

Do You Want to Be a Priest? - Through the Eyes of the Participants

By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

“When God takes hold of the flute and begins to play, the mountains begin to dance. Who, then, can stop them?” — Jacques Prévert, French poet

In order to help our young men hear the call of God within them, the Archdiocese, in cooperation with Ancient Faith Ministries, held the retreat [“Do You Want to Be a Priest?”](#) Eighty-two young men answered the invitation, together with fifty wives or fiancées.

The idea began with what I often notice during my parish visits: signs of priestly service appearing on the faces of many young men whom I meet. It also came from ongoing discussions with a number of faithful and concerned individuals about shaping a pastoral policy for the future of the Archdiocese in the coming years. We expected a response to the invitation, but we did not expect the number of participants to reach this level. One participant wrote: *“We are ready to serve in whatever way the Archdiocese sees fit.”*

The retreat was successful by every measure. What the participants, both men and women, shared clearly confirmed how much the retreat helped them better understand what they are experiencing regarding their consecration to God through service to His Church. It also gave them spiritual guidance on how to nurture this calling until it reaches the necessary maturity. The participation of several priests and their wives, and their sharing of their experience in this priestly ministry, had a very positive effect on the participants, as one participant and his wife expressed. Another wrote: *“I am very grateful for this spiritual retreat and for the love shown by His Eminence and the priests. I was encouraged by the examples they gave us.”*

The retreat helped some participants better understand the kind of Church service toward which their souls are inclined. Some discovered that, at the present time, they are inclined *“toward service in the permanent diaconate.”* Another participant, whose father is a Protestant pastor, and who comes from a country where there is no Orthodox church, expressed his desire to become a missionary priest: *“...and if it is God’s will that I should one day be blessed with priestly ministry, I hope to dedicate myself to bringing Christ and His Church through faithful service, preaching, and the witness of life.”*

The participation of several khourias of the Archdiocese helped the participants appreciate the role of the priest's wife and the importance of her calling maturing alongside the calling of her husband. Some participants wrote statements like this: *"I have a desire to become a priest if this is God's will. At the very least, I would like to be part of the diaconal order. But I am concerned about my fiancée and how she would adjust to the role of a khouria. Therefore, I will discuss this possibility with her, together with my parish priest."*

Another wrote: *"This retreat helped me realize that I need to go back and attend to the basics, such as a regular life of prayer, and that I need to pray for my wife, because she has not yet felt the calling, even though I know she would be a wonderful khouria because of her heart, which is full of love and forgiveness. My wife says that she will follow the will of God."*

As for the opportunity to encounter the priesthood in its real life within the context of the priest's family, the participants began to understand this well. *"This retreat was an excellent opportunity to learn about the priesthood from both sides, that is, from the perspective of the priest and his wife."*

The retreat also helped draw attention to the importance of the family environment in the growth and maturation of the calling. One comment stated: *"I want to fulfill and discern the will of God. The greatest obstacle before me is family. My father-in-law became a grandfather for the first time when he was eighty-four years old, and now he is eighty-seven, and my son is the first of his two grandchildren. I am not currently prepared to move and take my son away from him at this stage of his life. Therefore, I do not yet feel worthy or ready. I pray that God will grant me greater clarity as I work to correct the shortcomings that this spiritual encounter revealed to me."*

As for how the calling grows, becomes clear, and matures, the retreat helped the participants perceive this with watchfulness and awareness, whether through personal inclination and hearing the call of God: *"The idea of serving the Church has always been present in my mind, but I wanted to proceed slowly and focus first on learning the Orthodox way of life."*

Another wrote: *"Since I was young, I have felt inclined toward the priesthood, though I could not explain it clearly. As I grew older and learned more about the priesthood, I became afraid because of the great weight and responsibility that the*

priest carries. Despite this fear, the thought of the priesthood never left me. The more I served, the more my longing for service increased, whether in camps, SOYO, or Bible studies. I always felt that something was missing. I have a mixture of experiences: I feel that I am able to offer more, and yet at the same time I cannot. I believe the reason is that I have been called to the priesthood since childhood."

Or through family and friends: "Many people around me, including family members, parishioners, Orthodox friends, and even non-Christian friends, have told me that I should become a priest, or at least explore this calling."

Because of this, some began to ask the practical question: How do I prepare for this blessed ministry? "I would like to know what options are available for people who have not received post-secondary education and who desire to pursue the priesthood."

Another wrote: "I enrolled in the St. Stephen's Program with the goal of pursuing the permanent diaconate. However, later discussions with my parish priest encouraged me to continue on the path toward the priesthood and to pause, for the time being, my pursuit of the diaconate."

What is reassuring is that many of those who are certain of their calling expressed their sense of unworthiness and awe before the holiness of this ministry. This gives hope that, in the future, this blessed Archdiocese will have priests according to the heart of God. One wrote: "I fear the altar, but I want to serve Christ, and I love Him more than I fear the furnace." Another wrote: "I have never thought, and still believe, that I am unworthy even to think about the priesthood."

Perhaps the best way to conclude this article is with these words written by some of the participants: "All I want is to be in the Church." And also: "I have tried other hobbies and careers, but nothing surpasses my love for Christ and His Church. For this reason, I believe that I am called to the priesthood."

Further reading: [The Laborers are Few!](#)