



DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia • Orthodox Church in America

September 22, 2026

Prophet Jonah

October is Clergy Family Appreciation Month

Dear to God,

Christ is in our midst! October is clergy appreciation month and the 2nd Sunday, October 11 is nationally recognized as Pastor Appreciation Day. As Orthodox Christian let us make it something more this year. Let us make it *clergy family appreciation month*. Our clergy are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clergy often have family times, i.e., anniversaries, birthdays, spots events, etc. interrupted, including vacation time to minister to one of their flock. The demands on our clergy often take them away from their own family events.

Sadly, clergy are more likely to hear when someone is unhappy, but like the Ten Lepers in the Gospel, those who are pleased with their pastor often say nothing. The rate of clergy burnout is astounding (<https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>), with around 1500 clergy a month leaving active ministry. There is a disturbing article in 'Leaders & Pastors' reporting that as of November 2021 38% of pastors gave serious consideration to resigning. In January of 2021 it was 29%. In a few short months the percentage increased significantly (<https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>).

Unfortunately, some people believe the role of the clergy is to make them happy! Yet, the role of the priest is not to make people happy, it is to make them Holy! When I went to my second parish the council chairman greeted me and said, Fr. Mark your only role here is to make people happy. Without skipping a beat, I responded, "Our Lord, took on our Humanity, opened the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, healed the withered hand, cleansed the lepers, raised up the lame and raised the dead, and they nailed Him to a tree! Why would I expect to be treated differently?" As far as pleasing the faithful, there are always a few who will never be happy with any priest. Anyone in a leadership position who talks behind their spiritual leader's priest back should resign immediately for the good of the parish and his or her own salvation. A house divided cannot stand.

Our clergy are entrusted with a stewardship by the Lord for which they will answer. Let us pray that our clergy will always rise above seeking the praise of men and seek to be faithful to their high calling through faithful service, preaching and teaching and seek to be pleasing to the Lord in all things. Additionally, our clergy wives and families make a great sacrifice in their service to the Church, and their own family life is impacted by the demands of the priesthood.

For Clergy Appreciation Month, I would ask our Parish Councils to encourage the faithful of their parish to consider showing their appreciation to their priest and his family in a few ways:

1. Attend the services regularly and all classes intended to enrich our faith.
2. Send a card and state five things you sincerely appreciate about your priest, as well as his Matushka and family.
3. Consider either jointly or personally giving gift card(s) for the clergy and Mathusha's favorite coffee shop or restaurant.
4. Consider some form of recognition for clergy wives and families for their sacrifices as well.
5. Perhaps, the priest and his wife would appreciate time at a Bed and Breakfast.

Finally, telling your pastor and his family you appreciate them should not just be limited to the month of October. Years ago, I remember hearing from a priest, *'for every negative comment, we need to offer a hundred 'atta boys.'* Let us always seek to build one another up. And express our gratitude.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania