



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
May 2016**

Priest's Wife and Midlife Stage

Midlife stage is one of the life stages everybody passes through like he passes through childhood and adolescent stages. It may extend from 35-40 to 50-55 years old. Like any other life stage, midlife has its own challenges that when one overcomes peacefully, he ascends a further step in the ladder of his psycho-spiritual maturity. If this stage has its own challenges in the life of everybody in general, yet it carries some further challenges to the priest's wife whose life has a specific nature due to her role as a priest's wife.

The first half of a priest's wife life is characterized by a very rapid speed. She, like every other woman, is preoccupied in the beginning of her life with sequential stations of finishing her studies, finding an appropriate job, choosing her partner, giving birth to children and parenting them ... etc. But there are further stations a priest's wife passes by. They are the shared decision with her husband to accept the priesthood call, his ordination, starting service with all accompanying basic changes in life pattern and style that may also include many times moving to a new geographical place.

When the priest's wife starts the second half of her life, she feels that she had just hardly started to adapt to her new role as a priest's wife and to accommodate to changes that affected her own life and the life of her family after her husband's ordination. At this time, she thinks that she has already achieved an appropriate degree of stability and calmness, nevertheless, she is surprised

by a state of mixed feelings of frustration, confusion, loneliness, self-pity, feeling rejected and abandoned by her husband priest as if he does not need her anymore. She feels as if she was living up to that point in a whirlpool or in coma and that she just came back to herself to find out that during all these previous years she offered herself as a burnt sacrifice as she forsook all her dreams and expectations for herself and her family for the sake of accomplishing her husband's priesthood call. She sacrificed, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, her unique personal identity and just fulfilled faithfully the required tasks put on her as a priest's wife and as a mother.

What makes the priest's wife more confused and tense is that she experiences, for the first time, feelings that she considers strange to her personality. She may feel extreme jealousy, painful emotional deprivation, or highly demanding physical needs and desires towards her husband

priest. Of course, all these mixed feelings stimulate within the priest's wife an intense guilt feeling especially when her reaction to the tension of these feelings is inappropriate. An example of such inappropriate reaction is dealing with her husband priest and children with intense nervousness which in turn doubles her suffering and frustration.

This stage is also characterized by maturity of thinking and planning in life in general, and in service in particular. At this point, priest's wife had acquired a lot of experience along the previous years and learnt a lot through trial and errors during the different life situations she already passed through. But this intellectual brilliancy and maturity is accompanied with depleted regressed physical energy at this stage. The body starts to let down the priest's wife who is now full of intellectual vitality but not of physical one. This, of course, throws heavy shadows on the priest's wife mood at this stage.

Different scenarios

There are different scenarios and probabilities about how midlife stage ends up with a priest's wife:

- 1) She may be patient, understanding well the nature of this stage and resorting to prayers, spiritual guidance and emotional support. She thus gets out of this stage with greater power, maturity on all levels achieving a more balanced style of life, service and work.
- 2) Satan may get advantage of the frustrating, confusing and boring nature of this stage to heat the furnace of war more and more. Therefore, the priest's wife forsakes all her spiritual weapons, and estrange herself from the work of grace by neglecting her prayers, spiritual readings and watchfulness. This in turn makes her as a land ready for the enemy to plant the seeds of grumbling, Chronic boredom, anger, control, struggle over power, partiality, skepticism, blasphemy

and even emotional and behavioral deviation. At this point, midlife turns from a stage to a crisis. Of course, this becomes a hard temptation not only for the priest's wife but also for her husband, children and all the congregation.

- 3) The priest's wife may withdraw from many activities and services, maintaining the minimal involvement and participation, preferring to withdraw from the focus of light, and satisfied with what she had already offered in the past. She takes excuse of giving place in service to others.

How priest's wife can pass midlife stage peacefully

- 1) Priest's wife must realize that midlife is a mere natural extension of the previous life stages. The more the previous stages were characterized by spirituality, stability, accommodation, inner peace and satisfaction the more midlife stage passes

smoothly and calmly. *“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them”* (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Do not think, you who was used to be guided by the Holy Spirit in your whole life, that He will forsake you at your midlife because He remains faithful even if we are faithless. He is the one who said, *“Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you”* (Isaiah 46:4).

- 2) Accurate faithful exposure of the priest's wife thoughts before her confessor father cuts the way before Satan, and prevents him from taking advantage of what she passes through in order to stumble her in what is worse.
- 3) Holding on the weapon of prayer and not forsaking it whatever happens as prayer is like a fiery strong wall that protects from Satan's attacks.
- 4) Getting guidance from the spiritual father, support from the husband priest,

understanding from children, and listening from a trusted intimate friend reduces the stress of this stage and hastens its passage away.

- 5) Being aware of the nature of this stage and understanding it well reduces the confusion and mix-up, and gives to the priest's wife assurance that what she passes through is natural to many other people.
- 6) Being keen to take enough rest and sleep, and appropriate periods of entertainment and retreat helps priest's wife to renew her vitality and recharge her psychic, physical and spiritual energy.