



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

### **Monthly Message for the Priests Wives**

**August 2022**

### **Proxy Interactions**

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

The other day, our family went to a graduation party. To save the grandparents from a long walk, I dropped the elders and my children at the front door and went to park the car.

In my absence, they entered the party, and, as soon as my eight-year-old walked in, everyone asked him, "Where's Abouna?"

With a start, he responded, "I don't know! I came with my mom."

Doesn't this perfectly encapsulate our position as the priest's family? Before we are ourselves, we first "envoys of Abouna."

I've probably been asked, "Where's Abouna?" more times in my life than I can count. Before I am myself, I am Abouna's wife.

In the next few months, we'll define a few different kinds of interactions we may have as priests' wives. We'll talk about how to deal with them.

We'll also explore whether these interactions have the potential to develop into true friendships.

The first type of interaction that we'll discuss is the proxy interaction. Some people don't interact with us as ourselves, but as simply proxies to our husbands, a way to get to Abouna.

We are an opportunity to ask where he is, to pass along information, to make demands, or to pry information out.

*How can we deal with this kind of interaction?*

Naturally, if you don't mind being Abouna's envoy and excel at the task, you might choose to undertake it. Some people are very good at remembering and sharing messages confidentially and in a timely way. Some might feel very good about how they become an intermediary for Abouna, an organized and trustworthy go-between.

I personally do not choose to do this job. I don't want anyone thinking they have to go through "tasoni" to get to Abouna. I would not like anyone to see me as the gatekeeper to accessing their

priest, especially when building a personal connection with him is so important to their overall spiritual health.

In situations where you are the proxy, I recommend you be friendly but direct, balancing honesty with discretion.

Let's say Masie regularly comes up to you to ask you to pass along a complaint to Abouna. Sometimes it's the state of the grass, sometimes it's how loud the children are laughing on the playground. It's always something, and it's always a message for Abouna.

You can openly show your hesitation and redirect her to do take the matter up with Abouna directly. Use your calmest and sweetest tone. You can tell her to text him the information and assure her that your memory cannot be trusted to complete such an important task.

When asked a question you don't want to answer, you can reply, "Hmm... I'm not sure," to provide yourself enough mental space to politely shake loose.

*Can someone who regularly approaches you as a proxy to Abouna be a true friend?*

For a proxy relationship, the opportunity for a real friendship is hit or miss.

For some people, we really only a way to reach our husbands. They have no interest in us at all. When we don't give them the information that they want, they eventually leave us alone. This gives us more room for deeper, richer conversations with others.

Some people might actually approach us with questions or comments about Abouna as a way to break the ice or get us to warm up to them. For those people, it's actually us that they want to get to know. Turn the tables by approaching them first and asking about them. Show them you're interested in being more than just Abouna's envoy in their life.

As my son gave the simplest possible answer and moved on to find his friends, we can also learn to be simple with people and move past the box they put us in initially.

In next month's letter, we'll talk about one-sided relationships.

Your sister in Christ,

Ni-Ni