

A Doctor Takes a Look at Marriage

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Couples contemplating marriage in this diocese are strongly encouraged, if not required, to attend a series of pre-Cana conferences, the third of which is usually given by a physician, entitled "A Doctor Looks at Marriage". More accurately the title could be, "A Doctor Discusses Sex".

Why teach people about to be married about sex? Why not let them learn for themselves? The answers to these questions are no different than to the question "Why teach married couples anything about marriage?"

The marriage contract is the most important step that most people will ever take. Engaged couples should be made aware of what married life entails.

Many people have no idea of the financial responsibilities of family life. Many have no concept of the "give and take" needed for normal family harmony. Many are ignorant of their moral responsibilities to one another. Pre-Cana provides them with some help in these fields.

Many people are greatly lacking in knowledge of the sexual aspect of marriage. To help impart this knowledge is the task of the physician at pre-Cana.

Some will ask, "Is the Church, like everyone else, so pre-occupied with sex that one whole session be devoted to

it?" No, the Church is not pre-occupied with sex, but most newlyweds are, and many marital problems revolve around sex, not only for newlyweds but for couples who have seen many anniversaries.

Why? Because sexual union of husband and wife is the ultimate expression of their love, and failure to achieve sexual harmony is often interpreted, either correctly or incorrectly, as failure to love completely. Granted, there are many other equally important ways of saying, "I love you" than by sexual union. But the fact remains that sexual failure is often the stumbling block on the road to happy conjugal life.

In the doctor's conference, anatomy is discussed frankly with color slides

of both male and female body parts identified by their proper names. The formation of sperm and eggs, how conception occurs, where the baby grows, how it gets out, what exactly is intercourse, what is the menstrual period, what do hormones do, and what is a sexual climax are all subjects which are covered.

Of much greater importance is the discussion of the psychological differences between men and women in their approach to sex. Ignorance in this field is extreme, since both home and school have, in the past, done a poor job in sex education.

Men are usually quick to react to sexual stimuli and fail to realize that, in general, women are slow to react.

Women, more than men, do not look upon sex as a single, isolated expression of love: they long for various other ways of showing love.

Kindness, respect, consideration, helpfulness, praise and thanks are but a few of these. A woman tends to want these first and then sex later. She is often not too interested in sex as love-making if she is not made to feel loved in other ways. This is perhaps, in my opinion, the most important point to get across in the entire conference.

The girls are encouraged to get a premarital examination by a physician. At that time she can be assured that her sexual organs are adequate for normal marital relations, or corrective measures taken if they are not.

The fact that pregnancy can, with some accuracy, be planned is pointed out. The couples are reminded that rhythm can work, though definitely not for all couples, and, that, if it does not, something else can usually be worked out within the framework of a clear conscience.

This then, summarizes the material covered by the physician at the pre-Cana conferences, and why. Perhaps with adequate sex education in our schools and homes in the future, such a pre-Cana conference will no longer be needed. However, at the present time many couples benefit greatly from this straight-forward discussion of this very important aspect of married life.

It's Time for Learning

The word honeymoon stems from an old idea that the first month of marriage is the sweetest — honey (sweet) plus moon (month) — the idea being that in the first few months of marriage there are relatively few responsibilities and therefore newlywed couples may channel all of their energies into learning more about themselves.

But the true value of a honeymoon is that it affords the couple the opportunity to learn that the highest expression of married love, the physical act of married love, also requires a period

of learning, a period of adjustment.

The honeymoon therefore has a very special place in marriage — it is the learning phase of marriage.

Today the honeymoon is synonymous with the wedding trip. In reality the wedding trip is just the beginning of the honeymoon. Discovering more about each other and striving to a perfect marriage takes longer than the time devoted to the wedding trip.

Isn't it possible, then, that your honeymoon should last a lifetime — a lifetime of learning about each other?

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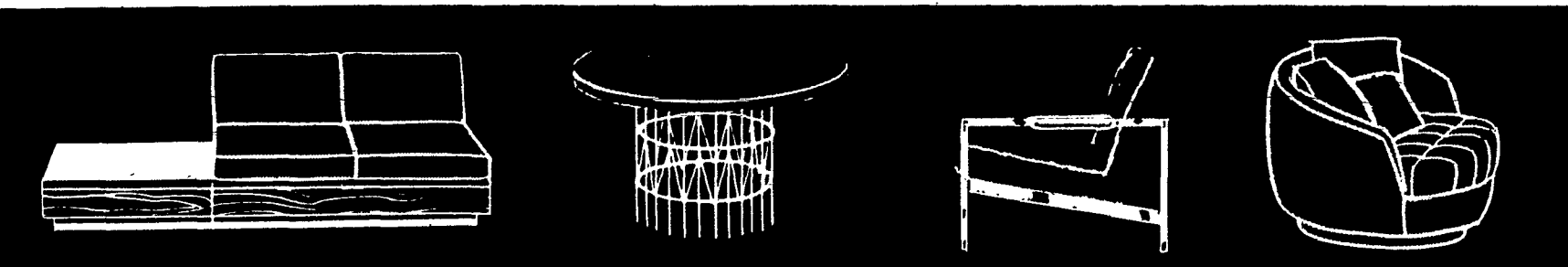
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