



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

**The Monthly Message
to the Priests' Wives
January 2019**

Opinions

My dearest sister in Christ,

As the priest's wife, there's always someone ready to share with you their opinion. An opinion about your husband's service, an opinion about your kids' behavior, or an opinion about you and how you're living your life.

In the end, all the comments sound the same: "You're doing it wrong" (whatever it may be). What's the trick to dealing with these comments gracefully?

Well, first, make sure you understand what they really meant by the comment. Let me give you an example. A friend of mine recently told me about a conflict they had at work. One young man saw her and a group of people giggling and looking his way. His immediate thought was that they were making fun of him. For the rest of the day, he was annoyed and rude to his co-workers.

Finally, one of them asked him what was wrong, and when he explained, they clarified that they weren't mocking him at all. They were planning his surprise birthday party! What a difference understanding each other makes.

Sometimes an opinion is formed from the wrong information. When we ask questions to learn where the opinion comes from, we can correct that underlying information and resolve the conflict. If it hadn't taken them so long to ask what was wrong, they may have settled the matter much earlier.

Next, recognize that the person in front of you might be vocalizing an unmet need within themselves. Again, you have to dig a little deeper to figure out what they're really looking for. What's the cry for help buried in the criticism? Sometimes what people say out loud and what they actually mean are different. Sometimes their request does not match their actual need.

So, don't hesitate to ask follow up questions, to repeat back what you think you heard, and to gather more information from the person. You might find that there's something valid in what they're saying buried in the surface accusation.

And finally, sometimes a person's comment is just an unreasonable expectation. Are they asking for something that you can really do? Are they setting a standard that exceeds your own human ability?

Even in a case like that, you don't have to dismiss the comment entirely. Maybe there's another person able to help fulfill that need. Or maybe you just need a chance to explain to them why their expectation is not able to be met.

For example, some people expect all children, regardless of age, to be silent, still, and attentive for all of Matins and Divine Liturgy. My father once gave me back to my mother during liturgy because, at six months old, I was not behaving in a way that met his expectations. Thankfully, God blessed him with a few more children to set him straight.

My point is, if we want to handle the avalanche of opinions hurled at us with grace, we have to stop and do a little detective work. We have to unearth the reasoning behind the opinion and not just take it at face value.

That way, we learn more about the people around us, we serve them better, and we win them to us, too!

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.