

## PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE, MARRIED LIFE AND FAMILY

- Rev. Dr. M. John Diraviam

### Introduction:

A well planned parochial and diocesan preparation for marriage and married life, is of great importance for the good of the church today. Without this well planned and executed preparation, the marital life of young couple is under attack. The sacrament of Marriage has great and immediate impact on the spouses, *a man and a woman*<sup>1</sup>, who establish themselves a partnership of whole life, *consortium totius vitae* (c. 1055), and whose decision plays a vital role in their marital journey. Consequently the spouses' destinies are intertwined "in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health."<sup>2</sup> In the past, this preparation enjoyed the support of society which recognized the values and benefits of marriage, due to which without any difficulty or doubt, the Church protected the sanctity of marriage in its Christian character (c.1063). As GS states "at least in the communities that were truly evangelized, the Church's support was solid, unitary and compact. In general, separations and marriage failures were rare, and divorce<sup>3</sup> was considered a social "plague"<sup>3</sup>.

What was considered earlier a mere western phenomenon, today is found, in our Indian church too; in many marriage cases, the ecclesial tribunals are witnessing an accentuated deterioration of the family and a certain corrosion of the values of marriage. Dowry, caste system, undue parental influence in decision making, the easy access of mass-media, technological advancement, bulky salary, women employment etc. have begun to attack the sanctity of marriage and its properties,

---

<sup>1</sup> There is a growing voice among the theologians, cardinals and bishops to redefine the definition of marriage. The Catholic Church in the Flemish part of Belgium published a 3 page document on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022 called "Being Pastorally Close to Homosexuals – For a Welcoming Church that Excludes No One". It became the first in the world to officially allow LGBT Catholics to celebrate their relationship with a ceremony in church. Cfr: [https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/celebrating-gay-relationships-in-church-is-actually-quite-catholic/16653?utm\\_source=UCAN&utm\\_campaign=From-our-partners&utm\\_medium](https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/celebrating-gay-relationships-in-church-is-actually-quite-catholic/16653?utm_source=UCAN&utm_campaign=From-our-partners&utm_medium); See also 'The new Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage', 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022, Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, Vatican; [www.family.va](http://www.family.va). 20, August 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Rite of Marriage, no. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr., *Gaudium et spes* = GS, no. 47.

unity and indissolubility (c. 1056). The once docile women partners in marriage are now determined to live single due to their employment if there were to arise any rift in their marriage. Girls' parents are connive at this separation and thus young couple's marriage is easily broken. In the economically developed western world, the number of marriages has decreased. Marriage is usually contracted at a later age and the number of divorces and separations is increasing, even during the first years of married life. Our Indian tribunals as well are not spared from the plethora of petitions poured out for annulment even before the completion of their first wedding anniversary. More than the civil society, the evils of Divorce, sexual freedom and single state of life affect in particular the innocent children of the broken families. Having strangled of their normal growth in a healthy family, which in fact forms the children in their all-round growth, Christian faith and development, the innocent children of such families are affected in their affective, educational, psychological and societal growth.

This global and Indian scenario inevitably leads to a pastoral concern that the church faces with: Are the persons contracting marriage really prepared for marriage and the married life? Do the episcopal conferences, dioceses and parishes have a permanent structure for marriage preparation? Does a parish priest of the couple really prepare the engaged for the sacrament of marriage? Does the marriage preparation course involve experts of different fields, *i.e.*, canonists, medical persons, counsellors, female religious, elderly couple etc., so that with an all-round teaching on marriage is given to the couple and thus they are prepared for their christinan marital life!

In fact the importance of marriage preparation involves a process of evangelization which is both maturation and deepening of faith. If the faith of the couple is weak or almost non-existent<sup>4</sup> it must be revived. At a situation of disparity of cult and mixed marriages (c.1125), a thorough catechetical preparation based on the Word of God and the Teachings of the *magisterium* is advisable to offer a "journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate"<sup>5</sup> and a presentation of the fundamental Christian

---

<sup>4</sup> Cfr., *Familiaris consortio* = FC no. 68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 66.

truths that may help acquire or strengthen the maturity of the faith of the persons contracting marriage.

In this background we will have an in-depth study on various aspects of marriage preparation which has been made mandatory by the 1996 Decree of the pontifical council for family<sup>6</sup>. This study will focus on CIC Cc. 1063-1072, CCEO C. 783, CCC, no, 1632 in the light of the above mentioned document of the pontifical council for family. Other curial documents also will be highlighted especially the *Magnacarta* for Families, the Apostolic Exhortation of St. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*. This paper consists the following of five parts: I. Pastoral Care for the Celebration of Marriage. II. The Sacramental Preparation for Marriage III. Continual Pastoral Care after Marriage IV. Prerequisites for a valid and lawful Celebration of Marriage V. Publications of Banns and enquiry for Marriage VI. The permission of the local ordinary for marriage.

### **I. PASTORAL CARE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE:**

The second Vatican council fathers identified "polygamy, the plague of divorce, so called free love, and similar blemishes"<sup>7</sup> as the urgent problems that threatened the church in the modern world that time. The number of persons is increasing who ignore or reject the riches of marriage with a form of mistrust that goes so far as to doubt or reject its goods and values<sup>8</sup>. As the council fathers identified, a secularized atmosphere has been spreading in different parts of the world which *especially* affects young people and subjects them to the pressure of a secularized environment in which one ends up losing the meaning of God and consequently the deep meaning of spousal love and the family as well. The negation of God in its different forms often includes the rejection of the institutions and structures which are part of God's plan, and which have been laid down since Creation (cf. *Matthew* 19: 3).

---

<sup>6</sup> Guidelines, 13 May 1996, "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage", Pontifical Commission for the Family. Also see "The pastoral Handbook of Bombay Archdiocese", Bishop's House, Mumbai.

<sup>7</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 47b.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 48.

The PCL documents states that in countries where the process of de-Christianization is more prevalent, the disturbing crisis of moral values stands out, in particular, the loss of the identity of marriage and the Christian family and hence the meaning of engagement. In addition to these losses, there is a crisis of values within the family itself to which a climate of widespread and even legalized permissiveness contributes. This is greatly encouraged by the mass media that present contrary models as if they were real values. What seems to be a cultural fabric is formed, offered to the new generations as an alternative to the concept of conjugal life and marriage, its sacramental value, and its links with the Church.<sup>9</sup>

The modern permissive cultures connected with new lifestyles devalue the human dimensions of the contracting parties with disastrous consequences for the family life. These include sexual permissiveness, the decrease in marriages or their continuous postponement, the increase in divorces, the contraceptive mentality, the spread of deliberate abortion, the spiritual void and deep dissatisfaction which contribute to the spread of drugs, alcoholism, violence and suicide among young people and adolescents.

Permissive laws too contribute toward aggravating situation with all their force in forging a mentality that harms families (cf. *EV* 59) with regard to divorce, abortion and sexual freedom. Many means of communication spread a climate of permissiveness and form what seems to be a cultural fabric that impedes young people from their normal growth in the Christian faith, their ties with the Church, and their discovery of the sacramental value of marriage and the requirements derived from its celebration.

As a way to combat against these evil tendencies Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *FC*, urged to prepare a programme for the young people for marriage and family life. He envisioned that the promotion of "better and more intensive programmes of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the

---

<sup>9</sup> PCL, no.12.

difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages"<sup>10</sup>.

In order to safeguard the Christian young couples from those modern evils the young are to be taught with the teachings of the magisterium on marriage and responsible parenthood and education of the children<sup>11</sup>. Thus Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith which does not end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout the couple's family life. Such preparation is to be done in each diocese. Depending upon the local needs and resources different programs such as Pre-Cana programs, Engaged Encounter program, Marriage Counselling etc., can be conducted at diocesan and parochial levels. Marriage preparation courses, are to be conducted regularly in each diocese and vicariate / deanery.

Canon 1063 places the obligation of conducting marriage preparation programme on the pastors of souls. It says that Christian community can be taught to preserve the marital state in a Christian spirit and perfect it further; this will be accomplished through the systematic marriage preparation and the pastoral care of married couple. The PCL document 1996 states that both the bishop and the pastor have to arrange such a programme for their communities at a parochial and diocesan level. All the others are encouraged to participate in this task. John P. Beal says "such participation could be furthered by enlisting the help of married couples, as well as other whose work or expertise would be useful to the couples preparing for marriage (e.g. lawyers, doctors, psychologists, etc.)"<sup>12</sup>

## **II. The Sacramental preparation for marriage:**

Pastor's Role in Marriage Preparation Programs:

a) **Preaching and Catechetical Instruction:** The code obligates that the pastors of the parishes are to instruct the children, adults and the parish community on the meaning of Christian marriage, the role of Christian spouses and parents;<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio (=FC), no. 66.

<sup>11</sup> c. 1055.

<sup>12</sup> Lynda Robitaille, John P. Beal et al. (ed), New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 2004, p.1262.

<sup>13</sup> c. 1063, 1°

b) **Couples' preparation for marriage:** The spouses before entering into marriage are to be prepared personally so that "they are disposed to the holiness and obligations of their new state";<sup>14</sup>

c) **A fruitful celebration of Marriage Liturgy:** The concerned pastors or the one who officiate the wedding are to celebrate the marriage liturgy meaningfully so that the "spouses manifest, and participate in, the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church"<sup>15</sup>

d) **Post marital ongoing programme for spouses:** The pastoral care for the couple is not accomplished fully by the marriage preparation programme alone but it is to be continued for those who have entered marriage so that "by faithfully observing and protecting their conjugal covenant, they may day by day achieve a holier and a fuller family life".<sup>16</sup>

### **Stages of Preparation:**

The starting point for an itinerary of marriage preparation is the awareness that the marriage covenant was taken up and raised to a sacrament of the New Covenant by the Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament unites the spouses to the self-giving love of Christ, the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride (*Ephesians* 5: 25-32) by making them the sharers in this love. The sacrament makes them give praise to the Lord, it sanctifies the conjugal union and the life of the Christian faithful who celebrate it, and gives rise to the Christian family, the domestic church, the "first and living cell of society"<sup>17</sup>.

Marriage is not a private commitment between the two individuals. But as a sacrament it is a commitment before God and the church community. It also involves the good of the community. Therefore marriage is to be highly esteemed by the community. Moreover the whole diocese is to be committed to the marriage preparation and for this reason the 1996 document recommends to establish a diocesan commission for marriage preparation not excluding a group of lay people,

---

<sup>14</sup> c. 1063, 2°

<sup>15</sup> c.1063, 3°

<sup>16</sup> c. 1063, 4°.

<sup>17</sup> Apostolicam autuositatem, no. 11

experts in different fields.<sup>18</sup> In order to ensure the ongoing formation for the couple, the apostolic exhortation *FC*<sup>19</sup> and this document prescribes three stages of preparation for the Christian community, namely Remote, Proximate and Immediate Preparation.

### **a) The Remote preparation:**

Remote preparation includes stages of infancy, childhood and adolescence and it takes place first of all in the family; it continues in the school and formation groups, as a valid assistance to the family. This is the period in which respect for authentic human values both interpersonal and social relations is transmitted and instilled; consequently the formation of character, self-control and self-esteem, the proper use of one's inclinations, and respect for persons of the other sex are taught to the young people.<sup>20</sup>

In this period, a faithful and courageous education in chastity and love as self-giving must not be lacking. Chastity is not a mortification of love but rather a condition for real love. In fact, if the vocation to married love is a vocation to self-giving in marriage, one must be also taught to value a greater Call to serve God and his people by living a celibate life. In this regard the sexual education received from parents in the first years of childhood and adolescence forms healthy children.

In this sense, it should be recalled that although the remote preparation deals more with doctrinal content of an anthropological nature, it is to be placed in the perspective of marriage in which human love becomes a sharing, as well as a sign, of the love between Christ and the Church. It should not be forgotten that, through the grace of God, love is also cherished, strengthened and intensified through the necessary values such as self-effacing, sacrifice, renunciation and self-denial. At this remote stage of formation, pastoral help should already be directed toward making moral behaviour be supported by faith. The example of parents, which becomes a

---

<sup>18</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family (= PCF), "Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage", 13 May 1996, *Origins* 26, (1996-1997), no. 20.

<sup>19</sup> *FC*, no. 64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 66.

real *witness* for those who will marry in the future, provides stimulus, support and consistency to this kind of *Christian lifestyle*.

The remote preparation is to enable the young people to acquire a critical ability with regard to their surroundings, and with the Christian courage to know how to be in the world without belonging to it. A *Letter to Diognetus*, a document of ancient Christian era states thus: "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech, or customs...the whole tenor of their way of living stamps it as worthy of admiration and admittedly extraordinary... They marry like all others and beget children; but they do not expose their offspring. Their table they spread for all, but not their bed. They find themselves *in the flesh*, but do not live *according to the flesh*". Thus the Christian formation should arrive at a mentality and personality capable of not being led astray by ideas contrary to the unity and stability of marriage.

The remote preparation first of all takes place in the Christian family. A Christian lifestyle, witnessed to by Christian families, is in itself a form of evangelization and the very foundation of remote preparation. It is in the family, the domestic church, that Christian parents are the first witnesses and educators of the children both in the growth of "faith, hope and charity", and each child discovers his or her own vocation there. "*Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a fundamental competence in this area: they are educators because they are parents*" (GS 16). For this purpose parents need suitable and adequate assistance.<sup>21</sup>

Next to the family, the parish can be listed as the place of Christian ecclesial formation. It is there that a style of living together as a *community* is learned<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, the school, other educational institutions, movements, groups, Catholic associations, sodalities, Anbiams (Basic Christian Communities) etc., play a vital role of forming young people in Christian and human values. This formation and preparation of the young people is also assisted by catechists, animators of the youth

---

<sup>21</sup> PCF, no. 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, The Second Vatican Council, no. 42.



and pastors. Pastors are to take advantage of homilies during liturgical celebrations and other forms of evangelization, personal meetings, house visit etc., in order to highlight the points that contribute to a preparation directed toward possible marriage.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the ways and means must be "invented" for the on-going formation of adolescents in the period preceding engagement which follows the stages of Christian initiation. Families joined together in the parishes as BCC, (*Anbiams*), institutions and different forms of association, help create a social atmosphere in which responsible love is taught to the adolescents.

### **b) Proximate Preparation:**

This proximate preparation takes place for the youth at a parish or diocese. Therefore it includes everything that pertains to the pastoral care of youth so as to enable them with integral growth.<sup>24</sup> It should reinforce the young people's social sense, first with regard to the members of their own family, and orient their values toward the future family they will build up. This preparation involves those who are about to marry and it helps them deepen their faith in God and grow in Christian maturity as to build up a Christian family. This preparation takes place during the period of engagement consisting of specific courses and appropriate marriage encounter programmes. It will be useful, during this period, to provide the possibility to verify the maturation of human values among the fiancés. Relationship of friendship and dialogue should characterize their engagement period. In view of the new state in life as a Christian couple, the opportunity should be offered to deepen their life of faith, especially regarding knowledge about the sacramentality of marriage.<sup>25</sup>

During the engagement period the couple are to be instructed on the vital teachings of the church on marriage such as inter-personal relationship between a man and a woman, the natural requirements for such relationship (c.1055), true awareness and meaning of consent which is the foundation of their covenantal relationship, knowledge about the essential properties of marriage, i.e., unity and indissolubility, the correct knowledge about responsible parenthood, human aspects of conjugal

---

<sup>23</sup> Cfr., *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> PCF, no. 33.

<sup>25</sup> PCF, no. 32.

sexuality (*humano modo*),<sup>26</sup> the psychological and procreational aspects about the conjugal act with its requirements and ends, education of the children in human and Christian values etc.<sup>27</sup> They should be trained to defend always the human life from its very origin till the end.

I quote: "The contraceptive mentality which is prevalent today in so many places, and the widespread, permissive laws with all they imply in terms of contempt for life from the moment of conception to death, constitute a series of multiple attacks to which the family is exposed and wounded in the most intimate part of its mission, and which impede its development according to the requirements of authentic human growth (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 39). Therefore, today more than before, formation is needed of the minds and hearts of the members of new families not to conform to the prevailing mentality. In this way, through their own new family life, one day they will be able to contribute towards creating and developing the culture of life by respecting and welcoming new lives in their love, as the testimony and expression of the proclamation, celebration and service to every life (cf. *EV* 83-84, 86, 93)"<sup>28</sup>.

The engaged with the assistance of proximate preparation should possess the knowledge on the basic elements of a psychological, pedagogical, legal and medical nature for marriage and family life. Moreover, the theological and moral formation on total self-giving and responsible procreation is to be taught to them. In fact, they should be aware of that conjugal love is total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful.<sup>29</sup> The young people are to be trained to overcome any emotional and psychological shortcomings, especially the inability to open themselves to the others. The engaged ones also should be prepared with the solid foundation on the formation of moral conscience.

During this period frequent meetings are to be held between the pastors, Catechists and the engaged in an atmosphere of dialogue, friendship and prayer. The PCL document states that "this period should not only be for theoretical study but also for

---

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Humanae vitae*, no. 11-12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., no. 35.

<sup>28</sup> PCF, no. 49.

<sup>29</sup> *Humanae vitae*, no. 9.

formation during which the engaged, with the help of grace and by avoiding all forms of sin, will prepare to give themselves as a couple to Christ who sustains, purifies and ennobles the engagement and married life. In this way, premarital chastity takes on its full meaning and rules out any cohabitation, premarital relations, and other practices, such as *marriage coutumier*, in the process of making love grow"<sup>30</sup>. The guidelines also highly recommends that in order to interiorize the human and Christian understanding of marriage the engaged should be introduced to the knowledge and wisdom containing in the roman documents, viz., *Familiaris Consortio*, the Letter to Families, *Gratissimam Sane*, the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and others.

Since Christian love is purified, perfected and elevated by Christ's love for the Church (cf. *GS* 49), the engaged should imitate this model and develop their awareness of self-giving which is always connected with the mutual respect and self-denial that help this love grow. "The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that gift: *the gift of one person to another person*. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the *spousal nature of love*" (*Gratissimam Sane*, 11).

As *Familiaris Consortio* notes, the formative journey of engaged persons should therefore include: deepening of personal faith and the rediscovery of the value of the sacraments and the experience of prayer. However, the center of this preparation must be a reflection in the faith on the sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium. The engaged should be made aware that to become "*una caro*" (*Matthew* 19:6) in Christ, through the Spirit in Christian marriage, means imprinting a new form of baptismal life on their existence.<sup>31</sup>

The above mentioned course is to be carried out in the individual parishes, if there are enough engaged persons, or in the Episcopal or Deanery / Vicariate level. The persons in charge of family movements, associations or apostolic groups could conduct such courses guided by a competent priest. This is an area which should be coordinated by a *diocesan organism* that works on behalf of the Bishop. Without

---

<sup>30</sup> PCF, No. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., no. 47.

neglecting the various aspects of psychology, medicine and other human sciences, the content should be *centred* on the *natural and Christian doctrine of marriage*.

Finally, if for certain reasons, during this period, the engaged ones are convinced that they are not compatible for each other for marriage, the newly created Dicastery for Family, Laity and Life states in its recent guidelines that they are free to quit the relationship.<sup>32</sup>

### **c) Immediate Preparation:**

After completing the itinerary and specific courses for the engaged, the following can be fulfilled for the immediate preparation for marriage: *a)* A synthesis of the previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral and spiritual content, thus filling in eventual gaps in basic formation; *b)* Experiences of prayer (retreats, spiritual exercises for the engaged) in which the encounter with the Lord can make them discover the depth and beauty of the supernatural life; *c)* A suitable liturgical preparation with the active participation of the engaged, with special attention to the Sacrament of Reconciliation; *d)* And good use the canonical talks that sums up doctrine on marriage.<sup>33</sup>

If for certain urgent reasons the couple request the parish priest to officiate the wedding without these immediate preparation could the parish priest deny the wedding? The document says that these preparations are not *sine qua non*; and they do not affect the validity. As per C. 1077 §1, the bishop can either delay such marriage for certain limited period or can dispense from the obligation and permit the couple to marry.<sup>34</sup> The basic human right to marry (c. 1058) must also to be taken into account. However, the parish priest and the pastoral co-ordinators are to see to it that the engaged are taught and informed with the doctrinal, moral and sacramental aspects of marriage so that those who have entered marriage, "by faithfully observing and protecting their conjugal covenant, may day by day achieve a holier and a fuller family life."<sup>35</sup> The immediate preparation of the couple should

---

<sup>32</sup> Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, Pastoral guidelines for Marriage, no. 15.

<sup>33</sup> PCF, no. 50.

<sup>34</sup> John M. Huels, The Pastoral Companion – A Canon Law Handbook for Catholic Ministry, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 2011, p. 219.

<sup>35</sup> See C. 1063, 4°

culminate in the filial devotion to blessed virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church, the Queen of all families.<sup>36</sup> The engaged themselves should be taught to recognize that Mary's presence is as active in the family, the Domestic Church, as it is in the wider Church. Likewise they should be taught to imitate Mary in her virtues. Thus the Holy Family, the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, makes the engaged discover "how sweet and irreplaceable education in the family is". This immediate preparation should introduce the couple to the rite of marriage.

**d) The Celebration of Marriage:** After the completion of the preparation for marriage, it is desirable that the marriage is celebrated in the church or the parish of the spouses. Thus it is more in conformity with the ecclesial meaning of the sacrament; for the marriage is to be celebrated normally in the church of the parish community to which the spouses belong (c. 1115). The whole parish community takes part in such a celebration and support the newly married couple in their faith journey. Moreover, the newly married becomes a new cell of the large parish community. Then, those who take active participation in the liturgy, in particular the engaged and the witnesses, also must participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Since the couples themselves are the ministers of the sacrament of marriage<sup>37</sup> they are to be involved in the liturgy actively. With the formula of the exchange of consent, the spouses will always remember the personal, ecclesial and social aspect gained from this consent for all their life, as a gift of one to the other even unto death. The celebrant who presides and presents the ecclesial meaning of the marriage commitment for the assembly, will try to involve those who are being married, together with their relatives and the witnesses, so that they can comprehend the structure of the rite. This applies especially to the most characteristic parts, such as: the Word of God, the consent exchanged and ratified, the blessing of the signs that symbolize marriage (rings etc.), the solemn blessing of the spouses, the reference to the spouses in the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer. "The various liturgies abound in

---

<sup>36</sup> PCF, no. 58.

<sup>37</sup> See The Rite of Marriage, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 1991.

prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God's grace and blessing on the new couple, especially the bride."<sup>38</sup>.

Whoever presides the marriage liturgy should adapt himself to the truth of the signs and gestures involved in the liturgy. He has to welcome the couple to be married, the witnesses, the parish community etc., without any preference for any person. The proclamation of the Word should be made by the prepared Lectors. "They can be chosen from among those present, especially witnesses, family members, friends, but it does not seem appropriate for the bride and groom to be lectors. In fact, they are the primary receivers of the proclaimed Word of God."<sup>39</sup> However, the choice of readings can be discussed with the engaged so that they would always keep in mind the Word of God at every moment of their married life later. The homily is obligatory which explains to the couple that the great mystery (Eph. 5,32) is celebrated before the church and the society. A well prepared prayer of the faithful is to be precise and finally with the solemn blessing the couple are sent into the world to live out the great mystery of married life.<sup>40</sup>

**Inter ecclesial / Inter ritual marriage celebrations:** C. 1059 states that "the marriage of Catholics, even if only one party is Catholic, is regulated not only by divine law but also by canon law". The church claims authority over the marriage of the catholic and a non-catholic, even a non-sacramental marriage involving a non-baptized spouse. Since inter ritual marriages involving two catholics of different church sui iuris, they are governed by the laws of both the churches. Before entering into marriage both the parties should be free from all diriment impediments as specified by the laws of both churches. If necessary dispensations are to be obtained.<sup>41</sup> The Eastern Rite reserves the role of the minister of marriage to the assisting priest. The blessing of the sacred minister in the eastern rite is for its validity which has to be informed of the Latin rite spouse. Bearing in mind that marriage is normally celebrated during Mass<sup>42</sup> when dealing with a marriage between a catholic

---

<sup>38</sup> See Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1624.

<sup>39</sup> PCF, no. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., nos. 70-72.

<sup>41</sup> John Huels, Pastoral Companion, p. 203-204.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 78; *FC* no. 57.

and a baptized non-catholic, the celebration will take place according to the special liturgical and canonical provisions.<sup>43</sup>

### **III. Continual Pastoral Care after Marriage:**

4° of c. 1063 necessitates a continual pastoral care to those already got married. As the first five year period is of most important and since at this period the couple are adjusting to their new responsibilities and preparing themselves for responsible parenthood, the parishes, the vicariates / deaneries or the diocesan family life commission can conduct post marriage courses, sharing and workshops for the couples.<sup>44</sup> The Dicastery for LFL entrusts this responsibility to the Episcopal Conferences to prepare guidelines for the local church. In the recent guidelines of the above mentioned Dicastery, it is suggested that the young married couples are to be included in the marriage preparation course since their testimonies and experiences will help most the engaged ones to embark into the journey of married life. It recommends that they be paired with newlywed couples to share their experiences with them and help other couples in crisis. Gabriela Gambino, the Under-Secretary of this Dicastery states that it is necessary for seasoned married couples to have a strong presence in the lives of other couples – especially those experiencing difficulty. This is important to create a foundation of mutual trust and respect in the relationship. Moreover the document also encourages priests to seek advice from experienced couples in carrying out their pastoral work.<sup>45</sup>

### **IV. Prerequisites for a valid and lawful celebration of marriage**

**Spiritual preparation for Marriage:** Canon 1065 is concerned with the spiritual preparation of the couple to get married. It presumes that both are baptized or at least the Catholic party. For a lawful celebration pastors of soul have to ascertain the fact that the couple had received the sacraments of initiation, Confirmation, Eucharist and Penance. The reception of these sacraments are to facilitate a fruitful reception of marriage. Although the reception of these sacraments are not for the validity, they help the parties to be spiritually nourished at their marriage and later their married

---

<sup>43</sup> See *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, nos. 79-117.

<sup>44</sup> Lynda Robitaille, *New Commentary*, John P. Beal et al. (ed), p. 1264; *FC*, no. 66.

<sup>45</sup> Pastoral Guidelines, Dicastery for Laity, 20 August 2022, no. 10.

life. It enables a fruitful and meaningful celebration of marriage. Though the ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop as per c. 884 it can be deputed to the parish priest who prepares the couple for marriage. With adequate preparation Confirmation is to be administered to the adult preparing for marriage (c. 889 §2).

**Prerequisites for marriage:** C. 1066 states that unless all the valid and licit conditions are fulfilled the marriage cannot be celebrated. Therefore it is the duty of the parish priest, who prepares the couple for marriage, to supervise all that impair the validity of the sacrament. For a marriage to be valid, it should be free of diriment impediments (cc. 1083-1094); the parties should give their consent freely (cc. 1095-1107), and the marriage should be celebrated with the proper canonical form (c. 1108). For a marriage to be lawfully celebrated, canons 1067 – 1072 as well as c. 1102, §3 are to be observed.<sup>46</sup>

**V. The Prenuptial Investigation and Publication of Banns:** C. 1067 owes the responsibility to the episcopal conferences to lay down norms for questions to be asked to the parties in order to find out whether they are free to marry, and for the proclamation of banns. This canon explicitly stipulates that the parties are to be asked certain questions not only whether there is any impediment to marry, but also to ascertain whether they are free to marry, their capacity to marry and their obligations and rights pertaining to marriage. Though this canon does not explicitly state the baptism certificate is mandatory it is always useful to find whether the couple are eligible for Christian marriage. As per c. 535 §2 that the baptismal register is to contain the notations of confirmation and marriage and other details (marriage, adoption, sacred orders, perpetual religious profession, change of *sui iuris* church, declaration of nullity or dissolution of previous marriage, dispensation from the obligation of celibacy etc.) regarding their canonical status. Therefore the pastors are to investigate the baptism certificate before marriage.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Lynda Robitaille, *New Commentary*, John P. Beal et al. (ed), p. 1265.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



With regard to Publication of Banns the Episcopal conference and the individual bishops can lay down norms. It is to ascertain the fact that the parties contracting marriage are without any impediment. Therefore three banns on successive Sundays or on days of obligation are to be read.<sup>48</sup> Publication of banns is also not for validity; it is to ascertain whether the party are free to marry. However in danger of death situation (illness, war, natural disaster etc.) if both the parties affirm that they are baptized and they are not impeded by any impediment that suffices. Such danger should be grave enough that there is no time to make normal investigation. Canon 1069 necessitates the faithful to reveal any impediment to the concerned pastors, the bishop or the local ordinary, or anything that would invalidate the consent of one of the parties. Those who learn of it in an internal forum is not to reveal unless it is also revealed in an external forum. Those who learn them in confidential relationship such as doctor, lawyer etc., it is not universally accepted that they need not reveal. For an innocent person's possible invalid marriage should be avoided. All the examination of the parties should be notified in the parochial register. If another priest has made the investigation he has to transmit the information and hand over the investigation to the parish priest who would notify all of them in the parochial register.<sup>49</sup>

## **VI. Permission of the Local Ordinary for Marriage:**

Canon 1071 enumerates seven instances which require the permission of the local ordinary to conduct marriage. i) Transients (*vagi*), those who have no domicile or quasi domicile (c. 1071, §1, 1<sup>o</sup>) in the parish. Migrant workers, homeless people and persons in transit need the local ordinary's permission to marry in the church. ii) Those whose marriage cannot be recognized or celebrated according to civil law (c. 1071, §1, 2<sup>o</sup>). Examples of such cases are prior marriage, lack of minimum age, blood relationship within specified degrees, severe mental disorder, adoptive relationship, venereal disease etc. Ordinarily such marriages must not be celebrated

---

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. C. 1024.

<sup>49</sup> See c. 1070.

with the local ordinary's permission until the impediment ceases or allowed by the court order.<sup>50</sup>

**Conclusion:** Family is the foundational unit of a society. It is only in the family children are begotten; values are learned and the future generation of any society is formed. The sacrament of matrimony enhances families to live a lifelong commitment between the spouses. Therefore in order to equip the couple with strong mind and will to live their matrimonial commitment we need to prepare the couple at different stages, at teen age period, before engagement and even after their marriage. Doctrinal, psychological, socio-sexual and spiritual aspects of marriage are to be taught to the couple so that they enter into a happy matrimony and build up fruitful families. I am afraid to express that without such serious and elaborated preparation for the celebration of sacrament of marriage, the couples' married journey till the end will not be without serious difficulties.

## Thank you.

---

<sup>50</sup> John M. Huels, p. 216.