

SACRAMENTAL LIFE

life, careers, economics, where to live, goals, sex, children, possible problems, etc.

II. COMMITTED TO SUCCEED

The strong intention to "make it work" has, in most longitudinal studies, been one of the most consistent predictors of marital success. You will be able to determine this if the couple has constructive answers to such questions as, "What would you do if several years from now your relationship ran into serious, unforeseen problems?" or, "Can you see yourself sacrificing some of your freedom, ambitions, or interests to make your marriage work?"

III. SELF-INSIGHT

Do each of the partners have the capacity to reflect on their basic personality traits, and is each aware of how he or she functions in and responds to stress, disappointment, confusion, etc.? You will be able to determine this if they give sensible, thoughtful answers to such questions as, "What do you believe is your greatest weakness and/or strength as a marriage partner?" You will also be able to determine this if you see evidence that they have learned from previous mistakes and do not repeat these mistakes over and over again.

IV. COMMUNICATION

Do they consider communication important? Do they have some skills in communication? Do they take time to communicate with one another?

You will be able to determine this if they have developed enough mutual trust to begin to reveal some of their fears, weaknesses, and dreams to each other. The quality of their exchange with one another during the interview will also help you determine how they communicate.

V. OPENNESS TO THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF MARRIAGE

You will be able to determine this when:

- they themselves make the decision to have a church wedding and view it as something more than a social custom;
- they provide the beginnings of an acceptable answer to the question "how in your view, does religious (sacramental) marriage differ from others?"
- they are reasonably conscientious in the practice of their faith; and
- they seem sincerely open to using the occasion of their marriage as a new start if they have neglected their faith life in the past.

VI. SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

A sense of responsibility in the couple will be evidenced by the following:

- ability to accept the consequences of their actions and decisions;
- direction of their work, careers, or school plans, as opposed to drifting, confusion, and a record spotted with frequent job changes;
- ability to finish what they start;
- no major tendencies to blame others for their problems and failures;
- involvement in civic, charitable, or volunteer activities; and
- concern for liturgy that would be meaningful to their parents, relatives and elders, as well as their peers.

VII. LOVE AND CAPACITY FOR INTIMACY

Love and the capacity for intimacy will be evidenced by the following:

- warmth, concern, humor, positive interplay, and display of respect, empathy, compassion, and willingness to enter the other's world and let the other in theirs; and
- a minimal amount of self-centeredness and tendency to carry the discussion on the relationship and marriage.

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Appendix III: Special Circumstances

A successful marriage requires that a couple be mature, responsible, and free to enter this union. Christian marriage, in particular, requires an acceptance of the dimension of faith within the shared life of the couple. Each couple is unique. There is no single infallible standard by which one can judge a couple's readiness for marriage or guarantee the success of that marriage. However, circumstances may be present which indicate a need for special consideration and/or resolution before a decision to marry can be finalized.

If the parish priest/deacon cannot, in good conscience, assist at a marriage, he must so advise the couple, and, being sensitive to their predicament, encourage them to evaluate their decision to marry. This will be very disappointing, and particular sensitivity on the part of the parish priest/deacon is critical.

The following are considered special circumstances. The

process of dealing with each circumstance is described. Any doubts on the part of the priest/deacon on how to proceed in any of these special circumstances should be referred to the regional delegate or directly to the appropriate office of the Pastoral Center.

I. SERIOUS LACK OF MATURITY

Immaturity is narcissistic in nature. It is characterized by lack of self-control, dependency, lack of consideration of others' rights and feelings, inability to defer gratification, tendency to manipulate others for one's personal satisfaction, and living by emotion rather than reason.

In contrast, the mature person recognizes the interdependence among persons, lives by personal convictions, responds consistently to persons and life-circumstances with behavior governed by reason and consideration for all involved. A distinguishing characteristic separating the mature from the immature is the ability to love, a love that is understood as concern for the life and growth of the one loved.

If, after assessing readiness for marriage (see Appendix II), a couple is found to be seriously lacking in maturity, it may require:

- additional sessions with parish priest/deacon
- additional sessions with the couple's parents
- referral to appropriate counseling services and these may thus delay marriage in the Church at this time.

The couple always has the right to a second opinion of their readiness to marry.

II. UNWILLINGNESS TO PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT

The priest/deacon ought to distinguish carefully between a couple's exaggerated preoccupation with the secondary details of marriage preparation (clothing, parties, decorations, photos, and so on), and their reluctance or open hostility to the sacramental preparation you suggest.

The first can be dealt with by a gentle reminder of the seriousness of the marriage covenant in the eyes of Christ and His Church. Stress how Christ and the Church have a personal concern that they have a happy and successful marriage. Any lifelong commitment requires serious preparation.

The second case is a serious defect, and additional effort on the part of the priest/deacon is in order to determine the presence of sufficient faith (see the next section). After encouraging them to grow in their awareness of how Christ wants to share His life with them in a special way — through the sacramental embrace of husband and wife — leave them to make the decision: accept Church preparation or no Church wedding.

III. LACK OF OPENNESS OF FAITH

Celebration of the sacrament of Marriage in the Church presupposes faith. While it is not the desire of the Church to bar persons from the sacraments or to reserve the sacraments solely to an elite, a minimal faith response is required.

To help guide an assessment of faith, the following elements of a Catholic Christian life-style are listed:

- acceptance of the doctrine of the creed
- regular sharing in the worship of the Church
- personal prayer life
- concern to show charity to others
- a life-style influenced by belief in the Lord Jesus and a commitment to the way of life to which He invites us.

Another approach may be to look for valid answers to the question: "why do you want to be married in the Church?"

Further sessions with the couple and the priest/deacon may be required before an adequate determination can be made. Consulting parents or other relatives may be beneficial also.

IV. MARRIAGE INVOLVING TEENAGERS (18 years old and under)

A great deal of pastoral concern must be used in ministering to teenage engaged couples. It is well-known that early marriages, that is, those of couples eighteen and under, have little or no chance of success. Care should be taken to gain the confidence of the engaged couples and to look upon their love in a positive way. It is important to give serious consideration to their intentions and not ridicule their age. The young couple should be led to understand that the care which is given to the study of their plans is not meant to create difficulties for them. Its purpose is to assure, as far as possible, that their union and their love will be lasting and to protect them against irreparable mistakes.

Marriage entails serious responsibilities, and therefore, requires a certain minimum of maturity to fulfill those responsibilities (see above). Anyone who does not give positive indications of possessing this minimal maturity is precluded by the natural law from marrying since no one has a right to enter a contract which he/she is incapable of fulfilling. Insistence on capability by one or another of the couple does not relieve the Church of the right and obligation to make its own judgment in the individual case.

"The pastor shall earnestly counsel young people under the age of twenty-one not to contract marriage without the knowledge of their parents or against their reasonable objections." (Canon 1034)

This circumstance **REQUIRES:**

- A. Additional sessions with the parish priest/deacon:

- 1) to interview the engaged couple and out the Investigation de Statu Liberatis Partium;
- 2) to indicate his own appraisal of the contemplated marriage on the back page of the Investigation having in view the stability of the future union, the spiritual welfare and dispositions of the couple, as well as their ability to assume the responsibilities of marriage;

- 3) to review with engaged couples the results of these interviews, the Teenage Staff Council's Evaluation (see below), and the judgment of the Bishop's delegate regarding the case.

B. Additional session with the parents of the engaged couple and the parish priest/deacon:

- 1) to ascertain the views of the parents regarding the contemplated marriage;
- 2) to complete the Affidavit for Parents (or Guardians) of a Minor.

C. Contact the Family Life Office to make arrangements for a special Teenage Marriage Preparation Program with one of the teenage staff couples

or Refer the engaged couple to the nearest Teenage Pre-Marriage Counseling Program listed in the Pre-Cana schedule — for a maturity evaluation.

- D. Send the completed forms to the regional delegate of the Bishop, who will send a letter in return containing the judgment. (The regional delegates' names are available from either the Family Life Office, or the Bishop's Office.)

This circumstance **MAY REQUIRE:**

- A. Referral to other professional counselors for additional counseling;
- B. Pastoral care in ministering to the engaged couple when a negative judgment is reached by the Bishop's delegate;
- C. If the couple is refused, suggestions should be made by the priest/deacon as to what the engaged couple should do so that a marriage can be planned for the future.

V. PREGNANCY

Special care must be taken to help the couple, engaged or not, to consider the motivation for marriage in light of the pregnancy. Pregnancy of itself is not to be considered the determining factor in proceeding with or delaying a marriage.

This circumstance **REQUIRES:**

- A. Additional sessions with the parish priest/deacon:
 - 1) to ascertain whether or not the pregnancy is the sole reason for marriage;
 - 2) to help the couple to review or consider alternatives to marriage if the above is true;
 - 3) to insure adequate preparation for these couples, if the pregnancy is not the motivating factor for marriage: (Sensitivity ought to be shown to obviously pregnant couples, especially in attendance at marriage preparation sessions with other couples. The Office of Family Life will arrange a couple-to-couple Pre-Cana for such cases.)
 - 4) to determine parental influence upon the decision;
 - 5) to discuss readiness to accept the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood — emotional, intellectual, financial and spiritual.

This circumstance **MAY REQUIRE:**

- A. Additional sessions with the couple's parents;
- B. Additional sessions with other counselors and/or agencies such as the Catholic Family Center or other diocesan-approved alternatives.

VI. MARRIAGE BETWEEN A BAPTIZED CATHOLIC AND A BAPTIZED PERSON OF ANOTHER CHRISTIAN COMMUNION OR A NON-BAPTIZED PERSON

Before entering such marriages in the Catholic Church, certain procedures must be fulfilled, and care must be taken for the sensitivities of all the parties involved.

This circumstance **REQUIRES:**

- A. Additional sessions with the parish priest/deacon:
 - 1) to reach a realistic appraisal of the faith commitment of each of the parties;
 - 2) to instruct the parties on the purposes and essential properties of marriage;
 - 3) to emphasize the special pressures which such a marriage will experience;
 - 4) to receive the promise of the Catholic party to do all in his/her power to give the children the Catholic faith, including Baptism;
 - 5) to inform the party who is not Catholic of the Catholic's responsibility in the faith of the children.
- B. Application for a dispensation from "Mixed Religion" (baptized Christians) OR from "Disparity of Cult" (one not baptized) is sent to the Pastoral Office.

This circumstance **MAY REQUIRE:**

- A. Application for a dispensation from Canonical Form, sent to the Pastoral Office. (Marriage to take place before a minister or clergyman of another faith not Catholic; and where the Catholic priest may be present).
- B. Permission, for the marriage to take place in a house of worship which is not a Catholic church, obtained from the Pastoral Office.

In the situation of the marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person, the rite outlined in Chapter III, #55-66 of The Rite of Marriage is used.

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