



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
April 2014

Role or Identity (7)

Challenges of the role of priest and role of priest's wife

(5) The fifth challenge that meets the priest and his wife is the **Role Strain** in which one feels difficulty in fulfilling the tasks of his role. In contrary to the Role Conflict, where tension is engendered from conflict between two different roles, the tension engendered in Role Strain comes from one single role.

Causes of tension in Role Strain

A) Causes related to expectations required from the person who plays the role. These expectations can be multiple, conflicting or ambiguous.

B) Causes related to the person who plays the role as he/she feels stresses because he/she does not accept the expectations required from him/her, because these expectations contradict his/her values or because they do not match his/her abilities and potentialities. The larger is the gap between these expectations from one side and the real abilities and potentialities of the person from the other side, the more the role strain will be.

Symptoms of Role Strain

- 1) Feeling of losing control over responsibilities.
- 2) Fear of failure.
- 3) Self doubts about personal competence and ability.
- 4) Feeling frustrated, sad and/or irritable.
- 5) Feeling despaired and indifferent and adopting a passive attitude.

- 6) Negative interference with the person's performance of this role and/or other roles.
- 7) Burnt out syndrome.
- 8) Psychosomatic disorders like tension headache, irritable colon, gastric ulcer, hypertension, cardiac disordersetc

Tension of the role of priest's wife

A priest's wife can feel many times the tension of the role required from her. She can find hard times where she feels, in different degrees, difficulty in fulfilling the task required from her. As the role tension is related to a great extent to the expectations required from the role player, then we must discuss the expectations required from the priest's wife to understand the extent of the role strain she feels.

Expectations from a priest's wife

- A) Expectations from the side of the congregation as people are expecting the priest's wife to be spiritual, kind, smiling, serving to the utmost degree, good

listener, humble and available at any time. They also expect her to be supportive to the priest in his service, to be a secretary to the priest when needed and to play the role of mediator between the priest and others when needed. Added to this, they do not accept to see her in a weak state, complaining, feeling bored, tired or wearing.

- B) Expectations from the side of the priest who is expecting his wife to be spiritual to the utmost degree, to understand the nature of his ministry and all its requirements, to accept the presence of a high degree of confidentiality in his service as there are many issues he cannot share with her, to accept some material, emotional and physical sacrifices that the service put on them, to take charge of a lot of responsibilities at home on his behalf and to help him in some aspects of the service that require her presence like for example some types of visitations. Besides, he does not expect her to be jealous, nagging, complaining or controlling in the service.

One can read all these expectations required from a priest's wife and says, how poor she is!! She is required to be an **infallible angel**, an **omnipotent robot** performing hundreds of tasks at the same time and in a high competence, a **dedicated soldier** ready for service at anytime and an **ascetic recluse** renouncing every material, emotional and physical needs.

The priest's wife herself may read all these expectations required from her and may feel dread saying, *"Is my strength the strength of stones? Or is my flesh bronze?"* (Job 6:12).

May be these expectations are the reason lying behind the refusal of many wives that their husbands be ordained as priests. As for those wives who accepted courageously to bear the yoke and did not refrain their husbands from God's priesthood, like Abram who did not withhold his only son Isaac from God, they will hear the same saying God said to Abram, *"Blessing I will bless you"* (Gen.22:17) and *"Do not be afraid Abram. I*

am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Gen.15:1).

But the question that will be immediately posed is, **"How can a priest wife deal with the strain of the role of the priest's wife? How can she avoid the negative consequences of this role listed above?"**

- 1) Be realistic and practical when dealing with such expectations. Do not expect yourself to be a "goddess". Accept the human and time limitations.
- 2) Learn to say "No" when you have to say it. Train yourself to set limits.
- 3) Have an open conversation with your husband in a calm spiritual atmosphere of love to express your needs and expectations from him in a frank and meek way.
- 4) Be flexible as much as you can as one cannot control all events' inputs but he/she can be creative inventing new ways that help him/her to accommodate.
- 5) Do not wait until you explode and break down but be aware of the early threatening signs of severe psychological stress and/or burnt out syndrome.

Respect these signs, do not ignore them and deal with them seriously. Do not hesitate at or be embarrassed from asking help and support.

- 6) Be keen to find trusted persons in your life who form your supportive network like for example your father of confession, a friend and/or another priest's wife who is advanced in spirituality and experience...etc. Sharing with these people is very important to decrease the stress and strain that fall upon you.
- 7) Train yourself how to manage your time in a skilful way. This will save much of your effort and energy.
- 8) Be sure that God who called your husband to priesthood is faithful towards him, towards you and towards your children. He will never abandon you or make you running short of anything. *"Be sure that God who chose the road for you will not abandon you in its middle"* (Pope Kyrillos VI).
- 9) Know that God is the owner of the vineyard and He is the true shepherd Who takes care of both the helper and

the helped. So, learn how to throw all your burdens on Him in your prayers and then after that to wait and see God's salvation.

- 10) Let God, not your husband, be the center of your life. Depend on Him and make Him the only source of your sense of security and joy for it is written, *"My heart rejoices in the Lord"* (1Sam.2:1).
- 11) Do not trust your abilities, gifts or potentialities lest they will let you down because it is written, *"Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord of hosts"* (Zech.4:6). Learn how to shout with St. Paul saying, *"In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God"* (Rom.15:19)

(to be continued)