



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

January 2023

Vulnerability

Dearest Sisters in Christ,

Vulnerability—what place does it have as we relate to, engage with, and serve our brothers and sisters in Christ, the members of the parish family to which we belong and are called to serve?

In the context of this letter, vulnerability means allowing others to see us as we really are, to be open with others.

As clergy wives we are accustomed to having others come to us in time of need, sharing their deepest joys and sorrows, challenges and victories, and life struggles. What of ourselves do we feel comfortable sharing with others, particularly those fellow servants in our parish family? Some of us are very guarded, given our personalities, life story, and/or convictions about the comportment of the clergy wife. Others are more open for the same reasons.

Where do we look for a model? We would begin well by pondering the life of our Lord. On one hand, He maintained a deep sense of privacy when He went off to be alone with His Father. In other circumstances He sought the company and fellowship of His inner circle of Peter, James and John, the 12 disciples, dear friends, particularly Lazarus, Mary and Martha, or all of those with whom He came into contact. He was discerningly vulnerable in each circumstance He encountered. A particular moment when He was very vulnerable was at the tomb of Lazarus, in the company of many people, where He “wept.”

Ultimately, in Jesus’ greatest act of love and compassion for all of humanity, as He was nailed to the Cross for us, He was as vulnerable as anyone will ever be—stripped naked and fully exposed.

So, what do we learn from Jesus? I have learned that there are different levels of vulnerability, and as I grow in Christ, His grace at work within me provides the

discernment to determine how vulnerable to be, depending on the circumstance and the person or people I am encountering. I have also learned from Him and my own life experiences that vulnerability can be a good thing. Especially as clergy wives, where people tend to put us on a perch or pedestal, appropriate and discerning vulnerability allows others to see our common humanity, giving consolation to others while at the same time giving us the opportunity to live in the freedom of Christ and not enslaved to self-protection based in fear of what others will think of us and what they might do with what they know about us.

I think discernment is key to how vulnerable we are with fellow servants in our parish family and with all of the people we encounter in our lives. One size does not fit all; what may be appropriate for one person in a particular situation may not be appropriate for another in the same situation.

For example, several years ago, a clergy wife was suffering from clinical depression. When she had to be hospitalized for a few weeks, the priest and his wife struggled mightily to decide whether or not to let the parish family know about the wife's condition. They prayed and then consulted with a clergy couple they trusted and decided to let the parish family know about the wife's condition. In this instance, the vulnerability to the parish family bore two significant "fruits":

1. It gave their parish family the gift of the opportunity to shower them with love, care and support, which it did,
2. It gave others suffering from depression but reluctant to seek professional help courage and encouragement to seek help for themselves.

Is the vulnerability shown by this clergy couple appropriate for all clergy couples who may find themselves in such a situation or something similar? No, not necessarily, but perhaps, depending on a variety of factors.

May our Lord guide each of us in every circumstance and person we encounter to show appropriate vulnerability for the building of the Body of Christ and His glory.

With love in Christ,

Kerry