



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

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

**Dearest Sister in Christ,**

I was talking with one of our sisters recently about how over-committed she was to services at their church. She was helping with nearly every single aspect of the service. I told her she could say no. And then we both laughed because, of course, when you agree to the service of the priesthood, you feel obliged to serve in every way.

But serving because you feel you have to has a very different energy than serving because you feel excited and privileged to serve. We want a positive energy behind our service and not a begrudging service. If there's anyone whose begrudging service would harm the overall strength of the church, it's the priest's wife.

When I am serving begrudgingly, I am less pleasant to other people, less tolerant of my husband being away at service, and, frankly, a little resentful at God.

*There are many bad reasons to say yes.*

**1. You're flattered to be asked.**

Sometimes we are so excited to be asked to do something that we say yes out of our pride. We can't believe that someone thinks we can do this, and it makes us feel good. But just because we're flattered, does not make enough of a reason to say yes.

The request has to fit into our larger plans and goals—for the week or for the year. If you're asked to help write a book, but your goal for the year is to learn a foreign language, you have to consider if the meetings for the book will eat up your time for the language classes.

**2. You're feeling guilty about something else.**

Sometimes we are asked to do something soon after we said no to something else, so we feel obliged to yes to make up for it. If a committee at church asks you every week to do something even though you stated clearly you weren't interested and don't have time, at some point they start to wear you down.

But feeling guilty and worn down is not enough of a reason to say yes to something that you can't do or don't wish to do. Each request on your time should be weighed independently whenever possible.

Guilt does not make a good fuel for getting things done. Remember that Delilah wore down Samson with her requests to know where his strength comes from until she brought down the strong man. Don't be Samson! Hold firm.

### **3. You're Abouna's wife.**

You don't want to upset anyone and you want to reflect positively on your husband, so you say yes to every social obligation until you are at your limit. Bad idea.

It's not enough to want to look good or make your husband look good. The request has to be something you actually want to do or actually can do.

If we start to say yes simply out of a sense of duty or obligation without thinking through the task at hand, we are more likely to let people down in the long run by not being able to fulfill what we promised—or by doing it poorly.

### **4. You're avoiding something else.**

Often, we are saying yes to so many things as an indirect way to say no to something that truly matters. You know the feeling or the action you're avoiding. Sometimes we stay busy as a way to keep from confronting an unsettling feeling, or to keep from completing a project we know needs to get done.

It's easier, isn't it, to tell yourself, "Well, I was just too busy to do X" and justify our lack of action on something important by filling our time with lots of little yesses to things that, in the long run, don't matter at all.

We can do a lot of little tasks to avoid processing our grief or to avoid going to confession or to avoid learning that skill that we NEED in order to move forward in our lives. But this is so dangerous because we will stand before God one day and need to explain ourselves and how we used the lifetime gifted to us.

The excuse that the kitchen needed one more mopping won't be enough to explain why we didn't do something with our talents. The excuse that soccer practice took too much time won't be enough to explain why we didn't teach our children to pray.

### **5. You don't know how to say no.**

Sometimes we don't know how to politely reject an offer or request, so we say yes rather than learn respectful and decent ways to say no. It feels rude to say no to requests made on our time at first. We feel like saying yes is the only way to be polite (I would argue this is especially true in our culture).

But there are many kind and graceful ways to say no to someone, ways to emphasize what a wonderful opportunity it is while explaining clearly that it is not the opportunity for you. It only

takes a few minutes of contemplation or a few conversations with graceful friends to learn good ways to say no.

Let us remember that every time we say YES to something that we are not really called to do we are saying NO to something we are called to do. May God's will in our lives guide our yesses and our nos.

Your sister in Christ,

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