



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

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

**October 2022**

### **One-sided Relationships**

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

There is this woman at church—a lovely human being. She is sweet and gentle... and in a lot of pain. She finds me every week to beg for a few minutes of my time.

Sometimes she asks for advice, sometimes for small favors. Mostly, though, she needs someone to hear her pain.

As the wife of the priest, we are often in this position. We find ourselves in many “one-sided” relationships like this.

Often, we are the kind, compassionate ear, the shoulder to cry on, but we cannot expect the same from the other party. Some people see us as mentors, a spiritual support or as friends, even if we may not feel the friendship on both sides. Because of their life circumstances, personality, or something else, we cannot unburden our hearts to this person.

We are her best friend, but she cannot be ours.

This is the third type of interaction that can limit our ability to make friends. In the last two letters, we talked about “proxy interactions” (people hoping to reach our husbands through us) and “superficial interactions” (those quick greetings as we pass people in church).

This type of interaction, the one-sided, can be the most draining. It requires us to guard our hearts and put boundaries on our time.

While St. Paul calls us to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), we are also limited in our human capacity and have our own weaknesses to consider.

First, we need to guard our hearts. We don’t want to be so empathetic that we are affected negatively by the other person’s pain. We must be careful to what degree we will allow our feelings and our thoughts to dwell on this person’s problems.

A friend of mine once lost her sister and my agony for her situation left me unable to carry on my daily life. I had never known this sister; only felt acutely the pain I would be in if I lost one of my own sisters. As the feeling stretched over a week, I realized there was no way this could be

healthy for me or helpful for her. My empathy had taken me to a dark place and rather than live my life or comfort her, I became a burden to those in my own life.

For this reason, we should help carry the burden of others without taking on water. We must remember always that Christ carries their burden with them and that we should direct them to Him, not thinking that we are solely responsible for saving or fixing their situation.

We also don't want all of our time to be eaten up serving this person at the expense of other relationships that need to take priority. Our husbands, children, and job (among other priorities) must be served first, with discretion.

For example, I have developed a code with this woman from church, so when she's in a dire situation she can call and hear my voice and encouragement briefly. Recently, I stepped out of an important birthday dinner to give her 5-10 minutes of loving compassion, confident I was able to give of this time without sacrificing my more intimate, closer relationships.

I also want to note that one-sided relationships are actually normal and healthy relationships to have. We are called to provide mentorship to those "behind" us on the journey of life, and we are also called to seek mentorship from those ahead of us on the path.

We might be the ones "in need" to others in our lives.

In wisdom and prayer, we also need to set boundaries so that we are not flooded by one-sided relationships. While some people in our lives lean on us and we lean on others, we also want to find those true friends who carry our burden as we carry theirs—those equally yoked with us on the journey through life and through spiritual growth.

Having this kind of balance keeps us from feeling weighed down by the burdens of others or feeling guilty that we're not doing enough.

Your sister in Christ,

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