

September 2018

## Monthly Letter for the priests' wives

My dearest sister in Christ,

When my children were young, bedtime was the worst. It was so hard, after a long and exhausting day, to wrangle them into bed all alone. My husband had visits though, so what choice did we have? So, yes, sometimes I felt like a single parent.

Really, we get such a small taste of what many, many other mothers go through. We are truly blessed in this small trial. In our congregations, there are single moms, divorced moms, widows, military moms whose husbands are away for months at a time.

Some couples are separated by their work schedules (he works all night, she works all day). Some husbands are gone all week every week to work on engineering projects and only come home on the weekends. Some husbands in the medical profession are "on call." They must leave suddenly, often, as emergencies arise or a kidney for transplant becomes available.

You married a good father. Your husband is such a blessing! Please remember that. Did you know that there is a part in the liturgy where he has to pray for his family by name? You're in the prayers at the altar with every liturgy!

Beyond that, you and I also know many women who wish for the "burden" of sweet children to call their own.

Please read my following advice with these things in mind: you are not alone in this feeling, you are not alone in this journey of parenting, and you have something sweet many people pray for.

None of this erases the feelings that you have or invalidates them.

I consider it one of the main responsibilities of a priest's wife to set a minimum acceptable standard for her husband's service to his own family and to remind him (gently and in a positive manner) when he begins to drift below this line.

I once heard our beloved bishop say that a priest who is not serving his own family well is considered a failure.

But here's the deal. This minimum acceptable standard has to be discussed and agreed upon *together*. It has to be reasonable and flexible. I don't mean to sound alarmist, but you do not want to be responsible for your husband's church service collapsing because you have put undue stress on him as a human being.

So, set clear expectations together. In our house, although my husband was never available for bedtime routines, he was always available to take them to school in the morning. Perhaps he won't be able to take them to soccer practice in the evening, but you can arrange together for him to be present at the piano recital on Saturday afternoon.

This goes for housework, too. Perhaps you cook, and he does the dishes. Perhaps he does the laundry, and you pay the bills. The only right way is the way that works for both of you.

And there are other ways to get help! Perhaps your family is available to come and stay for a few months in the year. Perhaps his family is nearby and can share responsibilities. Perhaps you have trusted friends and neighbors to turn to.

I should mention here that if it's in the budget, there's nothing wrong with hiring help. A professional team that comes and deep cleans once every three or six months can be surprisingly affordable, depending on your local cost of living. This is especially true if you also work a full-time job!

Plan ahead--and help him plan ahead. Sit together and compare calendars. Remember that you two are a TEAM, a powerful team with the blessing of the Holy Spirit!

A word of warning: I used to think that it was important to tell people in the congregation openly that "Tuesday is our family day," to point out to them that their priest has responsibilities as a father and that he's taking care of them.

But I have heard from one priest's wife that this backfired. Instead of understanding boundaries, some people began to spread his reputation as not serving but just hanging out with his family all the time. Despite the fact this was not at all the truth, he and his family were hurt by this.

It is VERY important to guard your agreed upon family time. However, instead of telling others why you aren't available a particular day, your husband can simply redirect them to another day or another time, saying, "I have a previous engagement" or something along those lines. This depends somewhat on your church's culture, but I thought you would benefit from hearing this.

If you want your husband to be an active and involved father, shower him with praise and encouragement. Remind him often how much the children benefit from his presence. Speak very, very highly of your husband to your children. All of this will grow in him that intrinsic desire and motivation to be a good father.

My sister, you are not a single parent. You are not alone.

You also don't lead an average life. You lead an extraordinary one. Never forget that.

Your every struggle as a family is noted by God, and our God will richly reward you.

Affectionately,  
Ni-ni

*Note: Tasoni Ni-ni is a fictional character, a compilation of events and advice gathered through research and interviews. Not everything Tasoni Ni-Ni says or does can be attributed to one person.*