



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

February 2022

Clashing Personalities

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

As a priest's wife, you are often sociable and friendly. You are able to get along with many different types of people, to show them love and care, and to connect with them.

But, every now and then, someone new comes along that you do not immediately get along with. In fact, you might initially be repelled by their way and their personality.

What can you do about your relationship with that kind of person?

I recently had a new member join our congregation whose personality type was not compatible with mine *at all*. Mary and I both had good hearts and positive intentions, but we were unable to understand and work alongside each other.

Although the easy solution would seem to be to avoid such people, as the priest's wife, you will not be able to do that for long. Eventually, you will have to find a way to get along—and you *can* get along.

Here are some steps you can take to help you warm up to someone whose personality type you find abrasive.

1- More Observation

When I first realized that Mary and I were not going to be able to get along, I decided to watch how she interacted with others. I found that many people were able to befriend her, to love her and respect her way of doing things. This made me take a step back and consider how my own personality flaws and past experiences might be coloring our relationship. Observation opened my eyes to other ways of interacting that would produce a more positive result.

When you're faced with an uncomfortable relationship, take the time to watch how this person interacts with others. You might find that he or she gets along much better with another member of the congregation. How do those interactions tend to go? Is there something you can change in your approach to produce a better end result?

For example, I realized that Mary really appreciated positive feedback. She needed a lot more open encouragement from me and less "helpful advice." When I began to praise Mary, she relaxed, and our relationship dynamic began to change.

2- More Quality Time

Since Mary was new, and we were not able to easily trust each other, I tried to find opportunities to get to know her better in different environments. I went out with her and other members of the congregation for social activities, like a coffee or a lunch. Instead of trying to build trust in situations where we were most tense (like, say, the servants meeting), I worked harder to let my guard down in situations where I did not feel that sense of responsibility.

Could you create more opportunities to interact positively with this person? Perhaps you can invite his or her family over for dinner. Maybe you can take her out to brunch. Make time to go sit with her at a church picnic. Find those pockets of time where tension is naturally eased and take advantage of them to build trust.

When I went out with Mary for lunch with our friends, I was able to see her laughing and joking and appreciate those parts of her personality which made her so beloved to all. This helped change the assumptions I brought to our relationship and helped me assume the best about her comments and actions throughout *all* our interactions.

3- More Listening

Mary arrived at our church this year with lots of new ideas. Some of them realistic and some of them sounded crazy to me. It was hard not to get defensive and immediately reject many of her perspectives and ideas. I found, however, when I chose to stay silent instead of interrupting with my objections, I learned a lot!

What are some ways you could calm your heart and allow yourself to open your ears and heart to this difficult personality and to his or her needs? Being more self-aware would allow you to quiet your own insecurities and anxieties and listen actively. Pray before interactions with him or her. Fight the urge to interrupt and instead empathize. Nod and smile and ask questions to help you learn more.

It turned out Mary's perspective and ideas echoed those of many other people. She was simply the first-person brave enough to voice those! In respecting her and listening to her, my eyes were opened to the needs of many who were in her situation.

In all our interactions with others, we must seek to be respectful and loving. My prayer, my sister, is that these ideas help you in dealing with the ones who grate on your heart, and that instead God give you peace towards them.

Your sister in Christ,

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