



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

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

**November 2022**

### **Expectant Relationships**

My Dearest Sister in Christ,

"I didn't expect you to be like this," the woman said, laughing. "I expected this whole priest's wife personality, and you're not like that."

I don't know if it was meant as a compliment or an insult, but I do try to assume the best.

I'm sure you have had similar conversations. Many of the people we encounter have preconceived notions about the kind of person we're supposed to be.

They draw these notions from the well-respected priests' wives who came before us, from their own priest's wife growing up, or, sometimes, from their own imaginary idea of spiritual perfection.

For the last few letters, I've been writing to you about different kinds of interactions we have as priests' wives. We talked about proxy interactions, superficial interactions, and one-sided interactions. We talked about ways to navigate the relationship and which of those interactions is most likely to lead to friendship.

Expectant interactions, in my experience, are the biggest gamble and the among the most likely to result in a true, deep relationship. The interaction can go in two extreme directions, which we'll touch on later in this letter.

First, how should we deal with someone who comes to us with big expectations for what our personality should be, how our family should act, and so on? Are we defensive? Do we give them a lecture about how we are each our own individual? Do we get angry and avoid this person?

The consensus from my beloved fellow PWs is a very simple solution: give them more data points.

What do I mean by that? I mean that you should interact with them regularly as your genuine, vulnerable self so that your real personality begins to substitute any expectations in their minds.

The best cure for an unrealistic image of you is a realistic image of you.

So, the solution is simply to live your life as true to yourself as possible. Make choices and decisions for your family in all integrity and not dependent on outside pressures. As you live authentically, others will witness and form a new image of you that's more in alignment with who you truly are.

As you replace their unrealistic image with a more realistic image, you'll encounter two types of people: those who dig in to the expectations and those who embrace the reality.

You will inevitably meet some of the first type. There are some people who feel it's their duty to educate you on how you should be. Their ego is stroked when they can tell you how you're not living up to their image.

These are the people whose list of "shoulds" increases each time they see you. They pull you aside and tell you that you *should* be doing this or not doing that. They urgently inform you that you *should* be wearing this or not wearing that. They take it as their divine right of commentary.

As they dig in, you continue to offer them your authentic self, but at some point, you naturally begin to draw away. This is acceptable and healthy.

But it's the second type you want to watch for. Look for the person who, as you reveal more of yourself, draws closer to you.

With an open heart, they genuinely want to learn more about you as a person. They acknowledge that you're not what they expected, but they do it without judgment or disappointed sighs.

That person is a hidden gem, a true friend when hard times come. They have their eyes and hearts open to you as you are and not as they expected.

It is this type of expectant interaction that has the highest possibility, in my mind, for creating a strong relationship. It's natural to have preconceived notions about another person, but it's a God-given grace to open your heart to how a person truly is and not how you expected.

This grace they give you, to see you as you are, is a beautiful seed that can grow a deep-rooted tree of friendship.

Your sister in Christ,

Ni-Ni