

Reflections of a Clergy Spouse

Shazz and I often talk about our experiences living under the clergy family 'microscope'. During one of our conversations he invited me to share some of my thoughts on the subject in our August newsletter.

Since moving to Andros I am often asked, "How are you finding your life as a priest wife on the family island?" I often answer 'Great', 'a blessing', 'it's fantastic living out of the city, away from the traffic'. These answers are honest but do not thoroughly address the question at hand. Truthfully, the life of priest wife (or clergy spouse) is not always great and blessed and positive.

I was recently reading an article on the subject on the *Christian Today* website. It reported that in a recent survey, more than half of clergy spouses said that they often suffered from feeling overworked and isolated. Hmm... I wonder what would be the results if a similar survey was conducted in our Diocese?

I would certainly answer 'yes' if asked whether I often feel overworked and isolated. The truth is, when church events or programs are falling short on manpower, more often than not, the priest (our husband, our partner in life, our best friend) depends on us to pick up the slack. And we step in, not because of our commitment to the church's work, but because of our commitment to him. I recall the week our small parish hosted our Diocese's annual Clergy Conference. The reality was that the number of clergy attending probably equaled the number of parishioners in our whole parish. Needless to say, pulling off the entire event was no small feat. Shazz, although not asking for a lot of help, needed a lot of help. I ended up doing way more than I had initially committed to - not because he asked but because I acknowledge that his success is my success. And often times, while never 'forcing' me into church work, there are always times when I have to fill in the shortfall - whether entertaining guests, accompanying him to an event, helping with the communications ministry, or offering encouragement to someone who calls needing encouragement when he isn't home. It can be overwhelming at times, especially when holding a full time job.

I feel, however, that the more acute challenge is the isolation associated with the life of a clergy spouse. For me, it has not been a choice, but a means of survival; as it is safer to be seen rather than heard. Often, articulating life's challenges to others can be misconstrued as ungratefulness and a sign of weakness. I've found that people have been conditioned to not think of their clergy spouses as persons who face real life challenges- e.g. disappointments, marital discontentment, or financial difficulties - but rather as persons always eager to give and never needing to receive. And if a spouse were to share or ask for advice in these areas, it becomes more of a topic of gossip than a means of obtaining constructive, encouraging advice. The task of sifting through the long list of those who offer themselves as 'confidants' but end up being judgmental gossips, is arduous and heartbreaking. It becomes easier to live a guarded existence.

My emotional isolation, I have come to accept, is also important for those the church (my husband) serve. The reality is, for those whose faith is fragile, my reality might negatively impact their faith in my husband's work (for example, they may not be able to cope with the fact that their clergy spouse is suffering from [you name it!]). As a person who didn't choose this responsibility but accepts it, I know that what I say (especially concerning my feelings and personal life) can have a negative impact on others spiritual development.

Overall, I have come to realize that no matter what I do or say or don't do or don't say, I am making an impact- negatively or positively. Many clergy spouses are quiet and reserved, yet their consistent commitment to their spouse and his/her ministry is something to be admired. There may be other clergy spouses who may commit to many things around the church but may never follow through on those commitments. Although well intentioned, it could negatively impact the credibility of the ministry in which they are trying to assist. You can share with others your frustration about your marriage, children and life as a clergy spouse (which are valid feelings) but when taken out of context, it can greatly detract from your spouse's. In these cases, it's best to not say anything at all.

All of us living in this peculiar 'clergy spouse' world know and can relate to feels of isolation and being overworked, but with so much good that we see, it's just as easy to share all the reasons we have to be grateful.

Candice Turnquest – Clergy Spouse (5 yrs)

Happy Patronal St. Margaret's & St. Mary Magdalene



Fr. Addison Turnquest leading mission while I play the piano.

Evensong is my favourite service of the church, it really plays on the senses. Parishioners from our churches in Bowen Sound, Fresh Creek and Calabash Bay all made the long trip North to celebrate with us. Ministers of other denominations in Nicholl's Town also turned out in full force and it was a joy to share our rich custom with them.

Since our combined Patronal was to be held in Nicholl's Town this year, I decided that we should have a mission service on Wednesday in Mastic Point, on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene. After only two years of trying I was able to get 'the other Fr. Turnquest' to come down for a visit and conduct the service for me. It was good to have 'the old man' back in his old parish. As he told the crowd it was 35 years ago that he last served in Mastic Point, Nicholl's Town and the whole of Central Andros all the way down to Behring Point. Our beloved Catechist Munnings would have been the only person in church that night to remember him. Even after suggesting to him 'a shorter sermon might be best' given the age of the crowd, after starting the sermon his first words were 'We're not going home early tonight...' It was a special Mission service, complete with all A&M hymns!!

It was special for me to have him there and it made me remember a conversation I had with Bishop Eldon during my ordination retreat. I asked him about father and son priest teams in the Bahamas. To the best of his knowledge he said that 'the old man' and I would have made the fifth team. He spoke of the Stromboms, Blacks, Richardsons, and another duos that I can't remember- before getting to us. Bernard Been and his father would be number six and Marie Roach and her father would be father-daughter team number one. Having my father participate as missionary and having several parishioners come forward during the altar call was a very key moment for me. I can only hope that at the beginning of this, my third year of ministry in Andros, we would be able to greatly expand God's Kingdom, here in Andros.

Radical Orthodox Apologetics

At St. Stephen's House in Oxford there is a summer course run every year that explores the relevance of the Christian faith and the church today through the eyes of orthodox theology. While surfing the net the other day, trying to find out what my colleagues at Westcott House were up to these days, I happened to stumble across this fascinating short course. In ECUSA and some Dioceses in Canada there is a rewriting of theology through the eyes of the liberal wing of the church. Essentially the liberals assert just about anything, the most recent being the denial of individual salvation and the promotion of collective salvation. Either we're all going to be saved together no matter how we all differ or no one will be saved at all. Finally, the scholars of Orthodoxy are stepping up to the plate! The challenge of orthodoxy is to take old arguments, dust them off, give them a tune up, and re-launch them again but within the modern context.

Three young men who were at Westcott with me took part in the course this summer. One, Andrew Davison, a tutor at St. Stephen's (Bishop Eldon's Alma Mater), runs the course. He came from a scientific background with a PhD in Biology from Oxford before training for the priesthood. A true scholar! One day at breakfast, Andrew happily provided our Liturgics tutor with a medieval liturgy for sheep, a rare find no less. The other, John Hughes, read for his PhD at Cambridge and is now one of the Chaplains at Jesus College Cambridge, just across the street from Westcott. The third, Matt Bullimore, who also read for his PhD at Cambridge (and I can't even explain the stuff he was studying for his PhD- something to do with existentialism) is currently the Chaplain to the Bishop of Wakefield. This is the kind of stuff that makes theology the king of disciplines. The liberal wing says one thing and this is countered by a scorched record response from the orthodox wing. Yes, the authenticity of scripture is absolute, but how do we make it new without changing it? How do we make the church relevant today without creating an organization that is no longer recognizable?

Parish Link

Our little church in Mastic Point was dedicated sometime in 1872 by Bishop Venables, an Oxford man. The church in Nicholl's Town was re-dedicated sometime after this. Another colleague from Westcott, Fr. Russell Dewhurst is the parish priest of two little churches in Oxford England. One is St. Margaret in a little town called Binsey (similar to Nicholl's Town) and the other is St. Frideswide on Botley Road Oxford. Coincidentally, St. Frideswide was dedicated in 1872 as well! After making initial contact, our parishes are exploring ways of being linked together. Watch this space. See their webpage at <http://www.adiutorium.org.uk/about/st-frideswides-botley-rd/>