

Laws, Civil and Church, Play Important Role

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Turn on the radio and you're likely to hear someone singing: "—all over the world you can hear the sound of lovers in love." To engaged couples the whole world is seen through the romantic glasses. Life's obligations seem far away. They could spend their days and nights seeing nothing but each other. And for a few days, their honeymoon, this magic is just what could happen.

This wonderful but brief time of honeymooning must end, however, and you will then come home to take your place as a new cell in society. It is within the civil and church community that you will live, work, recreate, raise and educate your young, and serve your Father in Heaven whose children you yourselves are. These communities have their laws and regulations, ready to encircle your married life.

So, you ask: Why so many laws? Why do civil and ecclesial communities make their laws?

The answer, of course, is that both civil and Church society have a vital interest in the family you are beginning: a family which is totally distinct from the families in which you grew



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up. Laws and guidelines have been established to enable you to live your married life to the fullest, to safeguard your best interests, and to assist you in standing on an equal footing alongside the other families of the community and world.

Law's benefits, to mention a few, include protecting your right to privacy as husband and wife, and giving you special privileges such as social security, income tax exemptions, reduced insurance rates, and so forth.

The first thing to do, once you have decided to marry, is to contact the priest with whom you'll be working. Normally, he is the pastor of the bride. With him you can arrange the date of your wedding, and determine what instructions and documents will be needed.

One of the first things he will mention will be the Pre-Cana Conferences. You will be asked to attend this four-session series of instructions for engaged couples, and he will give you a copy of the diocesan Pre-Cana Conference schedule. From these sessions you will derive, together with all the engaged couples who attend with you, a deeper and richer understanding of the vocation of matrimony that soon is to be yours. Pre-Cana is an important step in your preparation for that vocation.

Should you wish to be married by someone other than the bride's pastor — and occasionally this can happen — discuss the matter with the pastor.

You will need a recently-issued copy of your baptismal record — one issued within the previous six months. If the church of your wedding is also the church of your baptism, such a record is already on file. If the church of your baptism is some other, writing or calling the respective rectory will be all that is needed to have a copy of the record sent to you.

The priest will speak to you and your fiancée together, as well as alone. This will give you the opportunity to answer his questions without restraint. Incidentally, this offers an excellent occasion for you to do a little talking or asking yourself. Don't be afraid to ask him about any doubts or anxieties you may have. Besides his being knowledgeable in matters of church law and morals, the well-informed priest can also refer you to a good physician, a competent financial adviser, or a CFM group. He has had a great deal of experience in helping young couples, and he is happy to help you.

Engaged couples of different denominations should discuss the mixed marriage matter freely. The subject cannot be overlooked in the hope that it will never cause any problems.

It is a basic right that a human being marry whomever he wishes, even though this may cause difficulties; and the Church respects this right by not refusing its dispensation when a mixed-marriage in church is requested.

But, because marriage is a Sacrament, the Church does have the right to intervene for the welfare of the faith of those involved, if anything should be present which would be in conflict with her teaching and mission.

In Your Marriage Plans

Whether your fiancée be a Christian of some church other than Catholic, or be of some non-Christian faith (e.g. a Jew or a Moslem) she (he) will be asked not to put any obstacles in the way of your practicing your Catholic faith, or your passing on that same faith to your children.

Obviously it is far better to marry someone whose faith and its expression, and whose values parallel your own; yet your freedom is always respected when it comes to choosing a life's partner. Should you choose someone of another faith, difficulties could arise that become centralized in the child, and it is to preclude religion's being a source of irritation that the priest will go with you into the brief course called "Mixed-Marriage Instructions" — a "bird's-eye view" of Catholic belief and practices — for the benefit of you both, but especially of your fiancée.

Within the Catholic church there are many "rites". The majority of Catholics belong to the Roman rite and are known as Roman Catholics. Some rites have a very small representation in North America, but one rite is well represented here in the Rochester diocese: the Ukrainian-Byzantine rite.

Church law states that should a marriage be an "inter-ritual" or mixed-rite marriage, the wedding should take place in the parish and rite of the groom. (In this diocese we have four such Eastern Rite churches: Sts. Peter and Paul, in Auburn; Christ the King, in Bath; St. Nicholas, in Elmira Heights; and St. Josaphat's, in Rochester.)

Each parish has its own customs and regulations, and those of one parish could well be different from the parish in the next neighborhood. Questions about such things as photographers, flowers or confetti should be discussed with the pastor.

Civil law that will be of most concern to you as your wedding day draws near will be twofold: the blood test and the civil license.

The blood test can be taken care of in any doctor's office. (Yes, there is a needle involved!) If you wish, both you and your fiancée can make an appointment together — for moral support. In a couple of days you'll receive a "blood test certificate" which must be presented to the city or county clerk from whom you obtain your civil marriage license.

The civil license is valid for a period of 60 days from the date of issuance. To obtain the license you'll need to provide proof of age, present the blood test certificate, and pay a small fee for registering the license. (Anyone under legal age must have parental-permission to marry.)

After the civil license has been issued, a full 24 hours must elapse before the license is valid (can be used). Once valid, it remains such for 60 days, and your wedding would, of course, take place within this time. The reverse side of your civil license will be filled in by the priest who officiates at your wedding, and he will return it to the office of issuance. (He will give you a church Wedding Certificate, however, which is a good thing to take along with you on your honeymoon, should anyone ask questions.)

This covers, in brief, civil and Church laws you will be encountering on your way to the altar. The priest helping you to prepare for your wedding day will provide greater detail.

Laws you live by will help your marriage be all that God, your groom or bride, and yourself hope it will be and want it to be.

Take Time to Pray

Married couples find occasion for conjugal prayer at various times in their lives. Some couples have the practice of regularly praying a litany of gratitude to God for the blessing of their married life.

Conjugal prayer becomes very practical in the lives of those who have the practice of always kneeling down together at the end of a day which may have been disrupted by disagreement or arguments. On their knees they ask forgiveness of each other and of their God before they begin another day. This is but living out the command of Christ of not letting the sun set on one's anger.

Samples of conjugal prayer can be found in a booklet published by the Cana Conference of Chicago, "Prayers for the Family." It includes the "Litany for a Christian Home" which is especially striking:

"O Father in Heaven, we thank you for our home, our food, our health, and for all who dwell here. . . . We thank you, dear Father. . . ."

"That with honesty and cheerfulness, with bravery and truth, we may be quick and ready to help each other in each day's work and cares. . . . We pray, dear Jesus. . . ."

"For the constant support of our Holy Church in all the world; for the assurance of graces given and the promise of eternal peace. . . . We thank you, O God, our Father. . . ."

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