



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

**The Monthly Message  
to the Fathers, the Priests**

**November 2023**  
**The Pastoral Services (4)**  
**Family Affairs**

Among a priest's pastoral responsibilities, three types of which have already been dealt with in three consecutive messages, is family affairs specifically marital problems. Lately the number of marital problems have escalated and their subsequent acuteness has been noticed. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the church to care for the family unit through teaching and enlightening in order to stop problems from taking place.

Although it takes more than one article to deal with all the marital problems, yet some pieces of advice will be offered to priests along with the suggestion to read books and articles dedicated to this important topic.

**Precautionary Steps**

Blocking problems from happening is far better than trying to solve them after happening. This can be done through:

- Regular follow-up through visitation, especially after a lengthy absence from church or meetings. Neglecting a problem causes it to grow in seriousness.

- Enlightening by teaching. This takes place through sermons, meetings, distributing books about the topic of marital problems. A number of books written by His Eminence Metropolitan Youssef can be given out as gifts during visitations.
- Focusing with youths (university age group) on topics that deal with marriage and family, to ensure the formation of future families spiritually, psychologically and socially mature.

**How to Tackle Family Problems**

Once problems inevitably take place, it is important to do the following:

- Listen carefully to all ends, (husband, wife,) without getting satisfied or convinced by listening to one side only.
- Show no quick reaction in favor of one side over the other before listening to all members involved. Also, care should be taken not to judge before verifying the truths of the information heard.
- Exhibit respect and attentiveness to the speaker despite the lack of credibility in what is being said. Genuine respect will incur obedience to the priest later on when time comes to solving the problem.
- Manage carefully the discussion time, ensuring balance in the amount taken by each member while objectively explaining their points of view.
- Handle the talk wisely in case of the use of foul or offensive language. This can be done by diverting the

course of the discussion through soft words that drive away dispute and anger.

- Start and end the conference with prayer, asking God to be present and the Holy Spirit to direct every word; thus pointing out to the main key to the solution of any problem.
- Admit that certain problems do not lend themselves to immediate or quick solutions; nor are they within the priest's capacity. Therefore, in such cases, it is important to avoid hastiness in making any decision before listening to more details. There is no harm in appealing to someone specialized in counseling or a more experienced priest.
- Understand that you, as priest, do not have a magic stick that provides magic solutions. Therefore, do not appeal to a definitive solution. On the contrary, bring it home to the understanding of those family members that just as they contributed to the creation of their problem, they too have to contribute to the solution.
- Keep in mind that, as a priest, you are God's messenger. Hence, you are expected to deliver God's law, "*For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*" (Malachi 2:7). Consequently, your words should be fortified with the power of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul has said, "*And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). In offering solutions and advice, a priest should use

God's words so that people would understand that his words represent God's voice to them.

- Seek help when and where help is needed. Some family problems become so intricate and beyond a quick fix. Consequently such problems might exhaust a lot of a priest's time and energy at the expense of serving other families' problems. In such cases, the priest can entrust a trustworthy servant with such problems while conferring with him. A priest need not neglect his other services for the sake of one or two complicated family problems.
- Remember that the altar has the ultimate powerful answers and solutions to all problems. Experience dictates and ensures us that so many problems found miraculous solutions at the Lord's banquet. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that, "...*This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.*" (Mark 9:29). Therefore, the more cumbersome problems become, the more important for the priest to realize the importance of praying and fasting for the sake of his children whom Satan has bound up with various lusts and desires. In addition, this will be an occasion for the priest (as many priests have done) to come close to and in touch with the steadfast power of the altar prayers in solving the most horrendous problems.

May the Lord grant us the wisdom necessary in helping our people, taking His words as a beacon in alleviating their problems. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*" (Luke 4:18-19).