

**Healthy Friendships:  
Unique Opportunities and  
Challenges for the Clergy Wife**

# Which statement best describes your approach to friendship? (Choose one)

- *I do not have close friends in the parish; nor do I think it is appropriate to do so.*
- *I only have friends outside the parish and/or the church.*
- *Mostly other presbyteres are my real friends, as they are the only ones who understand my life.*
- *I am friendly with everyone and friends with no one.*
- *I have some authentic friendships in the parish, and I think that is not only ok but important, though I do maintain some boundaries/limitations with them.*
- *Other...*

# Danielsen Institute Study

*“The life of a presvytera can be lonely.”*

*18 % agree and 48 % strongly agree*

*Finding ways to increase social relationships, increase social support “and decrease loneliness may contribute to higher levels of resilience, and in turn, lower levels of distress.”*

# Research shows that friendships:

- *Buffer the hardship of life transitions*
- *Lower blood pressure*
- *Boost the immune system*
- *Promote physical healing*
- *Help women cope with stress*
- *Contribute to higher levels of resilience and lower levels of distress*
- *Increase the level of oxytocin (When women experience isolation and stress, the level of oxytocin in the body increases. Combined with estrogen, these hormones contribute to females seeking the company of others. Then when an emotional bond is formed, the level of oxytocin increases again.)*

# Jesus Had Friends

- ✧ *Inner Circle of Peter, James and John*
- ✧ *The 12 Disciples*
- ✧ *Women and others who followed Him throughout His ministry*
- ✧ *Intimate friends like Lazarus, Martha, Mary*

# However,

- ✦ *They didn't always understand Him*
- ✦ *They had some inappropriate expectations of Him*
- ✦ *They sometimes competed for His attention*
- ✦ *Judas betrayed Him*
- ✦ *Peter denied Him*
- ✦ *The rest (other than John who brought the Theotokos to the Cross) abandoned Him*

# Blessings and Challenges of Friendships in the Parish

## Blessings:

- companionship
- shared interests
- shared life experiences
- opportunity to give and receive
- opportunity to love and be loved
- worship together
- share joys and challenges of raising children
- share a common life in Christ and the Church

## Challenges:

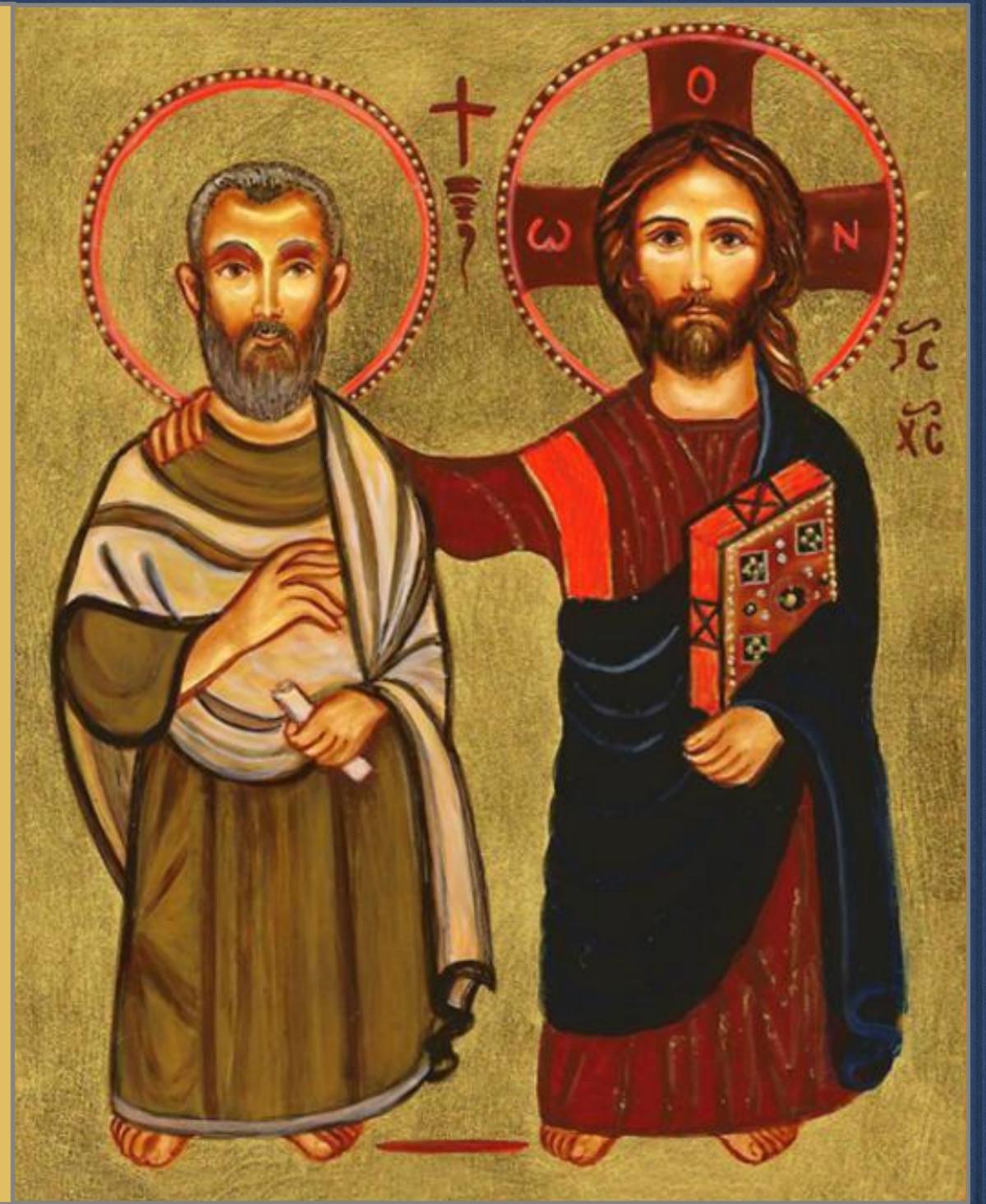
- expectations
- being used
- betrayal
- breaking of trust
- abandonment
- strings attached,
- jealousy
- anticipation of pain of separation with re-location
- necessary boundaries

“No longer do I call you servants,  
... but I have called you friends.”

(John 15:15)

The truest foundation of friendship is the quality of our friendship with Christ, nurtured through the practices of solitude and silence. As we allow ourselves to detach from all the thoughts, actions, and emotions that preoccupy our minds and hearts daily and attach to our Best Friend, our ability to form authentic friendships is deepened. Moreover, we become better equipped to be more fully present to others and to bear gracefully with the hurts and disappointments of friendship.

*(Icon of Friendship: Christ and St. (Abbot) Menas)*



# To Have and to Be a Friend

*"When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares." (Henri Nouwen)*

*"A friend is long sought, hardly found, and with difficulty kept." (St. Jerome)*