

Helpful Hints for Orthodox Clergy Wives (Preotese)



By Preoteasa Lillian Lupu



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Helpful Hints for Orthodox Clergy Wives (Preotese)

*Preoteasa Lillian Lupu
Calgary, Alberta*

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FOREWORD

“To sum up, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and let every wife respect her husband.”

(Ephesians 5:33)

This scriptural quote in the Orthodox marriage service is the basis for the relationship of every husband and wife joined together and responding to one another as Christian spouses. It is this same bond that shapes the relationship of Priest and Preoteasa, one of love and respect, although in a more intense and demanding manner.

There is no official “guidebook” on how to be a clergy wife. “Helpful Hints for Orthodox Clergy Wives (Preotese),” by Preoteasa Lillian Lupu, is a most welcome collection of 20 chapters of useful hints on the subject that also offers useful guidance. Additional chapters of prayers and references make up the total publication. These chapters bring to our attention the various roles and demands made on a clergy wife. It is these unique demands that weave the fabric which constitutes the life of a clergy wife, a Preoteasa, on her journey to eternal life.

A clergy wife of 35 years since husband Father Michael Lupu’s diaconal ordination, Preoteasa Lillian has submersed herself in serving Christ and his Church, heart and soul, in Canadian parishes of the Romanian Episcopate of the Orthodox Church in

America. “Helpful Hints” is her gift to her sister Preotese from her years of experience, plus additional “Hint Quotations” from other clergy wives and Priest’s Kids (“P.K.’s”) who responded to her invitation to share their experiences in this publication.

The format is easy to follow with the 20 chapters subtitled as necessary. In addition to her statements and quotations from Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers, Preoteasa Lillian includes quotations from clergy wives of various jurisdictions in North America plus an interesting chapter of quotations from the rarely heard “P.K.’s.” Interesting: there are no “clergyman” quotes! This is a gift from, by, and for clergy wives!

Even clergy wives themselves may be unaware of the many roles and stations in this unique life; for example, the life of the Chaplain’s wife, or a retired clergyman’s wife or even a widowed Preoteasa. “Helpful Hints for Preotese” can be an impetus for soul-searching. It can be an uplifting gift of encouragement; and perhaps, an impetus to share one’s own experience as a Preoteasa with others through the Episcopate’s website (roea.org).

This work has been formulated over the years and has been brought to completion in both the English and Romanian languages. The reference section is quite rich in useful sources. The illustrations are from Episcopate publications and the artwork of Bishop Mark (Forsberg).

Our indebted thanks to Preoteasa Lillian Lupu for this unique, useful and encouraging “Helpful Hints for Orthodox Clergy Wives (Preotese)!”

Archbishop Nathaniel (Popp)
Feast of Saint George the Great Martyr

PRAYER OF A PREOTEASA

“O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart.”

(3 Kings 8:21)

Prayer of a Priest's Wife to the Birthgiver of God

Holy Mother of God, who are honoured in heaven above the angels, hear the supplication of this priest's wife who humbly cries out to you. You are my help and my refuge. Please intercede for me, guide me and have mercy on me, for you are the mediatrix for all who call to you.

Our Lord and Saviour has found it fit to ordain my husband to serve at His holy altar. With fear and trembling, I accept the responsibility to help and support him, look after his well-being, and be a mother to those he serves.

Give me strength to stand firmly in my role as a Preoteasa in the parish and to help my family at home as each one needs. Strengthen my heart to hold all the joys that I will behold, my arms to embrace the sorrows of others, my eyes to see the beauty around me, and my body to serve in your Holy Orthodox Church. Give my soul rest from the grief that may one day afflict me; wipe away my tears, and lift the

veil of despondency. Fill my heart with love for the people around me.

Grant me a forgiving heart, ears that will discern what is spoken, and wisdom to know what I am to do and say in my role. And if I have done anything to provoke unkindness, redirect me and show me how to be more loving. Help me to trust in your Son and our Saviour that these joys and trials are sent for my edification.

For you are always ready to intercede for us, our steady help and protection, O Holy Mother of God. All glory is due to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This book has been written as a guide to Orthodox Priest Wives and Deacon Wives of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (ROEA) of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). We would like to thank His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel (Popp) (Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America) for his support for his clergy and their wives, and for his encouragement in putting forward this publication. A thank you to Bishop Andrei (Hoarste)(Bishop of Cleveland and Vicar Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America) for his help.

In addition, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all clergy wives who walk this same path. Clergy wives and children of clergy families have contributed examples and anecdotes throughout this book which we hope you will find encouraging and enlightening. All quotes from Preotese will be followed by “Preoteasa”. Quotes from children of priest’s families will be followed by “[PK]”. Please note that “Preoteasa” (Psa) is clergy wife singular and “Preotese” (Pse) is clergy wife plural. Deaconessa, the wife of a deacon, is implied every time there is reference to Preoteasa.

We are thankful that many people across different jurisdictions have contributed to this book. The titles *Matushka*, *Dobrodijka* and *Presvytera* are Russian, Serbian and Greek forms of *Preoteasa*. We would

like to especially thank the following for their time with editing, making suggestions and comments:

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blessed memory.

INTRODUCTION

The Church Fathers tell us that serving our Holy Church is the most important discipline in developing one's spiritual life. We pray that each of you will find joy and fulfillment in living the spiritual life within the parish community that your husband is serving.

“The commonality of Preotese is their work in the parish, and also for their salvation.”

Archbishop Nathaniel (Popp), ROEA

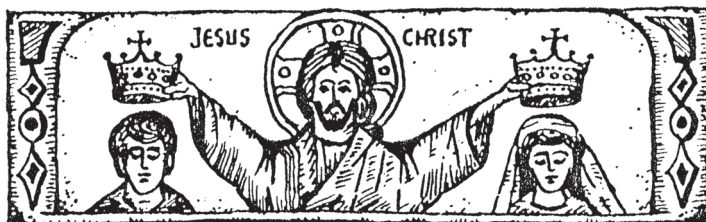
Within these few pages, we hope to encourage you with ‘hints’ (in other words, suggestions) that have been compiled by various Preotese -- all with experiences on the same journey. A goal of this book is to cast a wide net to Preotese of all walks of life: those women raised in Orthodoxy, and those women who are converts to the Orthodox faith; recent immigrants from Romania and other countries whose language and customs are different from those of North America; women who attended seminary, and women who did not; women working outside the home and those working in the home; women living in a parish community and those women living on a military base. Each of us is unique in our personality, experiences, circumstances, careers and talents. Given this diversity, how we live our lives and serve as Preotese will also be different.

“I wish an older pastor’s wife had helped me navigate my idealistic plans and fanciful dreams for my future as a ministry wife. I wish

she had coached me in how best to serve our Lord and love my husband well as we ministered together.” [1]

It is our prayer that this book might provide some guidance, answer some questions, and possibly confirm or refute ideas you may have as you navigate this challenging and exciting journey of service with your priest husband.

NOTE: *Scriptural references* are from the **Orthodox Study Bible (OSB)** unless indicated otherwise. *Reference numbers following quotes*, such as the “[1]” above, refer to sources and are located in the References section at the end of the book. *Abbreviations following quotations:* [PK] = Priest’s Kid.



ROLE OF A PREOTEASA

“You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.”

(Deuteronomy 13:5)

The word “role” is defined as “a function played by a person” or in other words “a job”. Our “role” as a priest’s wife is not so much a job as it is a journey. However, we will use the word “role” as it is widely recognized.

The role of a priest’s wife is not only defined by the individual, but also by her work environment, her education, her husband, her children and extended family, her parish family and her God-given talents. The role of a priest’s wife is also determined by the assignment her husband is given by his bishop: a small parish or a large parish, a mission or a military base, taking on an active role or a lesser role. You will draw on your own life experiences. This is very well demonstrated in a comment made by Archbishop Nathaniel who, speaking of Princess Ileana of Romania, (later known as Mother Alexandra), said:

“She knew that darkness challenges light and that knowledge of the past could help one shape one’s life, and most importantly for her, would shape the lives of her loved ones.” [2]

“When the Lord calls us, everything is on the table.”

Mother Christophora
Holy Transfiguration Monastery

The fact that our Holy Church bestows on us a title confirms that our role is a special one. Few churches have this honour. You are blessed in the role as a result of your husband’s response to the call of his bishop. Your role as a Preoteasa is a calling to the Church’s ministry. It may take many shapes and forms. You, along with your husband, and God’s guidance must decide how to best serve God’s Church.

Do you remember how you reacted when your husband told you he wanted to be a priest? How did you respond about being the wife of a priest? Did you have any idea what was in store? Perhaps you were excited, or perhaps you felt inadequate like this one pastor’s wife:

“To be a pastor’s wife; she’d thought she could do anything else better: fly a single-engine plane solo across the Atlantic, become a whaler, or open a dogsled business in Alaska.” [3]

“Your husband’s Ordination will probably be one of the happiest days of your life, and

one of the most grace-filled; it is also the start of a new position that you hold.” Preoteasa

“As a Matushka, I feel that I, too, am called to serve, to pray for the people in our church, especially the children, and to live in accordance with the Gospel as best I can.”

Preoteasa

There is no job description for what we do. There are few, if any courses or classes we may take to carry out this role. In some cases, this might cause confusion within us or unrealistic expectations of parishioners. By being true to God, your family and to yourself, you will discover your role as Preoteasa. It is especially important that you be true to yourself. Trying to be someone you or anyone else thinks you should be will not bring you joy. Take time and be patient with yourself in determining your role in the parish. If you move to another parish, your role may change. Discuss with your husband what role he would like you to take within the parish, and work together. Your husband is your partner in your role as Preoteasa. By understanding your husband’s role as a priest serving God, you will better understand and be confident in your role as Preoteasa.

“Jacqueline Kennedy was once asked what her role was as First Lady, and she said it was ‘to look after the President so he could do his job effectively’.” [4]

This is what we are called to do as Preotese: support our husbands so they can effectively carry out their priestly duties.

“The clergy wife has been described as an extension of the Myrrh-bearing Women. Your husband was assigned by the bishop to bring the ‘Good News’ to your parish. You, as a Preteasa, are also a witness of the Resurrection as the Myrrh-bearing Women were.” [5]

“The Myrrh-bearing Women went out early in the morning with spices and determination to tend to the body of their Lord Jesus. By their actions, they expressed their love for their Lord. It was a dangerous time for the followers of Christ; however, their love conquered the fear of what might happen to their own lives.”

Fr. John Konkle, Holy Dormition Monastery

Show your love for the Lord, show your love to those around you, and don’t be afraid.

“The Lord is the defender of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”
(Psalm 27)



SEMINARIAN'S WIFE

“Or what does the Lord seek from you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to be ready to walk with the Lord your God?”

(Micah 6:8)

Some Preotese are fortunate to go to seminary with their husband. This is a special environment, similar to a monastery where everyone is on the same path. It may be a “safe environment” for you and your family during your husband’s years of study. This will be a memorable experience. If you have children during this time, they too will have memorable experiences and will learn much about the Church.

1) An opportunity to learn

“I recommend learning chanting & music for whatever ethnic type of parish you are going to be in. You may not be very musical, but it may turn out that you are the most musical person in the parish! You may be called on to chant or direct a choir. Even if you don't really want to. It will be SO much easier for you if you already can chant at least a little. Perhaps you can take a seminary class in chanting.” Preoteasa

Learn as much as you can about parish life and what to expect. Ask questions of those wiser than you. Find other clergy wives and ask them to tell you about their lives and experiences. Learn what to expect when your husband will be assigned to a parish. This is a good opportunity for you to also learn aspects about the Faith while your husband studies theology.

2) Your marriage

“If you have any issues in your marriage, solve them now, while you are in seminary. Ordination is a great blessing, but it's not a magic cure.” Preoteasa

Your marriage will always be the priority. You probably haven't been married for very long, so you are both learning about each other while learning about the Faith. Incorporate your love for each other with your love for the Church. Use this time to learn about how your husband will be serving the Church and how you can be his partner. Observe other clergy

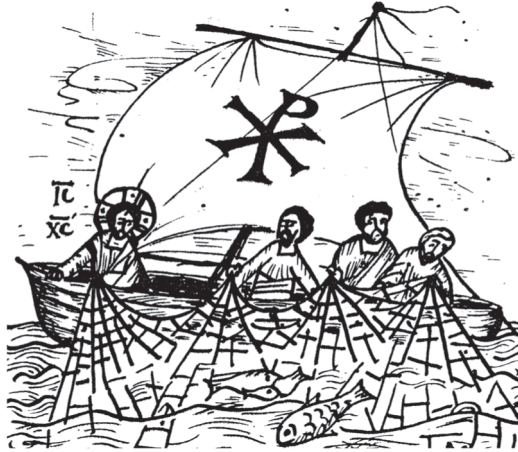
couples and how they deal with different circumstances.

3) Friends in Seminary

“Be nice to the people in seminary with you. They may not be your best friends now, but you will value them so much more when you are all over the country and the world, trying to do the same kind of difficult work.”

Preoteasa

Cherish the friends you make in Seminary. Their friendship will last a lifetime. Although you will go separate ways, there will always be a special bond that holds you close. Many priests have been heard to say “we went to seminary together.” These friends will be the “go-to” people when you have questions or concerns.



LATE VOCATIONS

“You may have had a career or raised a family and have some confidence in yourself. But often the way things happen in the parish isn't the way they happen in the work world... you may have achieved stature in your own field, but your parishioners will see you as just Presvytera, at least until they get to know you. Now that your husband is a new priest, you may be at the bottom of the pecking order in the diocese and nobody wants to hear about your secular job anymore. I found it was best to take some time to see how things worked, and observe, and try not to feel put out that I had, to be honest, lost a lot of power in terms of respect, getting things accomplished, and income. This requires a lot of humility. People need to take time to get to know you and trust

you before they become interested in you as a person. So take the time to acclimate, and look forward to getting to work in perhaps a different way than you did before.” Preoteasa

If your husband was ordained after he had started his secular career, he would be considered Late Vocations. Both of you would be older and maybe a bit wiser. However, you may not have had the opportunity to learn about being a Preoteasa as did those ladies that attended seminary. Sometimes this learning comes about by “the school of hard knocks” - in other words, by experience. If possible, find another Preoteasa who can guide you. Ask your bishop for assistance and guidance in your role.

If you have children, perhaps they are older when your husband is ordained. Family life will be different than with a young family, but you will still have the experience that you can share with young families in the parish.

In many cases, you will have a career that you will have to juggle with parish life. Try to get some hints to “keep all the balls in the air.” In the parish, your career will take second place and your role as Preoteasa will be first.

MILITARY CHAPLAIN'S WIFE

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier in Christ.”
(2 Timothy 2:3)

In the United States, the Military Chaplains are divided among the branches of the military, ie: Army, Navy, Air Force, etc. In Canada, the Military Chaplain is responsible for all environments. The chaplains have dual accountability to Faith Traditions and Military Authority. The Military Chaplain's wife's role is very different from a parish priest's wife's role. For this reason, we have included the Preotese's comments in their own words, as they can best describe their life in the military. Although there are different struggles and different experiences than those of a parish priest's wife, the joy of working for God's Church is the same.

1) Assignment

“So they may put their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, and seek out His commandments.”
(Psalm 78:7)

“The priest's wife is usually with her husband when he is stationed but she is not with him when he is deployed.” Preoteasa

“When the Military hires your husband, they hire the whole family.” Preoteasa

“The chaplain is sometimes the sole chaplain as well as a parish priest depending on where he is stationed. He is usually a part-time priest in a military chapel while serving. There have been times when he was stationed, that he worked 5 days in his military job and then Saturday and Sunday at the chapel or an assigned church.” Preoteasa

2) Mission & Evangelization

“Some of our classmates have told us that we would not know what real ministry was unless we were in a parish. I strongly disagree. The military chaplaincy is a ministry that is primarily youth ministry (the median ages of those we serve are 17-25) and a missionary effort – there are many seekers among those we serve! It is a challenging ministry.”
Preoteasa

“To be the wife of a military chaplain is like being the wife of a missionary, only without the guarantee of a parish or the permission to evangelize. As a chaplain’s wife, you need to prioritize the church of your home, because all ministry will flow from here.” Preoteasa

“Each duty station will bring different blessings and challenges, but if you have a stable base of regular prayers in your home, you will be able to meet the challenges with strength and patience. In regards to life as a missionary family, you will travel around the world, encounter people from many different

cultures, and many who have never heard of Orthodoxy or even Christ. However, in most cases, you are not able to walk around proclaiming the Orthodox faith. You will lead by example and find people coming to church because they are intrigued by your character and that of your husband.” Preoteasa

“Remember to be the hands and feet of Christ, because you never know when God will use your actions to lead others to the Church.” Preoteasa

“We preach God’s word to the lost sheep.”
Preoteasa

3) Relationships within the Military Community

“There are not many Orthodox chaplains across the military branches. So as Orthodox, we are usually unique in the chaplain’s environment. Among officer spouses (your husband would be an officer), there is also a general ignorance of who we are – there may be preconceived notions of who chaplains should be and how to relate to them socially. So you may end up explaining who you are as an Orthodox Christian – or they can just be totally uninterested.” Preoteasa

“All the different denominations shared the same chapel on Sunday morning. It was decided that we got the 1:00 slot on Sunday. We had to go to the Commander and ask that our service be moved earlier, because it was a

long time to fast before Communion. He didn't understand our predicament and said we could always go to the Protestant service and receive Communion. It took some explaining for him to realize that his suggestion was not an option." Preoteasa

"You rarely have a relationship with another Orthodox priest family." Preoteasa

"Military spouses groups don't recognize Orthodox spouses." Preoteasa

4) Military Chapel vs Parish

"Unlike in a typical parish, you have to seek out the opportunities to volunteer in your community or create ministry opportunities by holding a Bible or Book study. As a Chaplain's wife, you do not have the same visibility as you would in a typical parish, which can be a blessing and a disappointment. It is nice to be outside of the fishbowl, but it can be very lonely to not have a built-in social group. In addition, you may find that you do not even have a parish at all. It is always possible that there will not be any Orthodox at your duty station, yet you are expected to serve the Divine Liturgy every Sunday and to step up as the chanter, sexton, and congregation, all while your toddler runs wild in the chapel and your three-year-old wants to be held." Preoteasa

“Depending on where you are assigned, there may be an Orthodox parish, or there might not be.” Preoteasa

“A Military chapel is not a parish. Sometimes I left the base and found an Orthodox Church close by just to feel Parish Life with other Orthodox Christians”. Preoteasa

“There is no sisterhood -- so prosphora, flowers for Pascha, coordinating meals – those things might just fall into your lap!” Preoteasa

“Religious education/youth ministry – this may fall on you, and your children may be the only Orthodox children in the area. Religious Ed for the chapel community might fall on you.” Preoteasa

“In either case, the chapel is very simple; sometimes a choir, many times not, portable iconostas, small number of people. Usually, the people are very young, there are few children, no Sunday School or other organized activities.” Preoteasa

“Orthodox services are unique on a military base. You don’t have young children or old people. Most of the attendees are between 18-24 years of age and they might all be from different ethnic backgrounds. It is a joy to see such ethnic diversity in Orthodoxy, but also a hurt sometimes because there are disagreements with the music and other traditions.” Preoteasa

“Having a Spiritual Father is very difficult.”
Preoteasa

“When you go to a parish, people look at you differently because you are military.”
Preoteasa

5) Friendships with Military Spouses

“On our base, the chaplain spouses make up a unique group. We meet once a month to try to eliminate religious boundaries. We come from all different religions and therefore different customs. Having a meal together is sometimes quite a challenge with our fasting times and their meal restrictions.” Preoteasa

“Our chaplain spouses are part of a CARE team assigned to help when tragedy strikes. It is very difficult to deliver “bad news” to other members. We go as a group to the surviving spouse and help with meals, childcare and support the family. The wife has someone with her at all times during the grieving time, and we feel with them, because we understand.”
Preoteasa

“My experience has been that among chaplain spouses, there were usually not many people who could relate to me as an Orthodox Christian, and chaplain spouse groups tend to be Protestant.” Preoteasa

“Military spouses get a lot of training on what to expect.” Preoteasa

6) Relocation

“Moves are on average every 2-3 years. Sometimes more, sometimes less. The chaplain has input into where the next move is, sometimes not – “needs of the service” will prevail.” Preoteasa

“There is constant flux, constant change.”
Preoteasa

“The children have to leave friends behind.”
Preoteasa

“You develop relationships with people that last a long time, but you are not with them for more than a couple of years. There is no time for complicated relationships.”
Preoteasa

7) Deployment

“We are not in active war, but there are still deployments. And those can vary in their length – and can change once they are out there. One Navy chaplain spouse I know at this moment has just seen her husband’s deployment change from the planned 7 months to now over 9 months – with an open date of return. That’s tough. Thankfully, her kids are older. When they are out, communication is difficult – and sometimes impossible, depending on the need for security, but current technology has vastly improved the ability to communicate. How to survive deployment? Prepare. Attend the deployment

briefs so you are INFORMED. Make sure all your paperwork is in order. If your children are smaller, maybe a relative can come help out during the time he is gone. And know that he is doing his job, it's not a vacation – even though sometimes it may sound like it. Part of this job can be dangerous – especially if he deploys to a war zone.” Preoteasa

“During Pascha and other Holy days, the chaplain may be required to deploy to serve one or more Orthodox Christians who have requested his service.” Preoteasa

8) The future

“I hope that there will be an Orthodox chaplain to provide spiritual counsel and support for those of our sons and daughters who choose military service as part of their life experience!” Preoteasa



YOUR SPIRITUALITY

“And whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

(Matthew 21:22)

“Before you are anything in this life, you need to be and to live a true Christian life, both living your faith and growing in your faith.”

Metropolitan Joseph (Bosakov), Bulgarian
Diocese of the USA, Canada and Australia

1) Rule of Prayer

*“We must have our gaze fixed on heaven.
Then nothing here can shake us.”*

Elder Amphilochios Makris

*“His (Jesus) praying in the morning teaches
us that we must put as first priority our
commitment to God, and only then will we be
equipped to serve others.”*

(OSB footnotes for Mark 1:35)

Pray. Develop a rule of prayer. Find some time in the morning and evening to say your prayers. You need to pray for yourself, your bishop, your husband, your children, your parishioners and other clergy and their families. There will be times when one of these will need more prayers than the rest, so pray harder. Simple daily prayers for husband and wives, children and others can be found in the Annual Calendar booklet published by the ROEA. You need to be grounded in prayer in order to help those that need your help.

2) Live your Faith

“I remember one time when we had a difficult situation in the parish and I felt I couldn’t face ‘those people.’ Thankfully, I realized that if I stayed home from church because of a difficulty, I would send the wrong message to my children. What I wanted to teach them was when the going gets tough - go to church. So I did.” Preoteasa

Know your faith. Strive to live your Orthodox Faith to its fullest by strengthening your relationship with the Lord through the studying of the Scriptures and by adhering to the teachings of our Holy Orthodox Church. Maintain your spiritual life through prayer, fasting, and attending the services. There may be days when you feel “too tired”, “too overwhelmed”, or have other reasons you may want to stay home and not go to church. Resist the temptation to stay away from services (unless someone in the family is sick). Make the effort to push through.

3) Sacramental Life

“The Mother Church gives comfort during all difficult times.”

Bishop Andrei (Hoarste)

Receive the sacraments. Be sure not to avoid the Sacrament of Confession. Locate a spiritual father who can guide you in your spiritual struggles, preferably in the same city as you (but not necessarily) and someone with whom you are comfortable. Go to confession to a priest other than your husband. You already have a special relationship with your husband, which is different from a spiritual father.

As a Preoteasa, you will be confronted with many challenges. Maintaining an active spiritual life will give you the strength to overcome obstacles as well as lead to a stronger relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The ROEA has monasteries that can be a refuge for when you feel you need a spiritual lift. Holy Dormition Monastery in Rives Junction, Michigan and Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania (see references for websites) are both women’s monasteries that offer hospitality to pilgrims. Many women (and men) have found spiritual water at their wells.

4) Family’s Prayer Life

“Prayer is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquility, the root of a multitude of blessings and their source.”

St. John Chrysostom

“I remember visiting a dear friend with a very large family. At the hour that was dedicated to prayer, all gathered in the living room by the icons and got ready for prayer time. It was such a joy to witness.” Preoteasa

Shaping your family’s spirituality is equally important. Your husband’s attention may be elsewhere, so you may have to initiate this. Maintain the fasts and the feast days within your home. Start and end each day with prayer. Make services a priority. You can start small, with the Lord’s Prayer and venerate the icons. Then add more as you are able. These practices will set the foundation for your children in their spiritual growth.

“After family prayers every evening, the children came to their father to be blessed, then kissed his hand. Then they came to me, and I blessed them with the sign of the cross.”

Preoteasa

5) Learn about the Faith

“Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.”

(Proverbs 1:5) (ESV)

“You have to acquire strong faith, on your own, with patience, goodness and fairness. Let’s not lose faith. Keep the faith and God will give His help. Without prayer, we’re lost.”

Elder Amvrosios Lazaris

Continue to educate yourself about the Faith. There are many resources that are available today that you can use to learn about Orthodoxy. Listen to YouTube lectures or sermons, attend Zoom meetings with Preotese, listen to seminars or podcasts on different topics (Ancient Faith Radio is a good resource), and read books on and by the Church Fathers. There are a few recommended books and websites at the end of this book.



FAMILY

“Better is a morsel with enjoyment in peace, than a house full of many good things and unrighteous sacrifices with quarreling.”

(Proverbs 17:1)

“Your marriage is sacred; before you were Father and Presvytera, you were husband and wife. Do everything you can to maintain the loving relationship which brought you both together.” [6]

“Our family is a special gift of God in our lives. It is through our family that we struggle for salvation, for personal integration, for well-being. [7]

Make your marriage priority #1!

1) Love your family

“Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do...but how much love we put in that action.”

St. Mother Theresa

Make time to do things together outside of the social life of the parish. One suggestion is to schedule “Date Nights” where only you and your husband do something you both enjoy. Or schedule regular “Family Nights” when the family does something together apart from “parish stuff.” Remember to take your vacation time. Everyone needs some relaxing and restful time off from work, and for clergy and their families, this is especially important. You can’t afford to go anywhere? Make it a “Staycation” and go on day trips to local places in your home town or city that you haven’t had the chance to visit. Turn off your phones and enjoy your family for the day. During your vacation, either home or away, try not to discuss parish problems or issues. You will have a different perspective when you return.

“Since the priest is “on duty” 24/7, it is too often easier to let personal and/or family-together time slide, putting the parish/parishioners first. Find a balance. Make a balance!” Preoteasa

2) Your role in the home

“She also rises before dawn, and gives food to her household...”

(Proverbs 23:14)

“ ‘The woman is the “priestess” of the home.’ I was told this early in my adult life by a priest who chrismated me. The home and the spiritual life within is my area of expertise and authority, even with my husband being ‘the priest’. This has always given me joy and focus in my journey.” Preoteasa

“I remember an anecdote about St. John of Kronstadt’s Matushka, how she went to very great lengths to ensure he was not disturbed during the short rest he took each day.” [8]

The priest’s family needs to be a healthy unit in which all the members are cared for. The priest’s wife needs to help her husband carry out the demanding tasks of his life. As with wives in all walks of life, it is important that she pays close attention to her family by supervising the diet, activities and condition of the family. Some modern wives may think this sounds like something out of the 1950’s, but if you don’t look after your family’s well-being, who will? Even in these modern times, wives still have a role in maintaining a good, healthy family home. Taking care of the fundamentals at home allows everyone to be healthy and able to make good decisions. Will your husband be home for lunch? If not, could you suggest he take a lunch with him or could you pack him something to eat (rather than get fast food)? Do the children have all they need for their day at school? Are there activities after school? Have doctor and dentist appointments been made? Try to schedule appointments during non-feast times and check with Father’s schedule or ensure that he has made his own

appointment if that is what he prefers. Health is paramount. It is easy to neglect, but not that easy to deal with when it has deteriorated. Keep your hand on the pulse of all members of the family. That is priority #1.

3) When difficulties arise in the home

While looking after your family during good times, you need to be aware of how to handle the hard times. One specifically hard time is abuse in its many forms. If you or someone in your family experiences any abuse from another family member, a parishioner, or someone else in the community, you must take action immediately. Waiting and hoping that the situation will work out, or that it only occurred one time, is not an effective strategy. Seek help from a professional counsellor or your father confessor, and tell your bishop. He can direct you. In some cases, the police may have to be called in. Do not be afraid - listen to those who are there to help you get healing, as painful as it may be, and take their advice (see OCA Sexual Misconduct). [9]

“...I shall try them as silver is tried, and I will prove them as gold itself is proven.”

(Zechariah 13:9)

There are many stresses in a parish and your marriage may experience difficulties as a result. However your difficulties may manifest themselves, you will need to resolve the problems. If your marriage needs help to heal, do not be afraid or ashamed to get outside help. It is always better to get help while the marriage is still healthy. There is an OCA Personal Assistance

Program (see references) available to clergy families. You may find an Orthodox Counsellor from one of the resources, or a Marriage Counsellor from your health benefits. Reach out and get the help you need.



YOUR HUSBAND

“Who will find a courageous wife? For such a one is more valuable than precious stones. The heart of her husband trusts in her.”

(Proverbs 31:10-11)

“The clergy couple is a peculiar couple. The two spouses’ calling is to live in the world and simultaneously bear witness for what lies beyond the world. They are asked to function in the middle of the ecclesiastical community without losing their privacy. They are invited not to allow pastoral confidentiality to divide them but instead unite them for the flock.” [10]

Your positive support is essential to your husband’s ministry. He needs to feel confident in his service to the Church, and part of his success is directly related to your encouragement and love. He might not tell you when he is worn out, sick or troubled, so be observant. You are the shepherd’s caregiver. You are your husband’s haven.

1) Support your husband

“You are your husband’s main supporter and best friend. Love and encourage him. He needs to hear it.” Preoteasa

“I have not been a priest’s wife for long, but I have to say that the most important thing I’ve learned is that he wants your approval and wants to know if you think he did a good job. Be there for him. Be a good listener and not a fixer.” Preoteasa

Your husband’s ministry has put you and your family in a unique position in life. You are centered around the parish, its services, and all that goes on in the life of the parish. Church life is now your life. Embrace it. Attend the services with him and help him when needed. You are partners in this special service to others.

Reassure him during rough times; be joyful during good times; listen to his thoughts and worries; offer honest but gentle and loving feedback when he asks for it. Be genuine in your comments. Share your concerns together about the parish, about the children, about your work. Be wise and discerning in what you tell him about things you hear in the parish just as your husband will discern what he tells you. Remember that some things are told to the priest in confidence, and he will not be able to share them with you. You can be supportive, but don’t push. And don’t try to fix everything.

2) Love your husband

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

(John 13:34)

“The attachment of a priest to a parish is an arranged marriage made by the bishop. This arranged marriage is a holy relationship, each serving one another for doing the work of the Gospel. Together, the priest and the people as the body of Christ are providentially brought together to work out their salvation. The local parish is a family. The priest is called Father, because he is a spiritual father to the parish. Families love and care for each other.” [11]

“Let your love for each other show through to your children.” Preoteasa

Speak kindly to each other. Show respect at all times. Your family needs to know your love for each other. How you treat your husband will reflect on how others treat him as well. Parishioners will reflect the respect they see given to him by you and others. Your children need to see the love and respect you both have for each other. That will shape their future relationships.

Before you were Father and Preoteasa, you were crowned husband and wife. Your relationship as husband and wife needs to be maintained. Fan the coals of intimacy and show affection to each other, privately in your home. You both need to know you

are loved and cherished. You are more than just partners in this journey; God joined you together, and you are “one flesh.”

3) Be understanding

“It's a good thing I'm not a needy wife, because he's gone from the house all day and he even missed Valentine's Day.” Preoteasa

Understand that parish functions and obligations are a part of your husband's ministry. There will be times when meals will be interrupted or even missed. Phone calls might come in at very inopportune times. Family schedules may have to be changed. Your husband will be working many evenings and weekends. This might be opposite to your own working schedule. Try not to feel or show resentment. Be flexible. Be kind when he returns home.

4) Be perceptive

Take care of his simple needs. Did you notice a button missing on his cassock? Have it fixed. Make sure he has enough clean shirts and socks. During Holy Week, he might go through 2 or 3 shirts a day and won't be thinking of where they come from. Is there someone at the parish that looks after cleaning his vestments (and those of the altar boys) once or twice a year? Find a good dry cleaner that can handle the special materials. If you see something that is dirty or unkempt (i.e. altar cloths or communion cloths), ask your husband if you can help him by finding someone to clean them. Also, while you're at it, find a tailor or seamstress who can make alterations if you are not handy. This is his area of

work, and he is responsible for how holy and liturgical items are to be cared for, so don't interfere or assume... but perhaps he could use your help.

5) Marital struggles

“And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife...”.

(Genesis 25:21) ESV

Every marriage has those irritations that get under the skin and can fester. You know what they are: little things that might not mean a lot by themselves, but can grow from a “molehill to a mountain” if left unaddressed. When this happens, keep your feelings from parishioners. Instead of boiling over, sit down and make a list of all the things your husband does that make you happy. When you both have some quiet time together, discuss with him what is bothering you. In cases in which you are having trouble dealing with the irritations or when there are large problems, do not hesitate to get help. Speak to your father confessor, spiritual mother, a Christian counsellor, a trusted family member or close friend. And pray about it. However, do not discuss the problems between you and your husband with any parishioners - even close ones. Their perspective of their spiritual father should not be clouded by problems you are having at home. You also cannot risk the possibility that your problems will be exposed to the whole parish.

6) Your opinion versus your husband's

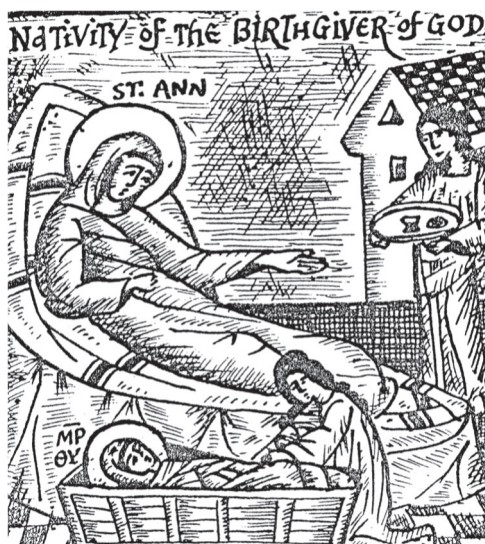
“Early on in the marriage, I learned to let my husband have his opinion and he knows I have mine. I know there will be a time to discuss

these opinions if they differ from one another.” Preoteasa

You may disagree with a decision your husband makes for your family or the parish. Discuss it with him privately. Never discuss a disagreement in public. Express your opinion and try to understand his position. Then pray on the matter and trust that God will work it out.

7) Beware of red flags

Help your husband avoid situations that might be construed as inappropriate. Be available, or ensure someone else is available to go with your husband if he is meeting alone with a woman parishioner. This means either in a residential home or at the church. There is a Sexual Misconduct Policy in the ROEA/OCA [9]. It is available on the website (roea.org). Make sure you and your husband are familiar with it.



YOUR CHILDREN

“Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up to the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Ephesians,
Homily No. 21)

“People say that children are our future. But children are our present. We need to attend to them today, not in the future.”

Archbishop Nathaniel (Popp)

Having children while in a parish may feel like living in a fishbowl. Some people might put expectations on the priest’s kids (PK’s), and sometimes these may be unreasonable. There are other people who will be loving and supportive, almost like adoptive

grandparents. Try to resist imposing a different standard of behaviour on your children just because they are ‘clergy kids’.

1) With love and understanding

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

(Proverbs 22:6) ESV

Teach your children to adopt the principles of God-pleasing children - and to guard against an emphasis on being “parish-pleasing” children. Avoid admonitions like “you can’t do that because you’re the priest’s kid,” or “you should know better because your father is the priest.” Teach your children how you want them to behave because it’s the right way to behave and not because people are watching them. Make no mistake, people are watching them, but like you, your children have to be true to themselves and God and not try to be someone that others expect them to be.

2) “Hear no evil, see no evil”

“He who lives blamelessly in righteousness, he will leave blessed children behind him.”

(Proverbs 20:7)

Don’t include your children in negative discussions about the parish or other clergy. Some clergy families do not even have their children in the building during annual meetings or situations that might become contentious. What your children will hear will form their opinion of the Church for many years to come. Protect them. Keep them close to you, but far from

discord. And help them build a good relationship with God and His Church that will last their whole life.

3) Be a buffer

As much as possible, shelter your children from criticism directed toward you and your husband by parishioners, as well as any criticism you may have about any parishioners. In a parish, there will be negative times, and PK's can get turned off from the Church by seeing and hearing negative aspects about parish life. They need to grow up in an environment in which respect for the Church and its clergy is paramount. This might seem to be a monumental job; and it is. You must keep your children in love with the Faith.

4) Their spiritual training

"As a priest's wife, raising children who love God and know that they are loved is the most important duty I have." Preoteasa

"Bring your children to church as often as you are able. This takes a great deal of effort, but it is your best gift to them and to God. Even babies who cannot understand receive grace from attending church. The candles, incense, icons, bells – they absorb all these things." Preoteasa

"A fundamental part of being the parents of PK's is to make sure they are happy going to church, even if it means they are noisy or running down the aisle or something else. If the children are miserable, you have lost the

battle even if you are doing everything right in “Training up a child in the way he should go.”” Preoteasa

“A Mother’s ministry is her children at church.” Preoteasa

Concentrate on your children’s spiritual well-being. Talk about upcoming feasts and make a lesson around the Faith whenever possible. Discuss the Gospel for the week, teach them holy traditions and read to them from Holy Scripture and the lives of the saints. Discuss current events in the context of Christian teaching; discuss what is right and wrong and why. This will help them defend their faith as they mature and move away from home.

5) Be a good example

“If we always allow the stress of preparing for Sunday to put us in a bad mood, they will learn to hate Sundays. Children in clergy families inevitably see the hard work and stress in their parents’ lives.” Preoteasa

Be a good example to your children, because they will definitely imitate what they see.

To alleviate stress, get many things ready before Sunday morning. Some families find leaving a basket or bag by the front door handy and add things through the week that need to go to the church. There will inevitably be things that go wrong (i.e. no gas in the car, the dog runs away, etc.), so have the regular things looked after. And try to keep your cool.

Stresses may happen other times too, like getting cut off in traffic, a rude phone call, a bad day at the office. Don't take your stresses out on your family, especially your children.

6) Be diligent

“Our oldest came home from Elementary School one day with some homework. When he showed it to us, we realized his class was studying witchcraft! If we hadn't been aware of what he was being taught at school, he would have continued to be exposed to it.”

Preoteasa

Look out for your children. Try to shelter them from attacks and criticisms, not only in the parish, but in daily life. Keep your ears sharp and listen for danger. You should be aware of what they are being taught in school. Who are their friends? Are they good examples? What are they watching on TV or the computer? Is it age-appropriate? Are their teachers teaching something contrary to Orthodox Doctrine? If you disagree with something at school, have courage to take a stand.

7) Friends of ‘like mind’

PK's enjoy the company of other PK's. If you live close to other Orthodox clergy families, make arrangements to get together as a family. This might help you and Father as much as it will help the children. Plan for your children to attend one of the ROEA summer camps where life-long friendships are often developed.

8) Respect your children's time

“My kids loved it when they finally got their driver's licenses. They were able to shave off at least 2 hours off waiting for Father and me at church.” Preoteasa

Be sensitive to your children concerning their attendance at all the services, as well as all the parish activities. The priest and his family are usually the first at church and the last to leave. And then, by the time you all get home, you and Father are exhausted and can't spend much time with the family. This can be demanding on the children who are feeling bored/hungry/ignored as their parents are busy with parishioners and other duties.

9) Be vigilant

“We once had a parishioner tell our 8-year-old daughter that her dress was too short and that she should not tell us he said so. Thankfully, she told us and because she felt ‘funny’ when he said it, we kept an eye on this man.” Preoteasa

“Be careful who you trust, the devil was once an angel. As your children grow into the teens, and as young adults, have, and continue to have, conversations about ‘the ways of the world’. We sometimes tend to shelter our children; this can make them naïve and unworldly. Of course, we don't want to expose them to the bad elements of society, but they need to be aware that the bad elements exist. ‘Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst

of wolves. Be...wise as serpents and harmless as doves'." Preoteasa

At all times, be protective of your children with parishioners. You need to be a "mamma bear." It is unfortunate that this needs to be mentioned, but you cannot be too careful with people you do not know very well, and even people you do know well! Always be vigilant regarding where and with whom your children are. Be very cautious about leaving your children alone with a parishioner or having "sleep-overs" at one of their houses. It is very important that your children know that they can tell you and Father absolutely anything that happens and is told to them. Also, that they can call you at any moment, day or night, if they have a concern. One young girl was at a sleepover and called her mother late in the night. The family had determined a "code word" in case of a problem. The young girl used that code word because she found herself in a dangerous situation, and her mother came and picked her up immediately. Work to keep the doors of communication open at all times.

10) Your children's happiness

" In 2018, just a quarter of young Americans described themselves as happy – the lowest level recorded by the General Social Survey, a key barometric index of American social life, begun in 1972." [12]

Raising children is never easy, but it has become more difficult in today's age to raise happy and content children, with society having less morals and

belief in God. Keep your eye on raising your children. Schedule activities to keep them busy. Make time around the supper table for them to talk about their day and their concerns. If you have more than one child, spend separate time with each. Your family is priority #1.

11) “Don’t sweat the small stuff” (Robert Eliot)

“One Sunday many years ago, I arrived early (as always) for Liturgy with our 3-year-old daughter. Orthros was still being chanted, this time with someone new. She looked over the railing (from the choir loft) to get a view of the guest chanter. She asked loudly, “Who’s the billy goat?” It was so hard not to laugh, the sound was less than pleasant! Fortunately, no one was there except us.”

Preoteasa

Children will say the darndest things. Don’t worry. You can handle any fallout. Five years from now, no one will remember what they said. What is important is that they are at church with you. Be proud of your family and don’t shy away from their behavior. As long as they are polite and civil, let your kids be kids.

As your children grow into adults, they might make decisions that don’t agree with your beliefs. It would be natural to worry: “what will the parishioners think?” Be honest, and loving. Your priority, again, is your family. Support them in every situation.

12) Social activities

"Parents should guide their children sometimes with strictness, other times more gently until the first year of puberty. After that, close your mouth and say nothing. Let your knees speak (prayer and prostrations)."

St. Paisios of Mount Athos

As your children age, decisions will have to be made about attending parties on Saturday nights and missing Vespers and/or Divine Liturgy the next morning. Also, will they be able to participate in sports if practices are on Sunday mornings? Will their part-time job or volunteering allow them to be present on Sunday mornings? Decide early what your stand will be, and then be consistent. The rules will be easier to enforce if your teen or young adult knows them ahead of time.

13) A child is born while your husband is assigned to a parish

"Initially it was very hard. I felt very isolated, that being said, we only had one vehicle at the time. I was questioning what I got myself into A LOT! However, I also had postpartum depression and anxiety. Once that part got figured out and I was more accepting of asking for help, things got better. When I returned to work and we invested in a second vehicle, again things got that much better again. Everyone that we surround ourselves with has something different to offer and we love our little community. " Preoteasa

Being assigned to a parish when you are both young brings with it the possibility of having children while your husband is the parish priest. Usually, your extended family is some distance away and cannot give you the support you need with the new baby. A family member may come for a short time, but eventually you will be on your own. You will have to depend on friends, parishioners and resources in the community to help, especially if you have more than one child. Your husband will not be able to be at home all the time. Accept offers of cooked meals, groceries, drives to the doctor, or even an offer to look after the baby for a short time while you take a shower or a nap.

Don't be in a hurry to return to work or parish life. The Church has a very good reason to keep you home for 40 days. You need that time at home with your baby; you need to gain your strength, and the baby doesn't need to be out in public during his or her early days. Maybe your community has a Public Health Nurse or midwife that can check up on you. There will probably be many early childhood classes you can attend to help you with care for your new baby. Make sure you avail yourself of these opportunities. Let your doctor know how you are managing with your brand new family and all the stresses that go along with it. It's very natural to feel anxious with a newborn, especially in a new home and a new parish. Reach out if you feel overwhelmed.

PRIESTS' KIDS' COMMENTS

“Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?... how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

(Matthew 7:9-11)

The child of a Priest and Preoteasa is born into a family which has a calling in the Church. But PKs have less say than you do in joining the life of ministry. They also have less control in how their life unfolds. You might not notice the effects of day-to-day parish life on your child, because you are busy existing in the day-to-day life yourself. Some things cannot be helped; their dad missing meals or family activities because of an emergency in the parish, for example. However, all these things take away from the time their father spends with them.

Be aware of your children's needs. Help them understand the demands on you and their father. Observe what they experience in their life as a PK. Make family time available. You might not always know what your child is thinking. You will not know how their experiences shape their lives until they do. Here are some comments from PKs. They will definitely provoke some thought.

- 1) *“I felt welcomed in the youth community of the parish while growing up because there*

was Jr AROY & Sr AROY to participate in, as well as church choir & Sunday School.” [PK]

- 2) *“Dealing with death was made easier because I often went with Dad & Mom to the Saracusta (Panahida) evening prayers at funeral homes for the deceased, along with many other kids from the parish. It was common to see lots of friends at the funeral homes dozens of times, and while sad, it made me realize that it was a normal part of the life cycle. Sometimes when a Cantor wasn’t available, I helped with chanting. Once when I was 16 years old, when the deceased was from a very small family, I was asked and gladly served as a pallbearer at the funeral.” [PK]*
- 3) *“I remember when I was about 6 years old. We went to another church for a Pan-Orthodox service. I was drawing something and a woman came up to me (who did not have a child in the crying room) and asked me if that was my father downstairs serving. When I said yes, she said, “What would he think of you drawing in the middle of church?” I think I was drawing something “churchy” too.” [PK]*
- 4) *“My dad told a story about me when I was 4 years old. He was working several jobs as well as being a priest, so he wasn’t home very much. One day, I met him at the door as he was coming home. I called out to my mother:*

“Mom, it’s the man who lives here.” It’s sad and a little funny.” [PK]

- 5) *“I would tell other PKs: “Maybe make sure to be kind to the other children, because they can see you as a role model, but also be conscious that their parents might be comparing them to you.”” [PK]*
- 6) *“One of the things I remember about becoming a PK was the pride I felt (as a young child we get that way sometimes) when my father was ordained. It felt kind of like a secret club I became a part of.” [PK]*
- 7) *“I have always felt a pressure to be or act a certain way because of my father’s position. I am constantly aware of how my behavior will influence others’ views of him, our family, and what others may think of how he and my mother raised me. So, I keep my cards close to my chest and do not give out too much information about my personal life, which sadly makes me feel like I can’t allow people to get to know all of me. I worry if they would withdraw or judge my father and our family.” [PK]*
- 8) *“There is an image I feel I have to uphold being the only daughter of a priest and honestly feel like I fail at it most days. He is such a good man and priest, and the last thing I want is for me to have a negative impact on him or his position in the church. So, in all*

honesty, it's been one of the hardest things I've had to deal with in my life." [PK]

- 9) *"When Dad becomes a priest... expect your life to change forever in ways that you will not even recognize until much later in life."* [PK]
- 10) *"There are perks... aside from the intercessions before the Throne of God, apart from your dad, you get lots of free flowers from funerals, gift baskets from parishioners; you get to travel to places for conferences and events; people respect you completely on virtue of your title as PK and put up with you no matter how much of an obnoxious or moody person you are. Your (Dad's) network suddenly explodes with kind and benevolent parishioners who can help from banking to home renovations to that guy who knows how to fix everything. You get to know the inner workings of a church from everything about cleaning schedules to Byzantine politics..."* [PK]
- 11) *"Living in a fishbowl becomes a norm; expect yourself to develop weird and sometimes useful coping mechanisms."* [PK]
- 12) *"Thought you were comfortable in your shower singing career? Now you will likely have a debut on the Anologion if you are in a small parish or have any musical talent. You start to become very wary of bishops. You often start to learn the Psalter and Bible more than you knew before, and then use it in daily*

conversation with your parents (or against your parents). "Come unto me child, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord"... "Do unto others DAD"... you develop a zany sense of humour, not unlike Calvin and Hobbes or Heart & Brain." [PK]

13) *"I would joke with people before they knew what Dad did, and I'd say "the funeral home always gives us great gift baskets at Christmas, because Dad gives them so much business." [PK]*

14) *"As Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory says, "expect to be fiercely tempted until your dying breath", but being in a priest's family is like walking down a dark alley with \$100 bills hanging out of your pockets... you are fresh meat for the demons, and they will do all they can to get to you, because that is how they can get to your dad. Prayers in the Holy Liturgy are more powerful than the prayers of the saints, so support your dad all you can in his efforts to perform Holy Liturgy. PK's... emotional scarring since the order of Melchizedek... but a huge blessing!" [PK]*

15) *"You're always under the parishioners' collective eyes at any church event." [PK]*

16) *"Being in the presence of a bishop is much different in church than it is when he is visiting in the priest's home. Much more casual." [PK]*

- 17) *"Unless it's life or death, the people come first. I broke a toe when I was in my middle teens, and dad was away for the day with visitors. I had to wait until the evening when he came home to get medical attention (that might also have been due to my mom being old world and not driving)." [PK]*
- 18) *"Who goes to a monastery for a vacation? We did! And I loved it." [PK]*
- 19) *"Singing with my dad created a love for liturgical music that has lasted my whole life." [PK]*
- 20) *"Always go to church when you can. Not because you have to because you're the PK, but because you know it's where you should be. Even at those times when you're tired or think you're too busy... go. There's a tendency to "rebel" against what you feel is expected of you, wrongly comparing yourself to others, but that's just in your mind, and you need to remind yourself to be better than that." [PK]*
- 21) *"Don't resent being a PK. At times you may feel certain expectations and limitations are unrealistic or unfair, especially compared to what you may perceive your friends' experience in their lives, but everyone experiences that in one way or another. You are not alone. Whether they are children of doctors, lawyers, politicians, entrepreneurs, first responders, or a variety of other professions and vocations, all kids, at one*

time or another, feel they are limited or disadvantaged because of who their parents are, what they do, and how that affects them (high expectations, strict rules, limited financial means, etc.). Don't make excuses. Accept who you are, who your parents are, and focus on being the best person you can be. Resentment only leads you away from yourself." [PK]

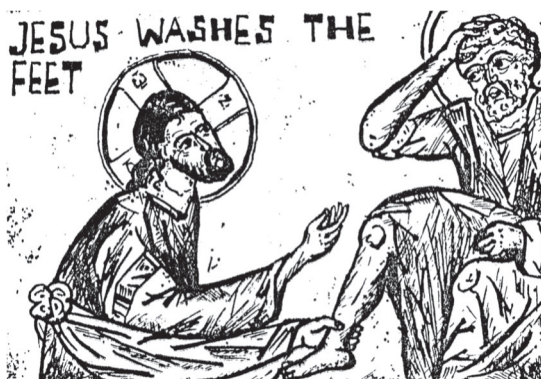
22) *"Sometimes, amid the hustle and bustle of everything going on at church and in your life, you need to remind yourself to stop and find peace. As it says in the Psalms, "Be still, and know that I am God." Take a small break – even if it's for just a few minutes – from all work, worries and conflicts, and focus your mind only on your spiritual and sacramental life. You will see the difference that makes in your life."* [PK]

23) *"Those who are in a position where they deal often with other people should never forget humility. Humility helps us to avoid anger, jealousy, greed, and so many other passions that can make life even more difficult for us and our families. It leads us to patience, faith, courage, and more. As St. Isaac the Syrian said, "As salt is needed for all kinds of food, so humility is needed for all kinds of virtues"."* [PK]

24) *"As a PK, you will probably come to know many people at church. The more people you*

know, the more likely it is you will see their various shortcomings, struggles and sins. Don't judge them. Don't speak ill of them. Remind yourself that we are all working out our salvation, and be an example to others through empathy and friendship." [PK]

- 25) *"One of the most common complaints of PK's is that people at church are often judging them, even to the point of saying rude and insulting things to them. To a certain point, you need to just grow a "thick skin." Understand that people can be ignorant, maybe they're deflecting their own problems and insecurities, maybe they think in their minds that they're being helpful, or sometimes they're just plain judgmental. Don't respond in kind. If you know you are not doing anything wrong, just let it go. Responding in anger or otherwise inappropriately will just make you look bad and may cause headaches for your family."* [PK]



YOUR ROLE IN THE PARISH

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.”

(1 Corinthians 7:17)

“Despite these changes (in society), the clergy spouse continues to be influential in the parish. Clergy spouses touch members’ lives in ways positive or negative, of which they may not even be aware. They are respected and trusted because of their personal relationship with the priest. Although the role of the clergy spouse is now more likely (than in the past) to be merely one aspect of their lives rather than the main focus, the situation is still demanding and frequently stressful for them.” [13]

Have you considered what your role will be when your husband is ordained?

“One day the Archbishop came to our parish, my husband was ordained, and I said “now what?” I didn’t know what to expect. I thought it would be a huge demand on my time and I was still working. I didn’t know what the parishioners expected from me.”
Preoteasa

Again, we don’t have a job description, but many preotese have gone before us and have been wonderful examples in their homes and their communities. Here are a few suggestions from many years of experience:

1) Your title and your husband’s

“You have a title that sets you apart from other parishioners. It is important that the parishioners call you ‘Preoteasa’ and your first name from the beginning of your time in a parish, especially if you are young and new to the role.” Preoteasa

Using your title in the church is important. It sets a tone that everyone has a job to do in the church and yours is being the wife of the priest. Your husband should also refer to you as “Preoteasa” when speaking about you.

“Refer to your husband as ‘Father’ when speaking about him to someone in the parish.” Preoteasa

Similarly, it is important that you set an example as to how your husband the priest is to be addressed. When

people use his title, it is a reminder of his role as the priest in the parish.

2) Have Respect

“Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Honour the king.”

(1 Peter 2:17)

“Do not second guess or contradict your husband in public. If someone asks you a question, such as ‘Would Father mind if I ...?’, refer that person to your husband.”

Preoteasa

It is essential that you have respect for the Church, your husband the priest, your parish and your bishop. Nothing is gained when you publicly criticize your husband or your bishop. If you disagree with a decision either has made, discuss it with them in private. You are a team and should present a strong unit to the faithful. Anything else is counterproductive. Also, complaining about your parish or parishioners isn't productive either. It tears down trust. You need to build trust in a community which is accomplished by showing respect.

If your husband makes a statement that you disagree with, discuss it at home. Stand by what he says and never criticise him to a parishioner. You are partners; however, he has the authority in the parish and you must respect that. Also, do not try to make decisions on behalf of your husband, because he may or may not agree.

3) Confidential or not

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

(Matthew 10:16)

Information that is told to you may be told in confidence, but that confidence does not exclude your husband. Do not get trapped by someone saying, “I have to tell you something, but please don’t tell Father.” Parishioners must realize that you do not keep secrets from the priest, but he will keep secrets from you. You must be especially aware if you are given information about an abuse or a crime. Make sure you get as much detail as possible, including contact names and numbers, and tell your husband immediately. He will decide whether to contact your bishop and/or the police. There are guidelines on the OCA website regarding sexual misconduct (<https://www.oca.org/about/sexual-misconduct>) [9].

4) Attending Services and other activities

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

(2 Timothy 4:5)

You are like any other parishioner in that you have the same calling: to attend the Services and make the Faith the central part of your life. This is crucial to your spiritual life, to the spiritual life of your family, as well as the support of your husband and the support of the parish. It is important that you come together with parishioners in “community.”

5) Serving the Church

*“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for
many.”*

(Matthew 20:28)

*“For to you is given that very special and
unique privilege to serve Christ and His
Church, along with your husband, in a most
sacred and mystical way - a way, that few, if
any of the parishioners would understand.”*

Metropolitan Joseph (Bosakov)

Be humble, loving, and considerate of others. We each became a Preotessa when our husband was ordained. We agreed to be partners in his ministry. Our title reflects that partnership. When times get difficult, don't be tempted to stay away, or even leave the parish. Similarly, don't try to battle it out. Stay, pray, and learn to reconcile and resolve difficulties.

*“It is a dangerous thing to declare your love
for God, for He will ask from you every
drop.”*

Written to Mother Alexandra,
possibly by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

There will be good times, and not so good. You may feel “squeezed” at times. Every situation and every person is different. God has bestowed these on us. He takes us out of our comfort zone so we don't become stagnant.

*“I feel like priest's wives are often God's
midwives. We show up, on the sideline, when*

*people are matched, hatched and dispatched.
Or maybe we are more like a doula, which
comes from the word "servant." There are
joys in even the most solemn and sorrowful
moments of service to God's people."*
Preoteasa

*"One thing that has served me well: be an
example of what you want to see in others.
People have always responded favourably."*
Preoteasa

*"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulations, be
constant in prayer."*
(Romans 12:12) ESV

Treat people in the parish (and in the community at large as well) as you would like to be treated. In Canada, the Ukrainian name for priest's wife is "Dobrodijka" which literally means "a woman who does good." Your role is to do good in the parish. Be gentle with people, and usually, they will be gentle back. Give credit and thanks where it is due. Learn people's names. Everyone loves hearing their name. It is important to parishioners that they know that you know them. Be charitable. Help those that need help, if you are able. Comfort those who are grieving.

6) Love your parishioners

*"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the
greatest of these is love."*
(1 Corinthians 13:13)

*"Grace proceeds from brotherly love, and by
brotherly love grace is preserved; but if we do*

not love our brother, the grace of God will not come into our souls.” On Love by St. Silouan

“I love all the different people in our parish.” Preoteasa

“Matushka” is a very descriptive term for understanding the role of a Preoteasa. The word means ‘little mother’ or ‘the endearing form of mother’ in the Slavonic language. That is what our role is. We are a mother to the parish. We are called to encourage and love people in the parish, at the same time being a partner to our husband and his ministry. Love everyone as you would love your children. There will be times when you don’t feel the love; you might not like them, but love them anyway.

“Love covers a multitude of sins.”

(1 Peter 4:8)

7) Difficult times

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting ...”.

(James 1:2-6)

“It is necessary to confront life, for life loves the brave.”

Princess Ileana of Romania [14]

“It would be incorrect to imagine that your life will be “all roses” or that your title will get you “a seat at the head table.” Preoteasa

There will be times when your role will not be “a bed of roses.” That’s okay too. Nothing worth having comes without a struggle. There are difficulties you may experience in your role as a Preoteasa. Work with your husband to get through the rough patches. Don’t lose sight of what’s important. Pray for your parish. Pray for your husband. Pray with the humility of the Canaanite woman, the perseverance of St. Monica, and the confidence of the Centurion. The first was not ashamed to get “the crumbs from the table” when asking the Lord to heal her daughter, the second prayed for 17 years for her son Augustine to be joined to the Church, and the third, he knew the Lord could heal from afar.

“Nothing is far from God.” St. Monica [15]

“...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

(Romans 8:18)

“Honestly, since being in this role, I did not realize how stressful the role could be. There are many rewards, joys and satisfaction, but there is hard work, frustration and ‘ugliness’ sometimes.”
Preoteasa

Don’t forget to include your bishop during those hard times. He needs to be included and hear from you about the struggles you are facing. Remember that your problem is probably not unique, and the bishop may be able to shed some light on a resolution to the problem.

8) “The good, the bad, and the ugly” (1966 movie)

Since there are a variety of people in a parish, it would be helpful if you made yourself aware of different personality traits. Here are a few websites to look over for some background:

(<https://blogs.goarch.org/blog/-/blogs/conflis>)

(<https://thecreativelittlechurch.com/dealing-with-toxic-people-in-church/>)

(<https://www.crosswalk.com/church/worship/when-toxic-people-fill-your-church.html>)

(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/women-leaders/2012/july/tiresome-taxing-and-toxic-situations-in-ministry.html>)

Learn to understand the difference between good people and those with ulterior motives. Researching a few short articles on different personalities may help you to recognize and deal with red flags before they become huge issues. This is not meant for you to be judgemental, only for you to be aware.

9) When people are not nice

“Fret not yourself because of evildoers...”

(Psalm 37:1) ESV

“When someone is nasty with you, remember they were probably nasty before you came around. They were probably nasty when they were 10 years old!” And if someone is angry with you, *“they might just be angry with God*

and are deflecting it on you. Or maybe they are just having a bad day.” [16]

Try not to take things personally. “Ha,” you say, “Easy for you to say!” Yes, it is easier to say than to do. But you must try to guard your heart against unpleasanties, and try not to allow them to lodge there. *Think* about a difficult situation more than *feeling* or becoming emotional about the situation.

“Someone once said the secret to success in ministry is to get the tough hide of a rhinoceros but keep the tender heart of a child; the trick is to get the one without losing the other.” [17]

10) Jobs in the Parish

“Just because the last Matushka did something doesn't mean that you have to. Just because they got you to do something in the last place doesn't mean that you have to do it now.” Preoteasa

Use your talents. Are you good with music? Help with the church music. Are you good with children? Help with the Church School. You don't necessarily have to lead these departments, but at least give your support in a loving and helpful manner. If you decide to help or lead in different parish ministries, do so because you are an Orthodox Christian and not because you are a Preoteasa and you feel obligated. Once you have had a position in the parish for a while, step back and let someone else help and eventually take over.

Some Preotese decide not to pick up any jobs in the parish, because their children are small and require their attention, or for other reasons. However, here are a few jobs that historically Preotese have taken on in the parish:

a) Prosphora

In order to make prosphora, you will need to have some instruction. There are several methods and a few recipes. Ensure you say your prayers before commencing. Seals can be bought online from one of the monasteries or Orthodox supply stores. You should have utensils, bowls and pans set aside only for Prosphora. Some people use a mixer or a bread machine to mix the ingredients. It is best to be shown by someone who has experience making the prosphora, such as another preoteasa or a monastic. You may also be able to find videos online showing the technique. It will take some practice. It is preferable to make fresh prosphora before every Divine Liturgy rather than bake many and freeze them. Ask your husband how the prosphora turned out and how you can improve the next time. Perhaps in time, you could teach a number of other ladies to make the prosphora and take turns preparing it.

b) Choir/Cantor

“So many presvyteras that I know, including me, have unexpectedly turned into choir directors, and have had to learn on the fly how to do this. This is especially true if you have married into a different jurisdiction or

are a convert, because when everything is new, it just makes it harder.” Preoteasa

You will need some knowledge of music to conduct the choir. Perhaps there are music books or outlines for special services already assembled when you arrive at the parish. That would be a wonderful bonus. If however, you have to build choir books and assemble books for special services, you will need some help. Ask the Episcopate office for the service books they have published. Contact another ROEA parish or monastery, and ask what they have in the way of music. There are listings of tones and service outlines online on the ROEA and OCA websites. After a while, your music library will grow. Remember that the people who are in your choir have volunteered to be there. Treat them kindly and encourage them to “sing praises to the Lord.”

c) Church School

It would be much easier if there are books, curriculum and supplies already available. If not, you will have to build from scratch. Get some help. Ask the Episcopate for resources. Ask the bishop for advice. Get the parents involved and have them bring their children to class. Research other parishes that have successful Church School classes and find out their processes. Look online for Orthodox Resources. Prepare well in advance for the classes, and follow up with those children that missed a Sunday or two.

d) Charity

It is said that “charity begins at home.” As a Preoteasa, you have a vantage point like no other

parishioner. You know the needs of many. Are you able to help a senior or new mother with a meal? Does someone need a ride to church? Is someone ill and could use a card or flowers to cheer them up? You don't have to do these acts of charity yourself, but perhaps you can find some ladies in the parish that have the time and energy. Feed the hungry. Other ideas for charitable works are: sandwiches or providing meals for the homeless shelter, Christmas hampers for people in the parish or outside in the community, providing warm clothing during the winter, or many other ideas.

There are other times that you may be called on to help (i.e.: bake sales, festivals, garage sales or other fundraising events). Do what you can. Be on time. And follow through on your promise.

11) Have boundaries

Set boundaries deliberately. You cannot be everywhere and do everything. If you help with the Church School or choir, do what you can and don't take on more than you can handle. Remember that your family comes first. Discuss with your husband what you feel comfortable doing and what your boundaries are. Boundaries are also important when dealing with parishioners. There are some things you may not feel comfortable sharing. Or there may be time limits you want to set on phone calls and discussions with parishioners. You need to decide what those things are and be comfortable with your boundaries.

12) Will you have a position on the parish council?

This is a topic that you need to discuss with your husband and your bishop. In small missions, there may not be a choice, and your help might be essential on council. However, in larger parishes, your presence on parish council may be awkward. What will you do if you disagree with your husband on a topic in council? It is not permissible by the ROEA that you or your husband handle money or any of the finances in the parish. This is for your protection in the instance that there is a discrepancy with accounting for funds. Once there is a shadow of doubt cast, it is very hard to regain the trust of the parishioners.

13) Money, energy and time

These are three resources for which God asks us to be good stewards. These are FINITE resources. You only have so much of each of them. You need to spread them out, or budget them to look after yourself and your family as well as your parish. Always put your family's needs first in whatever role you take on in the parish. Make sure you have time and energy left over for them after the parish activities. Your family must know that they are your first priority. If you have children, include them whenever possible in child-friendly parish activities.

14) Do not gossip

“A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”

(Proverbs 16:28) ESV

“If a man does start to work on himself, then the devil will find another job for him - to seek for flaws in others.”

St. Paisius of Mount Athos

“Gossip is like a feather pillow that is cut open, and the feathers fly away.”

Archimandrite Martinian Ivanovici of blessed
memory - Regina, Saskatchewan

Those feathers can never be retrieved, just as words can never be taken back. Don't indulge in gossip. Be diplomatic. You will hear many things in confidence which need not go any further.

Parishioners must be able to trust you, and that trust will dissipate very quickly if you get a reputation of being a gossip.

“Also, never complain about one parishioner to another. They will tell and both will judge you. Also, they are probably related.”

Preoteasa

15) New parish

When coming into a new parish, stay neutral and learn the way the parish works. Ideally, we should not have ‘favourites’ in the parish, but we often do - especially with those people who help, or are supportive of the priest’s family. Wait a while before you make the decision of who will be your friends. Sometimes, the people who come forward the quickest are not the people from whom you will get support later. Be friendly to everyone, but make

friends sparingly. (More on going to a new parish in the section on Relocation).

16) Parish Family

“We feel the sorrows of everyone in the parish. The priest carries these in his heart, and the priest's wife joins him by carrying those difficulties.” Preoteasa

Rejoice in the happy times in your parish - weddings, baptisms, chrismations. The parish is your ‘church family’. You may or may not be invited to the reception, if there is one. But you can attend the service and show your support for the occasion. Decide early on if you will bring gifts to all weddings and baptisms. Likewise, be there as much as you can, for tragedies and hard times in parishioners’ lives. Your husband might ask you to come with him to a parishioner who is having difficulty. Be supportive. Notice what help they might need. If possible, recruit other parishioners to help with meals or other tasks. Reach out a little while later and ask how they are doing.

“The path to God passes through the love of neighbor. There is no other way. At the Last Judgment, I will not be asked whether I have succeeded in my ascetical exercises. I will not be questioned about the number of my prostrations during prayer. I will be asked if I have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner. With regard to every poor person, all the hungry, the imprisoned,

the Savior said: It was I. I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was sick and in prison.” [18]

17) Opinions

Be sparing with your opinions, either personal or political. There will be many different opinions in a parish, and you don't want to become a lightning rod. It might be very tempting during an election to get into a discussion with one or more parishioners. Try to avoid this. Expressing your opinion on social media is very easy these days, but not always productive. Resist the temptation to post political or controversial topics or to get into discussions online with people.

18) Judging

“The church is a hospital, and not a courtroom for souls.”

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Sometimes people, very well-intentioned and pious people, may expect the new Matushka to become a little “policeman” in the church, to go around correcting everyone for the way they are dressed, the way they cross themselves, etc. My advice on this point is to refuse respectfully but firmly. It often happens that when people come to church, especially new visitors, they can be very, very sensitive.” [19]

We need to be aware that our Lord is always healing the people of His Church. Our labour is to remember that God works differently in each situation and

according to each need. Avoid anticipating and prejudging. Be compassionate and understanding. Remember that none of us is perfect, and we all learn from each other in the presence of God's holy Church.

19) Bring a book

“There will be many times you will be waiting for your husband at church. Always have a pocket-book with you.”

Preoteasa Betty Limbeson of blessed memory

Whether you arrive early for the service, are waiting for your husband to hear confessions, or while he has some discussions with a parishioner, or other reasons he is detained - you will find times you are by yourself and “killing time.” It is a good idea to have something to keep you occupied. These days there are many e-books that you can slip into your pocket or purse and find something to read while you wait. It's also a good topic of conversation and teaching when someone will ask you “what are you reading?”.

Other options are knitting or crocheting. They will keep you busy while you wait. These may also be useful when you are present in a conversation but not engaged.

20) Be adaptable

“As Christians we have a duty, grounded in love, to be for those around us the “still small voice.” That “still small voice” is where God is, and what His presence bestows on those who love Him: the ability to stand in the

middle of the storm and yet withstand the strong winds, the earthquakes, and the fire.” [20]

When this book was written, the world was in a global pandemic. Life changed on many levels - personal, professional and in the parish. Church services were cancelled, then live-streamed, then a few participants were allowed to attend before the churches were allowed to be opened fully. Although we hope changes on this level will not happen again, changes will happen. Life is full of surprises. Try to take it in stride. Learn about the situation. Do not complain, especially to parishioners. They will be looking to you and Father for direction.

21) Missed the mark

Finally, you will make mistakes, feel pain, and be disappointed. Don't give up and don't get discouraged. There will also be many happy, satisfying and proud times. Just keep going. Keep praying. As situations come up, discuss them with your husband. Ask his opinion on what you could have done differently. As with many women throughout history, a contrite heart, a faithful spirit, and the Grace of God will get you through anything.

“Ministry is: Giving when you feel like keeping; Praying for others when you need to be prayed for; Feeding others when your own soul is hungry; Living truth before people when you can't see results; Hurting with other people even when your own hurt can't be spoken; Keeping your word even when it is

*not convenient; Being faithful when your flesh
wants to run away.” [21]*

FINANCES

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”

(Ecclesiastes 5:10) ESV

Few priests earn a large wage from their ministry. This will cause some financial hardships for the family, even if you try to plan.

“One day we were really low on money. All the bills - mortgage, utilities and childrens’ activities - had been paid, but there was no money left for groceries. I looked in the cupboard and told my husband I didn’t know what we were going to eat for supper, because there wasn’t much there. He had returned from a funeral and was resting in the living room when a knock came at the door. It was the family from the funeral. They said they had a lot of food left over and would like us to have this cooler full of food! That only happened once, but it was the one time we needed it. Thank you God!” Preoteasa

1) Budgeting

“One priest’s wife was heard saying her family didn’t have enough money. When asked how much would be enough, she replied, “There’ll never be enough.”” Preoteasa

Live within your means. This sounds easy, but when you are tempted to buy something on credit,

remember it has to come from somewhere. Debt is easy to get into but hard to get out of. Be content with living frugally. Budget your money and don't spend more than you make.

You have to make the money coming in enough for your expenses. "Never enough" is always looking for more. Be content and make do. God always provides.

"There is more month left at the end of the paycheck." Preoteasa

Understand financing and budgets. If you are not sure as to how to handle your money, find a course that teaches you to manage money. Even on a small income, it is possible to keep a balanced budget. Some clergy find it beneficial to hire an accountant who is experienced with clergy taxes and their financial needs. There are also courses on budgeting and ways to manage your money. Many people have found them beneficial.

2) Tithing

"It has often been said, and it has been my experience, that sometimes the most spiritually engaging exercise (discipline or ascetic practice) that people encounter in a month is writing their tithe check. Holding the pen in my hand, I must ask myself again who owns the resources that I manage." [22].

"Nothing makes me feel wealthier than tithing." Preoteasa

No matter how much or how little money you make as a family, remember to tithe. The word "tithe" is

defined as one tenth of annual produce or earnings...for the support of the Church and clergy. We support the church, because that is what we are called to do. It is also important for the parishioners to see an example of tithing and realize that everyone is called to do it. One bishop was seen at a Divine Liturgy to reach into his pocket and put some money in the collection plate as it was passed around. He was setting an example, as well as carrying out his tithe.

“Not every form of giving produces the same spiritual fruit in everyone. Each must find a way to give that brings Life; however, all must serve, all must give alms.” [23]

3) Working outside the home

Is it essential for you to work? Many clergy wives have jobs outside of the home. In the United States, the wife often has to work outside the home to provide health care benefits for the family. In Canada, the wife’s job might bring extended health care benefits and a pension. Perhaps, Father has to take an outside job as well. This can be difficult, especially if your family is large. It requires a great deal of organization. If your job has benefits or a pension, make sure you take advantage of them. This topic will be discussed in more detail later.

4) Own your home or live in the rectory?

“Even the sparrow finds a home, and swallow a nest for herself.”

(Psalm 83:4) ESV

Some clergy families feel more comfortable buying their own house. This will be a considerable and ongoing investment. You will have mortgage payments, utilities, repairs, maybe new appliances and other expenses. Weigh carefully that you are prepared to take this on. On the upside, it will be an investment. And in your own home, you can do whatever renovations you want while living in the neighbourhood you want. There is security in owning your own home. If your family leaves the parish, you have the equity in your house that will follow you. There is privacy in owning your own home or in renting a home. Some may not feel comfortable purchasing a home, so perhaps renting one in a district you prefer is better than living in the parish house.

5) Prepare for your retirement

“Start saving early for retirement. Even a little goes a long way.” Preoteasa

When you are young, retirement seems so very far away. But it will come one day, and you need to be prepared for it. Make a plan. ROEA clergy in the United States must belong to the OCA pension plan. Some people seek the advice of a financial advisor for this purpose. If your parish or place of work offers a pension, make sure you take advantage of it. You want to be financially stable when retirement comes and there is no more paycheque.

6) Who is your boss?

“The parishioners would tell us ‘the priest prays for us, the preoteasa looks after the

cooking, the children, the singing, the cleaning of the church - that's what we pay the priest for!" Preoteasa

Is your husband an employee of the parish? Some parish council members might want to think so. But, NO. ***Your husband is not an employee and neither are you.*** The priest is assigned by the bishop and is remunerated by the parish. Before assignment, check with the ROEA Chancery regarding tax status. You are also not an employee, so don't let expectations of the parish run your life. You are not obligated to cook in the kitchen, but you may choose to. You need not bake the Prosfhora every week, but you may choose to. Only take on the jobs you and your husband feel you want to take on. Remember, your family and your own life and health come first.

WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME: YOUR ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY OUTSIDE OF THE PARISH

“People always say that when you are a clergy family, you live in a glass house....even moreso when you have kids. I was volunteering at our daughter’s school, walking down the hall, and I would have teachers stopping me to ask me if there was a perogy dinner at church on Friday, because that was our daughter’s sharing topic that week.” Preoteasa

“Of course, when your husband is a member of the clergy, you have to remember who you are and what you represent. We are all human, but I believe a lot of laypeople hold clergy and their families to a different standard.” Preoteasa

“I usually have co-workers come to me because they wonder what the stance of the Church is on various things.” Preoteasa

“When someone outside the parish asks me what my husband does, I say he’s a pastor. It’s easier than saying he is a priest, because most people don’t understand that priests can be married.” Preoteasa

Some clergy wives take a job outside the home for added income to the family, or as mentioned before, to provide health care for the family. Others choose to

work for the social aspect and to widen their circle of friends and acquaintances. If you choose to work outside the home, know that you are bringing your role as Preoteasa to the community.

If you work outside the home, everyone will have to pitch in with household duties. You may find it helpful to set out schedules for each member of the family. Who washes the dishes?

Who peels the potatoes? Who takes out the garbage? Who makes lunches? Try to find shortcuts. For example, run errands on your lunch hour (if possible), batch cook meals in order to have wholesome foods instead of take-out, use a slow cooker to have suppers ready when you get home from work or church services. These are just a few ideas. See what works for you to help ease the strain of work, home and parish responsibilities.



THE MEETING OF MARY AND ELIZABETH

FRIENDS/LONELINESS/STRESS/GRIEF

*“...if you have come to me in friendship to help me,
my heart will be joined to you...”*

(1 Chronicles 12:17) ESV

Living in a “fishbowl” may sometimes become stressful. How much privacy will you need as an individual? Everyone, especially women, need friends. Remember stories about “knitting bees” and “cook-offs”? Some younger ladies may have never heard of these terms. They were activities women organized in order to get together with each other when we all lived in small communities. Being with other women is necessary for our emotional health. But do you find friends in the parish? Some Preotese will caution you and tell you to be friendly to everyone in the parish, but have friends outside the

parish. Yet, sometimes the deepest friendships are formed within the parish walls. If you find one person you can trust, you are truly blessed.

A Washington Post article, in June 2006, reported:

“Americans are far more socially isolated today than they were two decades ago, and a sharply growing number of people say they have no one in whom they can confide... A quarter of Americans say they have no one with whom they can discuss personal troubles, more than double the number who were similarly isolated in 1985.” [24]

Since the time of this study, we have become more isolated, not less. Even individuals in parish communities are more isolated than before. This is a fact of the times, and you will have to find resources to help navigate through the isolation.

“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

(John 14:18)

Loneliness can affect Preotese because of the life we lead and the situations in which we find ourselves.

“The sense of isolation is intensified, because it happens in an environment of activity, crowds and “love.”” Preoteasa

A few suggestions to help with isolation and loneliness are:

1) Find a Spiritual Father

“...who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

(2 Corinthians 1:4)

Find a father confessor preferably in your own town or nearby. If he is a good fit, he will guide you through your journey and isolation. Some preotese avoid discussing their problems with a priest because of the “fish bowl” in which we live; but in so doing, you rob yourself of needed healing. Be honest with your Confessor and listen to what he says as he guides you on your journey.

2) Recreation

“An observer watched some nuns playing and laughing in the field. The sisters were clearly happy, but it seemed so out of character for a monastic who is usually stoic and quiet. The person asked the abbess why she allowed it. She replied that if a bow is stretched too far, it eventually breaks. It must be eased back so that it can be used again.” Preoteasa

Find a hobby, sport, or activity outside of the parish that you enjoy. This could be a membership to a fitness club, volunteering at a hospital, or a craft. What do you like to do? Add a time when you can do that activity. A diversion is helpful with relieving stress.

Some clergy wives do not have time or resources to have a hobby outside the parish. In these cases, they

have started groups within their parishes. These include book clubs, cultural groups, mother/babies groups and others.

3) Friends and Family

“There are friends who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.”

(Proverbs 18:24) ESV

Find a friend you can trust: maybe another preteasa, another clergy wife, or someone outside the parish with whom you can discuss your concerns. Are your family members nearby? Do you have good relationships with them? Contact your mother, sister, father, aunt and have a chat. You don't necessarily have to speak of your problems, but reach out and speak to someone who loves you. Nowadays, technology makes it easier to reach out. Attend pretese retreats and seminars. Many life-long friendships have formed at these functions. Ladies who are walking the same journey can provide support and camaraderie.

4) When life gets to be too much

“He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.”

(Psalm 147:3)

“She went to church and fulfilled her obligations as a pastor's wife but hid at home whenever possible. Most of those closest to her didn't know about her shattered heart.” [25]

It is very natural to find yourself one day in a place of depression or anxiety because of things that are going on in your life. Don't be afraid to ask for help. It is understood that it may be difficult to do so for a variety of reasons. This doesn't mean you are a complainer or whiner, only that you are not able to handle a situation in your life at that point in time. The OCA has a help line that is available to clergy families free of charge. The Personal Assistance Program has a toll-free number that provides professional and confidential services: 1-800-523-5668. Contact your doctor and discuss your situation with him or her. Many work health benefits provide a mental health component with professional counselling for employees. If you need to, get help.

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”

(Proverbs 17:22) ESV

A survey conducted by Focus on the Family found that 84% of pastor's wives are discouraged or dealing with depression. 84% !!! And more than 40% are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and unrealistic expectations.

“We should be with God at all times. For prayer is the life of the soul.”

Elder Cleopa of Sihastria

If you feel discouraged or burnt out, take steps to seek healing. Though this book has laid out some helpful hints, it is up to you, your husband and your family to work out a plan. Burn-out is a family problem, no

matter who is feeling it. Check out some Orthodox websites on choosing a therapist:

<https://www.oca.org/parish-ministry/familylife/when-help-is-needed-choosing-a-therapist>

<https://myocn.net/find-an-orthodox-christian-counselor-near-you/>

<http://myocn.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/OMHP-Listing-Spring2020.pdf>

<http://www.occiservies.org/>

http://Nsp.goarch.org/resources_and_links

<https://www.pravmir.com/christian-you-should-get-counseling/>

5) Grief

“Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress: my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.”

(Psalm 31:9) ESV

In general, women experience grief differently than men. Normally, women tend to demonstrate their grief by expressing their feelings and talking to friends. However, clergy wives usually keep their lives private and don't always have the option of speaking to a friend. This grief then feels like a pot ready to boil over with no relief valve. But the valve needs to be released, and grieving must take its course.

“There are times when I am out for a walk or just sitting alone. Then out of the blue, this

overwhelming sorrow rises up in my heart and I can't stop crying. No one knows. It's all in private." Preoteasa

"My eyes have grown dim with grief, my whole frame is but a shadow."

Job 17:7 ESV

"We have experienced grief through the loss of all 7 of our babies, with no living children on earth. Mostly our grief was quiet/hidden, as I didn't want/couldn't cope with relieving other parishioners' sorrow at our loss in the moment. The one time we did openly share our loss, I spent my time in church being the comforter rather than the comforted, and that shaped how we handled our subsequent losses." Preoteasa

"In our roles as clergy wives, there is almost an expectation that we handle grief differently from others...that we should be over the pain of loss faster than everyone else...it hurts more that we seem to have to contain our truth on our journey of loss." Preoteasa

In our lives, we may experience different types of losses which grieve our hearts: loss of a child, including miscarriage or inability to have a family, loss of a parent, spouse or other family member, loss of a friend or parishioner, loss/estrangement of a parish either with good experiences or not so good, estrangement of a family member or close friend, physical or sexual abuse, PTSD, divorce, the loss of your good health or your husband's, natural disasters,

financial hardships and other situations where someone we love or some aspect of our life has been taken away. The safe and familiar is gone, causing intense sorrow deep within the soul. A clergy wife shares the grief of parishioners, but she also has her own personal grief. Often these feelings are masked on clergy wives because of their role in the parish, and not shown outwardly to parishioners. The pain is real nonetheless. Not being able to talk about it intensifies the anguish.

“One thing I’ve noticed in myself is that at church I’m “in service” and my emotions, in particular, sadness, are just blocked. That’s good at the time, but I surely pay a price for it later.” Preoteasa

“When great loss arrives at our doorstep, our whole world is like a glass globe smashed into a million pieces, and we must put it back together, one piece at a time. A crisis of belief is normal. Grieving a great loss takes time. In the clergy family, the demands of others come knocking before we have healed from our own losses, and our needs may be pushed to the back. Healing may take longer than you, or anyone else, expects. “In this world, you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Preoteasa

If the incident that has caused you grief is close to your family, your children and other family members may also be experiencing grief. It’s hard to help someone else when you yourself are hurting. One tends to look inward when grieving and not notice

anything around you. However, to the best of your ability, be aware of your children and husband's well-being. Steer them to get some help. Be kind and gentle, knowing that they are hurting too. Give them time to heal.

“For he does not willingly bring affliction of grief to anyone.”

Lamentations 3:33

God does not want us to suffer, for He is a loving God. There are however, no quick fixes to grief. One misconception is that we must “get over it.” Grief is a process; it's a result of loving so profoundly. It does get easier with time, but you never “get over it.” And in time, your life will be different. You will be different (see Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross for the stages of grieving).

Here are some hints to help you through this difficult period of your life :

- Seek advice from your Spiritual Father
- Get professional help. Some community services and hospitals provide counselling for specific situations. In cases of child loss, you may want to seek out “Compassionate Friends.”
- See the list of Orthodox therapists listed in this chapter.
- Call the Orthodox Church in America Benefit Program - Personal Assistance Program at 1-800-523-5668 (available in the United States and Canada).

- Talk to a trusted friend or another clergy wife who has had a similar experience. Some people will take the time to listen, but if they have not gone through the same experience, they may not understand fully.
- Make healthy choices with food and exercise. Avoid tobacco, alcohol and other substances.
- In the case of a death, have regular memorial services and remember the good times.
- When you are ready, find books that are helpful for your situation. Check out the recommended reading list at the end of this book.
- In the case of a miscarriage, name the baby and remember him or her in your prayers.
- Seek out community support groups for your situation. If they are helpful, stay; if not, don't stay. Some groups are not uplifting, so be discerning.
- Be kind to yourself. Don't take on more until you feel better.
- Ask for help from your family if you feel you cannot keep up with your daily routine.
- Take time to grieve. There is no magical timeline as to when it will feel better.
- Everyone grieves differently, so don't compare yourself with anyone else, or let anyone tell you how you should feel.

- Pray. God hears your prayers. The Theotokos is our intercessor and a good listener.

“You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.”

John 16:20

Please also see chapter 21 on “Widowed Preotese.”

6) Your health

“When you have that anger within you - exercise. Work out some of the energy we put into anger.” Preoteasa

Your physical, mental, and spiritual health are your responsibility. Your family depends on you, so your well-being is vitally important to them as well. Exercise along with eating well, are essential in helping one deal with stress. You don't have to take out a membership at a club. Go for a walk, grab a bicycle and go for a ride, or go swimming if that is what you like. Just get some fresh air, some different scenery and let the exercise ‘change the gears.’ When you fly in a plane, the attendants tell you that you need to put on your own oxygen mask first before you give it to your child or other person travelling with you. So it is with your wellbeing in the parish. You need to put on your own “oxygen mask” first - look after yourself before you look after anyone else.

Essential to good health is good medical attention. Find a good family physician (primary care doctor) who will listen to you. As they get to know you, they will be able to make a proper diagnosis and help you. Be honest with your doctor and take their advice.

7) Be happy

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”

(1 Chronicles 16:34)

“Hold your course and don’t let go.”

(“Keep Hauling” by Fisherman's Friend, 2019)

Keep a positive attitude. It’s easy to dwell on a problem and stress, but more beneficial if you don’t. Traditionally, women are worriers, but that is a tradition we do not necessarily have to follow. Find joy in your day, count your blessings, rejoice in the accomplishments of family, friends and parishioners. Bring joy to others with a kind word, a card or flowers on their birthday. Listen to music. Sing a song. Try to find happiness in everything you do. Get back to living in purity, goodness and holiness. If you watch TV or a movie, keep the shows upbeat, happy and clean. Read inspirational and feel-good books. Surround yourself with good, wholesome, sincere people.

*“Be vigilant of what you hear and see.
Sometimes those images are hard to unsee.”*

Mother Gabriella, Abbess
Holy Dormition Monastery

8) Retreat

*“Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the
lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”*

(Psalm 141:2)

Visit a monastery. As mentioned earlier, the ROEA has two women’s monasteries. You can find some

quiet time, attend services, read spiritual books, and speak with the Abbess for guidance. It is not a ‘vacation,’ but a retreat to recharge your battery and connect with women who are also on a spiritual journey, albeit a bit different than yours. If you haven’t visited a monastery before, ask the Abbess or someone who has visited about what is expected.

9) Quiet time

Find some “Me Time” for your Spiritual Health. It may mean getting up earlier than everyone else, or staying up later than the family in order to carve out some time for yourself. Say your prayers, send emails, read a book or whatever you want to do in “your time”. This is especially important if you have a large family, or your family has a busy schedule.

10) Sisterhood of Preotese

“Exhort one another every day.”

(Hebrews 3:13)

Get together with other clergy wives in your community. If you live in a city in which there are other Orthodox parishes, try to get together with the other clergy wives of the different jurisdictions. Arrange a coffee meeting with one or more of the wives. You don’t need to discuss your parishes, problems or major issues. Just get together and forge friendships. Without knowing, you will be strengthening the bonds of Orthodoxy in your city, as well as building friendships.

The ROEA has, over the years, held Preotese Retreats and Zoom meetings specifically to get Preotese

together to know one another, to form a sisterhood. Make a point to attend when they are offered.

11) “Stop and Smell the Roses” (song by Mac Davis, 1974)

“How manifold are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all: the earth is full of your riches!”

(Psalm 104:24) ESV

Enjoy the little things in life. Even if you are really busy, try to find a moment. Eat your lunch outside. Watch the sunrise or sunset. Enjoy birds feeding in the yard. Listen to little children playing and laughing. How are the colours of the trees changing? Is the sound of rain comforting to you? Spend time with animals and children. Their purity can give us much peace. You can even enjoy washing the dishes or vacuuming, because it gives you a piece of your day to talk to God. Take time to enjoy life’s little pleasures, because God has put them there for you.

12) Know that God is always there for you

“Love that is eternal; one Friend who never leaves us, however imperfect and sorrowful we may be: God.” [26]

Princess Ileana/ Mother Alexandra

“Don’t let anything deprive you of hope.”

St. Nektarios of Aegina

Pray - it will get you through your loneliness and troubles. Bring your thoughts to God. Tell the Birthgiver of God what is in your heart. As hard as it might be to bring yourself to pray during a stressful

time, it is the best medicine. Also, ask those who are close to you to pray for you. Sometimes when we are lowest, we find it difficult to pray; we depend on others as they sometimes will depend on us.



NEW TO NORTH AMERICA

Perhaps you have moved to North America from Romania or another country. The differences in culture and way of life may cause confusion or grief. Add to that the stress of a new parish, and a changing family, and you have a lot of adapting to do in a short period of time. In Romania, the priest and his wife are regarded differently than in North America. Everyone in Romania recognizes the priest and is aware of your role as his wife. You might even be a VIP! Here, in the United States and Canada, the average citizen will not know about your role or even that priests can be married! You will not hold the same position in society as you may have had in Romania, and you will have to adjust. Also, the dynamics and organization of the parish will be different. You will need to understand how differently situations are

handled here as well as the fact that there are many Orthodox jurisdictions which do things differently.

1) Learn English

“I was struck by the energy and accomplishments of immigrants who came to America with nothing, yet managed to build churches and grow parishes. Today, we can barely maintain that which was started for us not that long ago.” Preoteasa

If you are new to this continent, it is imperative that you learn the language without delay. You will need to know the language to get along in society. You might get along in your parish by speaking Romanian; however, in day-to-day life, you will need to know the language. There will be people who will help you adapt and settle in; but nonetheless, you will need to know English (or French in Quebec).

2) Children want to fit in

Our children will want to adapt to their new country and may choose to follow the wrong role models. Discuss with them what principles they are encouraged to follow and which are not negotiable. They may have left friends back in Romania and will miss them. Finding new friends is never easy but will happen with time.

3) Different parish traditions

“I remember a Preoteasa in our first parish scolding me for knitting on Sundays.”
Preoteasa

Parish life is different in North America than in other countries, and is also much different now than years ago. There is a lot to learn about how parishes function here. Speak to your husband and your bishop regarding the best way to learn about the organization of the parish, Episcopate, and how each parish operates. Make yourself familiar with the ROEA website where the bylaws are available. Each parish also may have small “T” traditions that will trip you up. Deal with them as they come up and decide with your husband what to do about them. Some things are not taught in seminary or in books.

“Some things in the Church are just temporal and temporary things, merely human customs and traditions of no eternal and everlasting value. Such things in themselves are not sinful or wrong. On the contrary, they may be very positive and very helpful to the life of the Church as long as they are not taken to be what they are not.” [28]

4) How to adapt to your new country

“Changing countries is very tough. The best thing is a good sense of humour and lots of self-forgiveness for making stupid mistakes.”
Preoteasa

Cultural differences may be more pronounced when stress or tragedy arises. Although it may not be common in Romania to ask for help, in the United States and Canada, there are resources you can use for your benefit. It is necessary to find another person you can trust to help you through your struggles. As

mentioned above, another Preoteasa, a father confessor, a professional counsellor and your bishop are all possible supports to help you through a “rough patch.” Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to reach out and make use of the resources.

5) Greater distances

In Romania and other Orthodox countries, the church is usually only a few minutes walk from any house in the neighbourhood. However, in North America, you might have to drive from 15 minutes to well over an hour to get to church. You will usually be the first to arrive and the last to leave. So, judge your time accordingly. Not many neighbourhoods have local stores to which you can walk. You will need to drive to get groceries, go to the bank and carry out other errands. You and your husband will both definitely need drivers’ licenses.



NEW TO ORTHODOXY

“Even if you have been Orthodox awhile, but were not raised in the Orthodox Church, there is much to be gained from those in your parish who were raised in the Church and have immigrated to North America. Many are from families with multiple generations of Orthodoxy. They are an invaluable example and resource for many traditions that enrich the faith, and even more significantly, a way of living the faith that is organic and intuitive. Try to learn from them, because their example can help you and cause you to cry out to God for help in passing the faith on to your children and grandchildren.”
Preoteasa

If you are new to Orthodoxy, you may well have studied the faith thoroughly; nonetheless, the learning curve may be steep. Do not be intimidated. If you are

unsure about something regarding the Orthodox Faith, be sure to ask your husband or someone else in the know. The more you know about the Faith, the more confident you will feel as a Preotessa and as an Orthodox Christian. Check out the resources and recommended reading listed at the end of this book.

RELOCATION

The day may come when you have to move either because of your secular job, or more likely because your husband has been transferred to a new parish. How much warning will you be given? Sometimes, not more than a few weeks! This will surely be stressful, but try to take everything one step at a time. Perhaps you can stay behind to get things packed, sell the house if needed, and get things in order, while your husband goes to the new assignment. While there may be a great deal of work and stress, try to take things one day at a time and recruit help when possible.

1) The childrens' needs

"Before we moved, we had each kid get contact information for the children they would miss. The internet really helps kids stay in touch." Preoteasa

"We made a list of things we still wanted to do and places we still wanted to visit."
Preoteasa

The kids are going to miss their old place and especially their friends. Before you leave, visit places they will remember. Have fun in your last few days or weeks. Let the kids visit their friends. Encourage them to keep in touch with their friends through the internet and other methods. Perhaps their friends can visit once you are settled.

2) Leaving your old parish behind

“After we moved, I still needed the phone numbers of people from the parish that booted us, but I didn't like seeing their names. So I put three z's before each name so they come at the end of my directory. I did the same with doctors and schools from that portion of our lives.” Preoteasa

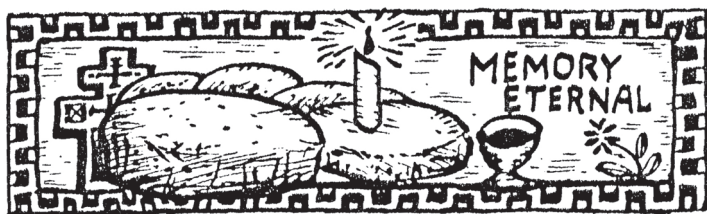
Some of the memories of your previous parish may be painful. Do what you have to do to move on. If you have fond memories of the old parish, keep them in your heart. You were blessed with friendships, and undoubtedly you left a mark. Try not to compare the parish left behind with the new parish.

3) Starting in your new parish

“It helps me to think of each parish as a planet. Your old parish will not be what it was without you. That historic epoch in the parish's life has ended. The new guy will drive away some people and attract new ones, and within two years you will not recognize most of the people in photos.” Preoteasa

You will have many things to set up; find a place to live, get insurance, new driver's licenses and health insurance, if you cross provincial/state lines. You will need to enroll the children in their new schools. You will also need to find a new doctor, dentist, hair salon, grocery and other stores. Ask for suggestions and referrals.

Moving to a new parish will have its ups and downs. You will make new memories in the new parish and hopefully many of them will be happy ones. You have a fresh start. Go slow. Watch. Listen. And embrace the opportunity.



WIDOWED PREOTESE

*“He will not overlook the supplication of an orphan,
nor a widow when she pours out her story... Neither
will he be slow to help them.”*

(Wisdom of Sirach 35:14,19)

These ladies are special. Life is very different when a Preoteasa’s husband passes away. The responsibilities she had because her husband was a priest have now faded. Her role has changed. She may feel the loss on many levels. The grief of a widowed preoteasa is one of losing her husband, as well as losing the life in the church as she once knew it. She may mask how she feels, but her grief is her own.

“At the one-year Memorial service for my husband everyone was so kind and I was overwhelmed but it was only later that I felt the grief and loss.” Preoteasa

The experiences of a widowed preoteasa will depend very much on her age, her family, and her parish.

1) A Young Widow

If the widow is a young woman, she will still be working and possibly raising a family on her own. If you find yourself in this situation, reach out to get some help. Get family, friends, and any other resources to help you start a life which will be much different than that with which you are accustomed. This is one situation in which owning or renting your own home is beneficial. As a young widow, it would be exponentially more difficult to have to uproot your family from the parish house and find somewhere else to live.

2) An Older Widow

“The most important thing is that I try not to say anything like ‘my husband always did it this way, NOT the way you are doing it,’ and if I have a suggestion, I send the priest a private message.” Preoteasa

“It’s been extremely difficult to live without my husband. It was hard for me to walk into our church.” Preoteasa

If you are an older preoteasa, you will have to make the choice of whether to stay in your parish or move to another location (perhaps to be with your family). If you stay in the parish where your husband served, you will now be a parishioner with the title “Preoteasa.” Act with tact and humility. It will be very difficult to see another priest at the altar that your husband served, at the same time as dealing with his loss. Be kind to yourself. Don’t feel you have to

go to all the church services or parish activities if you do not feel strong enough. Take time.

3) How we can help widowed Preotese

“I feel lucky (with the priest in the parish) but I know many widowed clergy wives who don’t have any support. I wish people would reach out sometimes, especially on special occasions.” Preoteasa

We all have a responsibility to the widowed Preotese. The ROEA publishes a list of all the widowed Preotese. We need to support them. If you are able, reach out to a widowed Preoteasa, send a card or an email to let her know you are thinking about her. We have no idea how much a card or a phone call means to someone who has lost more than just a husband. If there is an older widowed Preoteasa in your parish, ask if she needs a ride to church, help with groceries or a social visit. For a younger widow, she might need help with childcare or would love to go for lunch. Whatever the age of the widow, reach out and help these ladies who served alongside their husbands during their ministries.

The Saint Elizabeth Project is dedicated to sending cards and a small remuneration to the widowed Preotese in the ROEA. It is carried out by the ladies of ARFORA and ARCOLA.

4) Widower Priest

The widower priest might be active in the parish he is serving or a retired priest attached to a parish. In either case, the loss of a beloved wife, a lifelong

partner, is a painful time in anyone's life. If you know of a widower priest, reach out and help him. He has supported parishioners during his ministry, and now he needs support from people around him.

RETIRED CLERGY AND THEIR FAMILIES

*“O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His
mercy endures forever.”*

(Psalm 135:1)

Make plans well before your husband decides to retire. Many of us expect to live out our lives in the parish in which we have spent the last number of years, or in our “favourite” parish. But that might not happen. Include your bishop in the discussions you have with your husband about where and how you will retire. Don’t assume you will stay in your home parish. The new priest might want his independence, and you will have to move on. Or, the situation might be very agreeable, and your husband will be welcomed to serve and stay in the parish. Be prepared either way.

Hopefully, you have prepared financially for this time. You cannot depend on Social Security or Canada Pension Plan, because that will not be enough to live on. By the time you retire, either one or both of you might not be in good health. Prepare for that possibility. Do you have the resources to look after yourselves in the event that you require extra help or medical assistance? These are not things you think about when you are young; but, God willing, you will get old, and being aware of the possibilities is crucial.

If you stay in your parish, what is your role? You are still “Preoteasa”, but you now have a secondary role. Refer all questions to the new priest or Preoteasa. Do not compete with the new Preoteasa. It’s her time

now. Be supportive as a mother to her daughter, but, only if she wants it. Do not criticize the new priest or any members of his family. That will only cause confusion and division.

If you move to another parish, it has to be one in which your husband is comfortable. Your role there will also be different than it was in your home parish. You will not have any responsibilities, but hopefully, you will be respected as a clergy wife. You are now a parishioner, so look on the new parish as your home. People may come to you for your opinion which you should give sparingly. Keep conversations positive. Encourage the parishioners and the clergy family and do not criticize anyone.

Enjoy this time. You've earned it. Attend Divine Liturgies and other services with a new focus. You no longer need to worry whether the coffee has been turned on, or if all the choir members have shown up, or anything else. Focus on the service and the spiritual growth of your heart.

If you are a younger Preoteasa and have a retired Preoteasa in your parish, remember that you too will be there one day. Treat her with the same kindness and respect that you would like to be paid one day. She can be a great asset to you and your parish if you let her.

CONCLUSION

“Love means sacrifice.”

Mother Gabriella, Abbess
Holy Dormition Monastery

Your journey as a Preoteasa will be an exciting one. It will be filled with many experiences that are unique to your position in life and in the parish. Love your husband and support him in your marriage and his vocation. Work with your husband on balancing the priorities of church, family, and secular work. Be prepared to put in more than 100% in all that you do: in sacrifice, love, and forgiveness. Show your love for the Lord and for those around you: your husband, your family and your parishioners. And...don't be afraid. Take each challenge as it comes.

“Complete trust in God, that is what holy humility is.”

St. Pophyrios of Kafsokalivia

Pray, pray and pray some more. Pray to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and with the help of the Birthgiver of God, you will be a wonderful asset to our Holy Church. There are many books and articles listed in the references and recommended reading at the end of this book. Peruse the list and read some for information and guidance.

“Would they do it all over again? If we had one hundred lives, Lord, we'd give them all to you and laugh with the joy of doing it. Thank you for letting us live, love, and grow old at our church.” [29]

A CLERGY WIFE'S RECIPE

Here's a recipe found in 'Just Between Us' for clergy wives. [27]

1 gallon love
2 gallons faith
1 pint encouragements
5 tablespoons patience
1 quart energy
2 cups laughter
3 cups flexibility
Dash of creativity, to taste

Combine all ingredients. Mix thoroughly with reality and truth. Let rise for 60 minutes of planning. Sift through Scripture. Bake at 350 degrees in prayer for one lifetime. In a separate bowl, mix rest, romance, exercise and alone time. Deliver warm. Calories:0. Serves: the Lord.

**A PRAYER OF A WOMAN:
HELP ME, O LORD**

Help me, O Lord, to endure what is unendurable, to support what is insupportable. Help me not to revolt when the good I do is taken wrongly;

When the words I have spoken are derided, help me understand and not to mind;

Help me, O Lord, You who are love, and mercy and knows no evil, to be silent even before those I love most.

Teach me to carry my head high, searching only for You;

Teach me to walk alone but to not lose faith in others, for they are Your children;

Help me to gather my sorrow as close to me as possible so that by no mischance its shadow shall fall on others;

Help me, O Lord, to fulfil to the very end my calling as a mother;

You are my strength, my rest, the water that quenches my thirst, the rock that gives me shade in the desert, the wing that protects me in the storm;

To You O Lord, out of the depths of my gratitude, I give all of myself to others.

Amen.

*A prayer written by Princess Ileana of Romania,
Mother Alexandra (1901-1990),
Foundress of the Orthodox Monastery of the
Transfiguration,
while in exile in Buenos Aires, November 1949.*

BIOGRAPHY OF PREOTEASA LILLIAN (LILLIANA) LUPU

Lillian Lupu (nee Suba) was born in 1957 and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She was baptised at St. George Romanian Orthodox Church in Toronto where her future husband was also a parishioner. After years apart, she and Michael Lupu reconnected and were married in the same church in 1979, where both their families had been founding members, and by the same priests that baptised them.

Lillian graduated her grade 13 from Canadian Junior College in Lausanne, Switzerland, and later received a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Toronto. She has held positions with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Thompson General Hospital, Foothills General Hospital, Chinook Nursing Home, and the City of Calgary. She has travelled through Europe, the Middle East, and North America. She attended Preotese retreats at the Vatra and visited Holy Dormition Monastery numerous times. Also, Preoteasa Lillian Lupu is the founder of “Canadian Military Moms.”

In 1981, the young couple moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where Michael attended St. Andrew’s Seminary and Lillian worked a secular job. Two children were born in Winnipeg: Nicolae Toma in 1982 and Maria Corina in 1985. The same weekend Maria was baptised, Michael Lupu was ordained into the Diaconate and served at St. George’s Romanian Orthodox Church in Winnipeg.

In 1988, Bishop Nathaniel ordained Father Michael to the Holy Priesthood and assigned him to the Nativity of the Birthgiver of God parish in Calgary, Alberta, where they remained until Father Michael's retirement in 2018. During the 30 years at St. Mary's, Preoteasa Lillian conducted the choir, served as cantor for Vespers and other services, helped with the Church School and church camps, baked the prosphora and performed "other duties as required." With God's help, the parish was able to build the congregation, buy a new building, beautify the church with icons and pay off the mortgage. Preoteasa Lillian always had a full time secular job, the most recent was in the Human Resources department with the City of Calgary from which she retired in 2016.

Preoteasa Lillian and Father Michael are enjoying their retirement, sharing their time between Calgary and their cottage in central Alberta.

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The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV), Good News Publishing, 2001

Holy Dormition Monastery, Rives Junction, Michigan. Mother Gabriella, Abbess
www.dormitionmonastery.org

Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Mother Christophora, Abbess
www.orthodoxmonasteryellwoodcity.org

Orthodox Church in America Benefit Program - Personal Assistance Program 1-800-523-5668 (available in the United States and Canada)

RECOMMENDED READING/RESOURCES

There are many resources these days on being a clergy wife. Many are accessible on the internet for your convenience. Here are just a few of them that we used or recommend:

- Presbytera: The Life, Mission and Service of the Priest's Wife, by Athanasia Papademitriou, Sumerset Hall Press, 2004
- Parenting toward the Kingdom: Orthodox Christian Principles of Child Rearing by Philip Mamalakas, 2016
- OCA Parish Ministry Resources: Family Life (<https://www.oca.org/parish-ministry/familylife>)
- The Joy to Serve, by Juliana Schmemmann, Alexander Press, Jan. 1, 2009
- The Forgotten Desert Mothers - Saying, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women, by Laura Swan. Paulist Press, 1954
- The Desert Fathers - Sayings of the Early Christian Monks, Benedicta Ward. Penguin Books, 2003
- The Ascetic Lives of Mothers: A Prayer Book for Orthodox Moms, by Annalisa Boyd, Ancient Faith Publishing, 2014
- The Priest's Wife by Fr. Stephen Freeman, Oct. 8, 2015, article in Glory to God for All Things

(<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2015/10/08/the-priests-wife/>)

- Presbyteria Anonyma blog
(www.presbyteriaanonyma.wordpress.com)
- The life of St. Matushka Olga Michael
(https://orthodoxcanada.ca/Saint_Matushka_Olga_Michael_of_Alaska)
(<http://www.cjoc.ca/pdf/Vol-3-W-1%20Kevin%20071228.PDF>)
- The Orthodox Home - The Little Church
(<https://www.bulgariandiocese.org/files/BOYA/The-Orthodox-Home---The-Little-Church.pdf>)
- ROEA Preotese Facebook page: “ROEA Preotese”
- “Presvyteras Coast to Coast” Facebook page
- How to be a Sinner, by Peter Bouteneff, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2018
- Clergy Wives on Sharing the Grace and Cross of Ordination, by Sophia Moshura, April 6, 2012, Pravmir.com
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- Principles for Presbyteras in the Parish, posted on September 17, 2019, The Catalog of Good Deeds.
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- How to fail at being the priest’s wife, posted

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by Presvytera Anonyma ([https://
presbyteraanonyma.wordpress.com/2013/07/0
7/how-to-fail-at-being-the-priests-wife/](https://presbyteraanonyma.wordpress.com/2013/07/07/how-to-fail-at-being-the-priests-wife/))

- The "Call" of the Priest's Wife to Share Her Husband's Ministry, by Athanasia Papadimi
([http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/
papadimitriou_call2.html](http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/papadimitriou_call2.html))
- Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home, Anthony M. Coniaris
- Daily Vitamins for Spiritual Growth Vol. 1 & 2, Anthony M. Coniaris
- Surviving the Fishbowl: Letters to Pastor's Kids - Catherine Stewart, Feb. 2021
- Letters to Pastor's Wives - Catherine Stewart, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., Sept, 2013
- Holy Women of Russia - The Lives of Five Orthodox Women Offer Spiritual Guidance for Today, by Brenda Meehan-Waters, 1997
- How to not take things personally - Ted Talks (www.youtube.com/watch?&v=LnJwH_PZXnM)
- Surviving the loss of a loved one, Anthony Coniaris
- What was lost: A Christian Journey through Miscarriage by Elise Erikson Barrett
- Widow to Widow by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg
- Walking through Grief - a free PDF download by Focus on the Family



Preoteasa Lillian Lupu

