

Marriage after an Annulment

Hugh and Corita O'Brien met at the University of Notre Dame in 1976. They were divorced Catholics attending a national conference. In each case, a first marriage had been annulled by the Church. Neither was looking for a new spouse.

Through Catholic support groups in Philadelphia and northern Virginia, they had worked through much of the grief following their divorces and they felt good about their new, single lives. Their friendship deepened quickly, however, and with it the thought of risking marriage. Their wedding in 1979 was

very joyful. Corita's three children and Hugh's three daughters all participated. The bride and groom were more excited than many 15-year-olds on their first date. Two years later Corita gave birth to a son.

People like Hugh and Corita marry with the Church's blessing. An annulment has found that their earlier marriages were not Christian marriages. The annulment allows them to try again to find marital happiness.

But these marriages are raising a new pastoral challenge for the Church

community. How do we prepare such couples for their union? How do we assess readiness for the marriage? How do we help couples foresee some of the unique challenges ahead?

Counselors and pastors are focusing on four main considerations:

1. Have people really recovered and grieved and distanced themselves from the anger, the sadness, the upset that led to the annulment?

A psychiatrist friend suggests that these couples are only ready to marry when they realize how much it is going to cost them. Marriage

will bring many wonderful benefits - but what about the independence and freedom which must be sacrificed?

Researchers agree that it takes the average person three to five years to recover after a divorce. Yet half of the divorced remarry within three years.

In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau expects 40 percent of new second marriages to eventually end in divorce, and the single reason cited for this high failure rate is the so-called "rebounding effect," i.e., getting into a marriage before one has built a self-sustaining, single life.

2. How do these couples put together a "blended" family? Corita brought her three children into marriage with Hugh and later they added their own son.

Some say children never cause a divorce the first time, but they often do a second time. If children are unhappy about the marriage and don't like their new stepparent, or if the difficult issues of personal space, money and discipline create disagreement and tension, a marriage may crumble under the strain.

Blending families requires solid information, through skills for negotiating difference and lots of patience.

3. How does the couple work through questions about what makes this marriage different from the marriage that was annulled? Couples need to talk early and often about possible areas of conflict, priorities and values, assuming that

love will conquer all can be a disastrous mistake.

Support groups of couples in the same situation are helping couples work through some common adjustment problems with others in the same situation.

4. Finally, what about the larger family relationships? These marriages can produce four sets of grandparents, innumerable aunts and uncles and cousins. Different children have different relationships with these people.

Winning family support for the marriage is more important in the long run than often is thought at first. Sometimes couples marry without consulting parents and relatives. This can cause

strain in family relationships. "You and me against the world" doesn't last very long, since everyone needs kinship support both in good times and in troubled times.

On top of these special questions, there are all the ordinary questions that face any couple; finances, sexuality, communication, lifestyle, career, leisure.

It is no wonder that couples marrying after an annulment seem eager and grateful to part of the new preparation programs currently being offered in 16 U.S. dioceses.

Hugh and Corita have married beautifully, but not without a lot of prayer and hard work.

Commitment Renewal Necessary

By Frank and Sue Staropoli
Coordinators
Family Life Office

Climbing divorce rates, continual stresses from social and economic forces of change, and alternative lifestyles have raised questions in many circles about the viability of the family in the future of this society. Some have predicted the death of the family. But as Michael Novak, theological essayist, has written, "Choosing family life today is an act of courage and intelligence... marriage and family still express our highest moral ideals."

We salute you for your courage and intelligence, and make of all for your desire to make a commitment to each other, to God and to the

Church in an age where such promises are seen as unnecessary, passe. We know the love you have for each other - so vibrant and alive now - is a cherished possession. We also know, as you must, that after the honeymoon that love will need to be constantly nourished and reaffirmed because it will be tested.

Your husband or wife and the faith you share must be number one. Build your lives around that relationship, and don't allow anything to take precedence - not jobs, or education, or friends, or even in-laws. Celebrate and renew that bond of love often. Work to keep it fresh and alive, because when you don't it doesn't stay fresh - it withers, slowly but surely.

Finally, know that the

Church is always ready to support you, and to accept your support. There are programs in many parishes throughout the diocese to help you discover how to live the sacrament you will celebrate soon. We want to be a source of inspiration, hope, encouragement, and healing for you when you need it. We also want you to share with us the freshness and excitement of your marriage. You can be inspirational for so many couples who may have lost some of the glow you radiate.

So keep in touch, for our sake and yours. Become involved from the beginning in your parish. Learn about programs offered by the Family Life Office at (716) 436-5450.

Give a Thought To Wedding Guests

Many guests at a wedding feel uncomfortable and a little awkward as they watch everyone else to see when to stand, sit, or even kneel. The trend recently is to prepare a personalized booklet or a simple program for the guests to follow.

At the Pre-Cana classes couples are given books that have a selection of prayers for all parts of the Mass. The bride and groom sit down together and produce the liturgy for their wedding. After this is done a missalette or program can be prepared with the couples' personal choices - including the names of the musical selections they wish to use at appropriate places in the ceremony. A page of the booklet is usually dedicated to the wedding party, including acknowledgment of the vocalist, organist and the person who presided at the wedding.

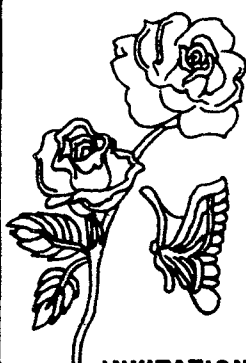
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