



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States

The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
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The War of the First Lady

One of the common things in the African American churches in the United States is giving the title of the *First Lady* to the pastor's wife. By doing that, the congregation tries to show her respect and esteem like the wife of the president of the United States who is called the First Lady in the White House.

Although this is not the case in our Coptic Orthodox Church, yet many of its priests' wives are subjected to such temptation. Although they did not acquire that title formally yet they adopt the attitude of the First Lady inside the church. Hence they start treating others through that attitude and concept.

This concept insinuates inside the heart of the priest wife in a gradual deceiving way without being aware

of it. Therefore she feels confused and substitutes the role of the First Lady inside the church with her role as a priest wife imitating the role of the First Lady in the White House. Many factors contribute in such confusion of roles:

- (1) The uniqueness of the role of her husband priest may cause her to think that she is subsequently unique and must be treated in a special way.
- (2) The exaggerated way adopted by the congregation to show respect and esteem to the priest and his wife. Sometimes things reach the degree of hypocrisy and pretense.
- (3) Unrealistic expectations imposed by the congregation on the priest wife.
- (4) Adopting this attitude by the priest wife as an unhealthy way to deal with her feelings of insecurity and low self confidence.
- (5) Entry of the priest wife in a virtual competition with her husband priest trying to stay in the spotlight and to get the same respect and esteem he gets.

(6) Loss of goal and unawareness of the priest wife of the true nature of her role and the real mission required from her.

(7) Weakness of the priest wife's spirituality. This helps the worldly secular concepts to overwhelm her. She then starts in abusing her role as a priest wife in controlling people and asking for special privileges on both moral and materialistic levels.

(8) Witnessing and being in contact with a model of a priest wife who was behaving as the First Lady inside the church. This model becomes deeply imprinted in her mind so that as soon as her husband is ordained as a priest she starts to behave according to that model thinking that this is the basic attitude a priest wife should naturally adopt.

This type of psycho-spiritual wars that a priest wife faces is considered to be the most dangerous for both the service and the priest wife herself. The dangerousness of such war comes from its gradual insinuation with great deception from the part of the devil. Things escalate from playing the role of the priest wife to adopting the role of the First Lady of the church

without stopping at this point but usually it ends up in her adoption of the role of a Co-priest to her husband priest. This eventually leads her to rule over the service and control its arrangements whether in a frank explicit way or in a hidden way running things behind the scenes.

When the devil strikes the priest wife with that stroke he is actually striking the whole church as this leads to a double fold offence. This offence is manifested in the division of the congregation into two groups: a group that refuses this situation and complains from it, hence falls in the sins of judgment and anger and a second group that is pleased with such a situation and encourages it falling in the sin of hypocrisy. At the end the devil becomes the only winner as he hunts all into his prey and distract them away from the real goal which is the salvation of their souls.

That is why a priest wife must examine herself honestly as regard such type of wars getting help of some of the following signs that indicate her fall into such weakness:

(1) Feeling that she excels the rest of the congregation just because she is a priest wife.

(2) Expecting a special treatment from the congregation and getting severely angry in case she does not get such a special treatment. Some examples of this are specifying a special seat for her in the church in the first rows and her intense anger if one of the congregation dares to occupy it, specifying a special place in the church's parking lot for her car, getting keys of the church and all its halls and rooms, expecting to be personally invited to all weddings and different celebrations of the congregations ...etc.

(3) Expecting to be served by everyone and not accepting the word NO.

(4) Constantly seeking the news of the congregation not out of love and care but out of curiosity and control that may amount to the level of intrusion.

(5) Exaggerated care for her general appearance and attire reflecting her sense of being the First Lady.

(6) Adopting a way of communication, tone of voice and body language that do not convey any humility but reflect a spirit of control and arrogance.

(7) Directing her husband priest in different decisions related to the service and influencing him as regard his attitude towards some people.

Examples of women in the Holy Bible who played the role of the First Lady is Jezebel the wife of Ahab who killed the prophets, persecuted Elijah, planned to kill Naboth the Jezreelite and seize his vineyard and she was the true ruler of the kingdom of Israel (1Kings 19,21). A second example is Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah who destroyed all the royal heirs to reign over the land (2Kings 11).

How a priest wife can deal with such war?

(1) Redetermination of the goal and path reform. A priest wife must be well aware of the nature of her role, her boundaries and her mission. She must always remember the words of St. Arsanios saying: "*O Arsani, remember the reason for which you left the world*".

(2) A priest wife must discover the hidden psychological motives and needs lying behind her deviation from her true role and adoption of the role of the First Lady in the church.

(3) A priest wife must be aware that this war is closely related to the passion of pride and vainglory which might have many other manifestations in other areas of her social and spiritual lives. Therefore she must struggle spiritually according to the rules to defeat this malicious passion. This must be done under the guidance of a wise discerning spiritual father.

(4) A priest wife must discover the worldly concepts that insinuated inside her. An example of which is the concept of control. She must correct them according to the right biblical spiritual concepts. *"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many'"* (Matthew 20: 25-28); *"Shepherd the flock of God which is*

among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3).

(5) Spiritual fullness and satisfaction as well as drawing near to God. This makes the spirit of repentance, contrition and God's fear dwell plentifully within the priest wife.

(6) A priest wife must take the Virgin Mary as a model. After Jesus Resurrection and Ascension into the heavens she did not behave as the First Lady among the disciples, the apostles and the first church although she deserved such a title. She was a true model of humility, meekness and self-denial.

(7) Finally, a priest wife must know well the true definition of the church. The church is the house of God, the house of angels and the house of prayer. It is neither the White House nor the Presidential Palace. Therefore, a priest wife must be a servant of that house and not a First Lady inside it.