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Mixed Marriages Need Extra Effort

By Fr. Gerald Dunn
 Director, Family Life Bureau

It is generally agreed that marriages between persons of different faiths will occur in the same proportion as the population differs. It should be no great surprise then, that many parishes have more mixed marriages than Catholic marriages. But this is not a happy situation.

Statistics have shown that there has been a greater percentage of break-up in mixed marriages. Added to this is the fact that many Catholics lose their faith in such relationships. Undoubtedly this has done much to force the Church to try to discourage such marriages and to make stringent rules to help solve some of these problems.

Mixed marriage was, indeed, a step-child, an ugly duckling.

There was still one fact to be faced. Love grows where it will. There is nothing in a person's religious beliefs that automatically makes them personally attractive or hideous. A person's faith is certainly a contributing factor but there are many other elements that help to develop character and personality: home, school, associates, etc. And since our young men and women were meeting and associating with persons under circumstances other than religious, the only thing that could result was mutual personal attraction.

Obviously, all the concern and regu-

lations were not restricting the number of mixed marriages and now there is a more sensible attitude developing. What are the inherent difficulties in this type of marriage and how can they best be handled?

Mixed Marriage

The Church has taken some of the stigma away from the mixed marriage ceremony. Not too many years ago it was performed in the rectory, in any room that might be available, then it was permitted in church, but only outside the altar rail. Now all marriages have the same ritual status.

The Nuptial Mass and Blessing can, if agreeable to both parties in a Mixed Marriage, be an integral part of their wedding day. Holy Communion is an intimate and personal union with Christ, very symbolic of the marriage union. And, in the marriage of Catholics, it sets the note of family spirituality and religious practice.

However, in a mixed marriage, since the Catholic party is the only one who can receive, I usually suggest that the Catholic receive Holy Communion at an earlier morning Mass to avoid the appearance of prejudice or bias toward the non-Catholic.

The prenuptial promises in a mixed marriage have been somewhat softened more in accordance with reality. The responsibility of raising the children in the Catholic faith falls upon the Cath-

olic. And the promises may be given orally.

It would be unfair to pass over lightly the question of the religion of the children. This can well be a bone of contention. If a person is close to their religion they will be anxious to have their children share in it. It is not sufficient to wait until the child is old enough to choose for themselves, since their knowledge and love of God should begin from their earliest days. To let this go until they come of age is encouraging a total lack of faith and morals.

By the nature of things, it would be better to have the children follow the religion of the parent who has the strongest faith and if this is the mother, then so much the better. This is so because she has the greatest influence in the training of the children, being with them in pre-school days.

In any event, it is most important that this question of the religious education of the children be agreed upon in advance. To wait until the situation arrives is to court a fight. Both families may well get into the act. This has been one of the saving features of the Church program of insisting upon the religious training of the children.

This question is currently being studied by the Church and there will be a change in this specific requirement. However, I hope that any change will include a predetermination

of the Faith of the children so that they will not be denied a heritage of love and service of God.

Religion in Marriage

There was a time when there was no consideration given to the religious practice of the non-Catholic. Their Church and clergyman were excluded. Recognizing that one was on strange ground and wishing to give them some contact with their spiritual directors on this momentous occasion, the Church now invites ministers of other Faiths to participate in the marriage ceremony.

Undoubtedly, there will be other changes and modifications in the days to come but the celebration of marriage only lasts a brief time. There are several other important considerations with long lasting effects.

A mutual understanding of one another's beliefs can bring many benefits. An extensive study is not necessary, nor is it always possible. But our Ecumenical meetings have pointed out one salient fact: we have many mistaken notions on one another's beliefs and practices. A correct understanding can do wonders in helping us to appreciate the other's viewpoint and feelings. Their practice then takes on a reasonable nature.

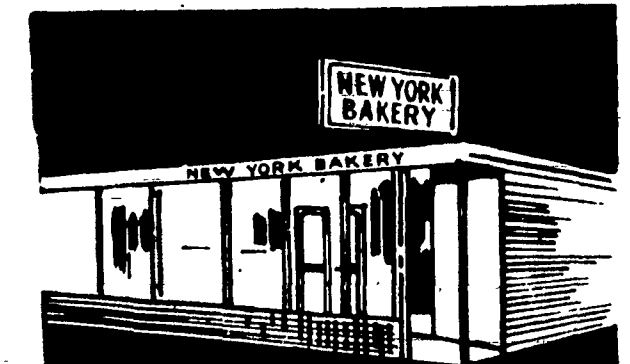
The Catholic Church requires an explanation of her teaching before mar-

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