



## Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

### Monthly Message for the Priests Wives

February 2023

#### **The Clergy Couple**

*“The clergy couple is the touch-stone of the quality of our pastoral ministry.”* The clergy couple is a peculiar couple. The two spouses’ calling is to live in the world and simultaneously bear witness for what lies beyond this world. They are asked to function in the middle of the ecclesiastical community without losing their privacy. They have to experience spiritual fatherhood [motherhood] without betraying their natural parenthood. They are invited not to allow pastoral confidentiality divide them but instead unite them in love for the flock. They are assigned the task of spiritual leadership while at the same time they find themselves in the middle of their own dilemmas and inner immaturities. They are united in both their conjugal bed and in the Holy Eucharist.” (*Father Vaseleios Thermos, Keynote address, GOA National Clergy Retreat, 2007*)

We would do well to share these words with our husbands and discuss together the “state” of our marriage. Though Fr. Vasileios is speaking directly to priests, the entire address (which can be found at <https://goodguyswearblack.org/2011/06/06/between-heaven-and-earth-pastoral-reflections-on-the-psychodynamics-of-the-clergy-family/>) is relevant for all clergy couples. The reality is, for those priests who are married, a sound marriage feeds healthy and holy ministry. In the midst of the demands of ministry and raising children, the marriage of the clergy couple is often put on the back burner and taken for granted. We may inadvertently and wrongly assume that since both of us are committed and practicing Orthodox Christians united by Christ in the sacrament of marriage, the marriage is intact and cannot be threatened. That is, God will take care of our marriage since we have committed our lives to Him and His Church.

When we marry, we leave the home of our parents and are joined by Christ, become one flesh, and hopefully move toward oneness of mind and heart, even with our differences and disagreements! Christ joins us, but we must nurture what He has joined. Just as our personal life in Christ must be nurtured, so must the closest human relationship, that with our closest neighbor, our spouse.

So, as we enter the civil new year, let us all create a sacred space and time with our spouse to prayerfully discuss the state of our marriage—that is, the strengths and how we will build on them, and the growth points and how we will work on them.

Let us remember that we are not called to “balance” marriage and ministry, a common misconception and one that pits the marriage/family in competition with the church, and sometimes even God Himself, as if they are separate entities. Rather, we must remember that our marriage and family constitute the Church, the “home church” Christ established when He joined us in marriage and build healthy, holy rhythms to nurture, grow and cultivate, by the grace of God, what He has joined.