a primary reason for their difficulties the effect that full-time ministry had on their families. And among those who were satisfied and positive about their continued ministry, more than half cited their family support as the most important factor in their success. That makes your role as Presvyteres crucial for the mission and ministry of our Church here in America.

So I know that I speak not only for myself, but for all my brother hierarchs, when I say that we thank you sincerely for *your* ministry in our Church. You may never have sought the life of a Presvytera, but you have nevertheless been called to a unique ministry, not only that of supporting your husband’s ministry, but of serving as the mothers of your parishes. We see the many sacrifices that you make and the contributions you make to our communities. We know that your husbands must often miss out on their own family commitments in order to serve the needs of the parish, for example to rush to the hospital to comfort another family in an emergency. We as your hierarchs recognize such sacrifices and can only pray that “our God Who loves mankind accept them at His holy and celestial and mystical altar” and bless you for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/>

such a precious offering. And we also recognize your tireless efforts in our parishes. Presvyteres serve our parishes in countless ways: as chanters, as choir directors, as Sunday School teachers and directors, as Philoptochos members, as GOYA advisors and youth workers. The list goes on and on. In so many ways, our parishes are successful because the Presvyteres share their husband's vision and commitment to the Orthodox faith and to Christ's Holy Church, and for this I say, "Thank you."

As a small token of our thanks, the National Sisterhood of Presvyteres, along with the Presvyteres of the Sacred Metropolis of New Jersey, have prepared this retreat, where we hope to provide you with some rest and relaxation, as well as some good *Parea*, but first and foremost with some spiritual nourishment. The theme for this retreat, drawn from our Lord's Beatitudes, is most appropriate: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled." It's easy to get caught up in the many activities of our parishes and family lives and to forget that our one true goal is our eternal salvation. If righteousness, if our own personal sanctification, is what we truly long for, what we truly hunger and thirst for, then everything else will fall into place. We will be filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with Christ, Who is the bread of life and the living water, and will no longer hunger and thirst for earthly things that do not satisfy. Christ restates the same message later in the Sermon on the Mount, when He urges us not to worry about food and drink or clothing, saying, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt. 6.33). This is what I believe for my own priests and why I stressed at my enthronement that "First and foremost, the clergy's personal spiritual cultivation and their own rebirth in Christ is also the guarantee... of the success of their pastoral work." And I say the same to you as Presvyteres: if you are spiritually filled, you will be successful in your Christian witness and ministry, to your husbands, to your families, to your parishes, and to all those around you.

And so I pray that these next few days will provide that spiritual nourishment for you, that you will return home renewed and refreshed. I convey to you the Patriarchal love, blessings and prayers of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and as this is a national gathering of Presvyteres I express to you the paternal love and support of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. And may the mercies of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life and the Living Water, be with you all. Amen.

[View Photo Gallery of the National Presvyteres Retreat](#)

