

Priests Talk About Out-of-Church Weddings

By BARBARA MOYNEHAN

The Church's views on holding marriage ceremonies in places other than a church seem to be changing.

The diocese's official stand on park or garden weddings is that of the National Conference of Bishops, which states: if the marriage is of two Catholics the wedding must be in a Catholic church, and if the marriage involves a Protestant and Catholic, a special dispensation may be granted for the wedding to be held in a Protestant church.

In short, the rule is "a Catholic Church or other sacred place" and that is where the trouble comes in — defining a "sacred place."

When 10 diocesan priests were asked recently for their feelings on outdoor weddings, and the practice of young couples writing their own vows, seven were against weddings outside churches and all accepted individual vows as long as fidelity and till-death clauses were included in the contract.

Feelings on outside weddings range from opposition, expressed by Father William G. Charbonneau, pastor of St. Mary's, Ganandaigua, to the approval Father David Callan, Cornell University chaplain, offered.

Father Charbonneau said weddings should be "solemnized" and explained that by saying, "It is a public act of worship. Marriage should be before the Christian community. It is not private, the bride and groom are members of a Christian family. It is a social sacrament so it should be performed in church."

Father Callan, who reported that out of 30 weddings per-

formed each at Cornell, where there is no Catholic chapel, about 10 are held in the campus courtyards and gardens, said that when a young couple decides to have a wedding out-of-doors it is not necessarily an anti-Church move.

"They feel God and the Church can be just as present in a setting of nature as in a religious building," the chaplain said.

Father James F. Slattery, pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace, called the removal of weddings from the church setting, the "secularization of the sacrament."

Msgr. Joseph J. Sullivan, pastor of Holy Family in Auburn, says he is "basically agin" holding weddings outside the church, unless there is a very good reason.

"We've gone too far, having Mass in the school auditorium," Msgr. Sullivan continued, explaining, "I favor coming to the altar of God."

Like all but four of the priests interviewed, Father John S. Hayes, pastor of St. Patrick's, Aurora, and co-ordinator of Cayuga-Seneca region, has never been asked to perform a wedding outside.

But Father Hayes said he would if he were asked. "We are in the day of laity's influence in the Church," he explained, "and certainly we want to respect their wishes if it is in the perimeter of the law."

Father James Marvin, pastor of St. Ambrose and president of the Priests' Council, said he is "not much for weddings in parks and woods."

He feels there is a possibility for a change of the Church's

ruling on this, but personally feels, "The Church is the place for weddings. If it is a sacrament it should be held before the Blessed Sacrament," he continued. "It is a continuation of other sacraments, of the sacramental life; so it is better to be in a house of worship."

Father Thomas H. Wheeland of Sacred Heart Cathedral cited a problem which he thought was unique, but is really the crux of the whole matter.

"Our problem is the other way around," he said when asked about requests for out-of-door weddings. The problem is, he continued, "people who don't attend church regularly but want to be married in a nice church building. They don't seem to have

belief in the Church other than the building, and they have a very poor concept of the sacrament."

The couple's understanding of and commitment to the sacrament of matrimony is a problem area. How does a priest discern their feelings on the Church and the sacrament? It is a problem facing priests who don't want to be hypocritical in performing the ceremony, according to Father Robert Kreckel, pastor of the Church of the Resurrection.

Father Gerald J. Appleby, Rochester Institute of Technology chaplain and director of the division of Campus Ministry, joined Father Callan's viewpoint, saying he could concede that couples are not

necessarily anti-Church if they want their wedding outside. Father Appleby put his feelings simply when he said, "God's house comes in many different forms and not within four walls."

Father Henry Adamski, pastor of St. Casimir's, Elmira, and Schuyler-Chemung regional co-ordinator, agreed with the explanation offered by Father John P. Norris, pastor of Blessed Sacrament.

"Weddings outside a church are beyond the law of the Church and I wholeheartedly agree," said Father Norris. "Marriage as we deal with it is a sacrament and should be in the edifice of the Church where other sacraments are performed, even though God is everywhere."

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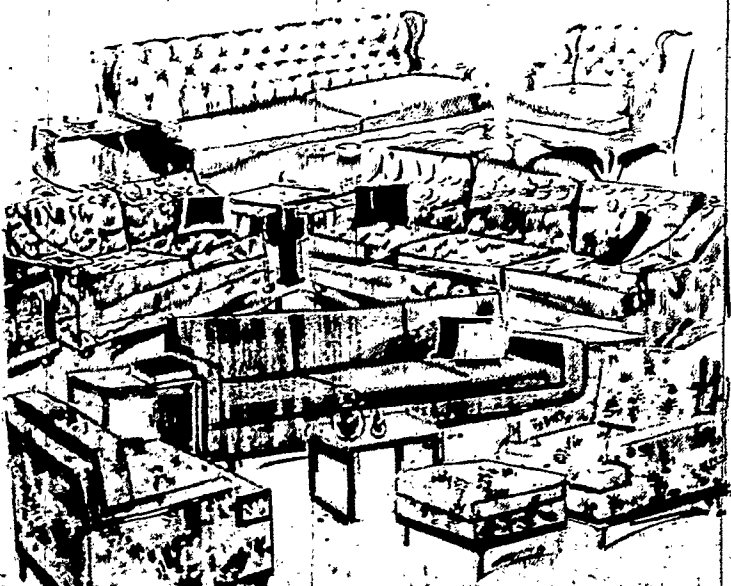
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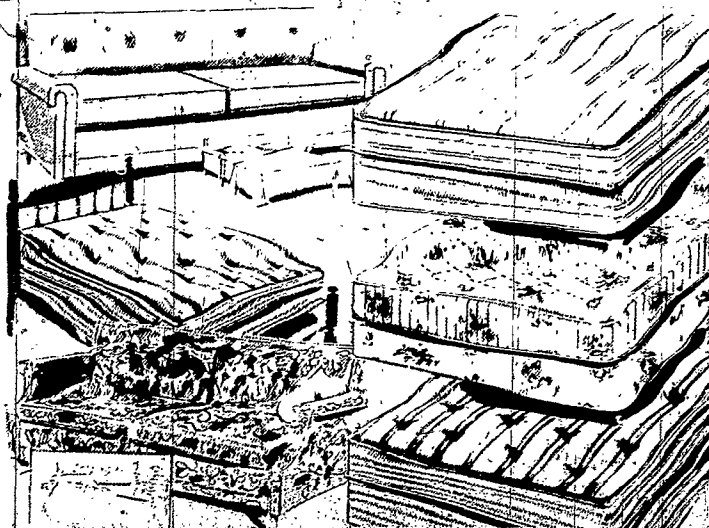
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