

From 13A

During such conversations, the priest or deacon could assist the couple in assessing their readiness for marriage, and thereby help them enter the sacrament in a realistic manner. He could also ascertain whether the couple shares the Catholic Church's vision of the goals and purposes of marriage.

II. DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH

The Church has the deep conviction that marriage is a dynamic reality which should grow and deepen through constant communications.

The Vatican Council defines marriage as an "intimate partnership . . . established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent." (Gaudium et Spes. No. 48). In the practical order, the basis of this intimate partnership is conjugal love, which the Council and *Humanae Vitae* describes as "human", "total", "faithful and exclusive and fruitful."

"Yet the excellence of this institution is not everywhere reflected with equal brilliance . . . serious disturbances are caused in families by modern economic conditions, by influences at once social and psychological and by the demands of civil society. All these situations have produced anxious consciences. Yet, the power and strength of the institution of marriage and family can also be seen in the fact that time and again, despite the difficulties produced, the profound changes in modern society reveal the true character of this institution in one way or another." (Gaudium et Spes. No. 47)

III. COUNSELING GOALS

The witnessing priest or deacon should endeavor to build relationship with each couple so that he can help them see their marriage in a realistic light. He should promote self-evaluation as regards love, security, self-esteem, creativity, communication, interpersonal relationships, companionship and independence.

The witnessing priest or deacon as counselor has the joint responsibility with the Pre-Cana Conference to help the couple:

1. understand themselves as persons and what they bring to marriage as individuals;
2. examine their motives for wanting to marry;
3. clarify role expectations and consider the personal adjustment that marriage demands;
4. explore the faith-dimension of marriage;
5. learn to communicate and give them insights in the area of problem-solving;
6. explore any unusual circumstances present in their relationship, eg. differences in religion, age, ethnic background, physical handicaps, etc;
7. evaluate the degree of readiness of each couple, noting their maturity to cope with the realities of marriage.

IV. PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

The witnessing priest should be sen-

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sitive to the needs of couples beginning a new vocation in life. He should envision this as an opportunity to bring couples back to the practice of their faith.

1. The Sacrament of Marriage should receive as intense a preparation, if not more than other sacraments, eg. First Communion, First Penance and Confirmation. Liturgically and theologically, the priest is best qualified to prepare the couple. Practically, married couples are ideally suited to prepare engaged couples for marriage.

2. The witnessing priest should be aware of programs for engaged couples available from the Office of Family Life. The proper Pre-Cana may then be assigned to fill the couple's needs, eg.

1. teenage program (under 18)
2. regular Pre-Cana
 - a. all day sessions
 - b. two day sessions
 - c. four day sessions
3. specialized counseling by trained personnel
4. one-to-one sessions

3. Pre-Cana Conference must be attended whenever possible (not when convenient). It is the duty of the priest to give the couples an intelligent explanation of these conferences. He should explain the areas of concern that will be discussed: exploring their differences, communication, sexuality, responsible parenthood, finances, family life, liturgy, marriage spirituality and the problems arising from mixed religion. N.B. If for any serious reason the couple cannot attend Pre-Cana Conferences, it is the witnessing priest's obligation to give these instructions.

V. EXCEPTIONAL CASES

During the process of preparation, the witnessing priest may feel that some real difficulty could exist. Some situations which may indicate this could include:

1. Immature approach to marriage possibly due to:
 - a. age of either or both the partners.
 - b. incompatibility — an apparent poor relationship where there is belittling of the future partner or complete insensitivity to the other's needs.
 - c. lack of awareness of the realities of marriage.
2. Pregnancy — If there was no pregnancy, would they want to marry at this time, or at all?
3. Poor home situation — Is one or both of the partners merely seeking an escape?
4. Lack of Faith Commitment —

Are they asking to be married in Church (the building) or in Christ (the sacrament)?

5. Recommendation of a Pre-Cana team couple that this couple appears to need additional preparation or pre-marital counseling.

In this process of preparation the witnessing priest is not acting as a professional marriage counselor. However, this process is a serious preparation involving a determination of a couple's readiness for marriage.

VI. PROCEDURE

If the priest should determine in his evaluation that some serious difficulty exists he should:

1. Require additional visits to determine more fully the couple's readiness for marriage.
2. If the couple attended Pre-Cana, seek some evaluation from the team couple involved with them.
3. Possibly refer the couple either to Catholic Family Center or to another agency for further evaluation. In this case he should request permission for release of an evaluation from the couple.
4. Re-evaluate his position regarding the advisability of the marriage.
5. Consult the bishop's regional delegate for a final judgment regarding the couple's readiness to contract a sacramental marriage.

If a priest cannot, in good conscience, assist in the marriage, he should so advise the couple and encourage them to re-evaluate their own decision and readiness for marriage and to possibly seek additional counseling.

VII. CANONICAL CONSIDERATION

The right to marry is a natural right of high priority although not without restrictions. These can be imposed by Church or State where serious cases are found that conflict with Christian Revelation or pose a threat to the common good. The Church recognizes (Canon 1067) that most of its members are called to a sacramental marriage and restricts marriages to those males over 16 and females over 14 (Canon 1067):

Marriage requires a certain minimum level of maturity to fulfill the moral, spiritual, sexual, familial, financial and social responsibilities. Lack of any of the above qualities raises serious doubt about the ability to enter into a covenant of which they are incapable of fulfilling. In some cases there may be disagreement between the individuals

and the Church, but the Church has a serious responsibility to weigh heavily the commitment of the individual to each other and to the Church itself.

At times the Bishop or his delegate can temporarily postpone a marriage for a just cause and for as long as such cause continues (Canon 1039, para. 1) in order that a better understanding of an indissoluble sacramental marriage be brought about.

VIII. INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

The Church is concerned that every man and woman entering marriage make the proper preparations and receive basic meaningful instructions for success in their life together. Because of circumstances and problems of interfaith marriages, there may be greater need that the couple attain "perfect union of mind and a full communion of life in their Catholic marriage."

From a pastoral viewpoint, those who receive the couple should realize that each couple is unique and should be received with kindness and understanding. A thoughtful realistic dialogue should be entered into to discover the religious attitudes and convictions about marriage, as well as the relationship each has with the Church (faith, prayer and practice). Insights should be gained regarding the attitudes of each, regarding each other's faith, about parenthood, and about the religion of the children of the marriage. The conversation should also include the expectations of the couple about the ceremony or celebration of marriage. Frank and mutual respectful dialogue will give insights into the convictions and values that each has for marriage — their marriage. If there are serious basic conflicts assuring instability, it may be justifiable to advise against the marriage, only after the couple consults with the Office of Family Life.

Three areas of special concern:

1. The dispensation
2. Canonical Form
3. Liturgical Celebration

THE DISPENSATION

The Church wants the couple to know and respect one another's beliefs and considers itself obliged by divine law to require the Catholic party to promise to do all in his power to rear his children in the Catholic faith. The priest should not only state the requirement, but should also reassure the non-Catholic that the purpose of the Catholic education of the children is true Christian formation.

The Catholic party "requests a dispensation from the Bishop to enter a mixed marriage. The Catholic is expected to declare that he or she is ready to remove all dangers of falling away from the faith and must also promise to do all in his or her power to have all children baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith." These promises are made by the Catholic, and the non-Catholic, although no longer asked to make the promises, must be informed