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MARRIAGE
in the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH

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ABOUT THIS PAMPHLET

A happy and enduring marriage is of supreme importance to each husband and wife, to their children, to the Church and to the community.

The Church's teaching and regulations on marriage are intended to strengthen and safeguard the Christian character of the marriage relationship.

In this pamphlet, they are stated briefly and directly in digest form from the provisions of the General Convention of the Church.

Prepared by the Commission on Holy Matrimony appointed by General Convention in 1949.

Marriage in the Episcopal Church. Published by The Forward Movement Publications, 412 Sycamore Street, Cincinnati 2, Ohio. Printed in U.S.A.

I

WHAT THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH MEANS

BY CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The Church holds:—

That marriage is a physical, spiritual and mystical union of a man and a woman,

That it is created by the mutual consent of heart, mind and will thereto,

That it is a holy estate instituted of God,

That it is in intention lifelong.

In the holy estate of matrimony a man and a woman are set apart for each other and together enter into a new relationship. This relationship is hallowed or holy, for it is intended to reflect God's love and to be an expression of His purpose.

The marriage service is The Solemnization of Matrimony. Through it the Church adds to the legal acts which the Minister performs as an agent of the state:—

The taking of the vows before God and the people.

The prayers of those present for their lifelong happiness.

The declared bestowal upon them of God's grace and continuing help.

The Church's blessing in God's name upon the man and the woman who are joined together.

I

II

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

The Church believes that adequate preparation of heart, mind and spirit are as necessary to enduring happiness in marriage as is training to success in one's lifework. The lack of such preparation may lead to unnecessary tension or difficulty. Such difficulties, if allowed to continue and grow, threaten the harmony and permanence of the marriage relationship.

Upon the Minister is laid a definite responsibility for instruction concerning the nature of Christian marriage. He will also give counsel at any time after marriage, especially when in a period of strain his advice is sought. More and more the value of such impartial counseling is being widely recognized.

Upon the married couple the Church also lays the duty of bringing their problems to the Minister in order that a solution may, if possible, be found and the personal relationship strengthened.

III

THE DUTY OF THE MINISTER

In addition to the responsibility for instruction on Holy Matrimony, the Minister must conform to the laws of the state regarding marriage and to the laws of this Church governing the solemnization of matrimony. The impediments or obstacles set forth in the canons may not be ignored. (see page 7).

He must secure from the couple their Declaration of Intention (see below) and make certain that at least one of them has received Holy Baptism.

He must also make certain that at least two witnesses will be present at the wedding, and he must record the marriage in the Church register. The record is signed by the Minister and witnesses.

It is within the discretion of the Minister to decline to solemnize any marriage.

We, _____ and

_____, desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Form of Solemnization of Holy Matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer. We believe it is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, for the safeguarding and benefit of society. And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.

IV

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF THOSE TO BE MARRIED

The intention to be married should be indicated to the Minister well in advance of the contemplated marriage. Sufficient time should be given not only to set the date for the wedding and to make plans for it, but also to enable the couple to prepare sincerely and as fully as possible for their marriage.

The minimum requirement is three days. The Minister may dispense with this minimum requirement only under certain special conditions.

Before the man and the woman can be married they must sign the form declaring their understanding of the nature and purpose of Christian marriage and their intention to establish a true and lasting union. (page 3.)

They should share with the Minister any matters which trouble them and lay before him any doubts about their right to be married in the Episcopal Church.

V

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE MARRIED IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IF A FORMER MARRIAGE OF EITHER PARTY HAS BEEN TERMINATED BY CIVIL AUTHORITY?

Yes, but only under the following conditions:

The applicant must be an active member of this Church in good standing.

The judgment of the civil court must have become final at least a year before the application for marriage is made.

The application should be in the hands of the Bishop at least thirty days before the contemplated marriage.

The parties must be prepared to present to the Minister and the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority information regarding the reasons for the annulment or dissolution of the former marriage by civil authority and such other facts as are required.

The Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority must be satisfied that the parties intend a true Christian marriage.

In making an official decision upon the application, the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority will take care that such decision conforms to the doctrine of this Church.

When any of the recognized impediments (page 7) "are shown to exist or to have existed which manifestly establish that no marriage bond as the same is recognized by this Church exists, the same may be declared by proper authority".

Such a judgment is intended in no way to affect the legitimacy of children or the civil validity of the former marriage.

When the above conditions have been met and a favorable decision rendered, the marriage may be performed by a Minister of this Church, but it still remains within his discretion to decline to officiate.

VI

IMPEDIMENTS TO MARRIAGE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The impediments to marriage applying to either party are:—

Consanguinity (Blood relationship) within certain degrees.

Mistake as to identity of either party.

Mental deficiency sufficient to prevent the exercise of intelligent choice.

Insanity.

Failure to have reached the age of puberty.

Undisclosed impotence, sexual perversion, or the existence of venereal disease.

Facts which make the proposed marriage bigamous.

Any agreement made by the parties at the time of marriage which is not in agreement with the declaration which the canons require and which would therefore be inconsistent with the marriage laws of the Church.

Attendant conditions: error as to identity, fraud, coercion or duress, or such defects of personality as to make competent or free consent impossible.

VII

CAN A MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH WHO HAS BEEN MARRIED AGAIN CONTRARY TO THE LAW OF THE CHURCH BE RESTORED TO COMMUNICANT STATUS?

Any person may apply to his Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority for recognition of communicant status when this has been impaired by the above circumstance.

The exact procedure and time required for an official decision is determined by the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority.

When in doubt about the status of a marriage in the eyes of the Church, the Minister will refer the case to the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority; but no Minister shall in any case refuse the Sacraments when a person is in immediate danger of death.

The Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority in rendering an official decision upon an application for the restoration of communicant status, will take into consideration both justice and mercy.

THE MARRIAGE VOW

from

The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony as contained in the Book of Common Prayer.

I, _____, take thee, _____, to my wedded Wife (*Husband*), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight (*give*) thee my troth.

PRAYER

A PRAYER BEFORE MARRIAGE

O God, our Heavenly Father, we pray for thy grace and blessing as we take upon ourselves the sacred vows of Christian marriage. Let our love for each other be pure and enduring; give us understanding of each other's mind and needs; help us to share our joys and sorrows; and keep us ever faithful to our promise to live together according to thy will till death shall separate us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE PRAYERS

from

THE FORM OF SOLEMNIZATION OF MATRIMONY

O ETERNAL God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life; Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, (whereof this Ring given and received is a token and pledge,) and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O ALMIGHTY God, Creator of Mankind, who only art the well-spring of life; Bestow upon these thy servants, if it be thy will, the gift and heritage of children; and grant that they may see their children brought up in thy faith and fear, to the honour and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O GOD, who hast so consecrated the state of Matrimony that in it is represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church; Look mercifully upon these thy servants, that they may love, honour and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and of peace; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

Questions You Should Consider

1. If you are not members of the same Church, have you seriously studied each other's religion to find out if you might unite on one Church?
2. If not, have you counted the cost of a divided loyalty and intelligently faced it?
3. What interests have you in common? Have you considered how you will develop them?
4. What separate interests, hobbies, or obligations have you which might take time (evenings and holidays) or money from what you might otherwise spend together? Have you considered together the continuation of these activities?
5. Have you budgeted your income so that you know how much you will need for rent, food, fuel, clothing, doctors, recreation, "good will" (that is, donations, gifts, organization dues, etc.) and savings?
6. Is there any feeling of tension with parents or in-laws which could be cleared up at this time with a friendly, frank talk?
7. Is there anything in marriage which you fear? Do you fear yourself? Each other? The finality of marriage? Do you fear having children, or any of the physical aspects of marriage?
8. Will you start, with your marriage, an adventure in prayer, learning more of it continually together?
9. Have you determined to give the worship of the Church and especially Holy Communion a real place in your lives?
10. Have you prepared for your life together by having a complete health examination by a reliable doctor? If not, you ought to do so.

Talk these questions over with your Rector before the marriage takes place.

OTHER PAMPHLETS

YOU ARE ABOUT TO BE MARRIED, George L. Cadigan.

2 cents. Department of Social Service, 1 Joy Street, Boston 8, Mass. An informal personal letter about things that matter in marriage.

IF I MARRY A ROMAN CATHOLIC.

5 cents. National (Federal) Council of Churches, 297 Fourth Ave., N. Y. 10, N. Y. Indicates problems which must be faced when a member of another Church marries a Roman Catholic.

RELIGION AND THE HOME, Rev. George Buttrick.

5 cents. National (Federal) Council of Churches, 297 Fourth Ave., N. Y. 10, N. Y. An appeal to make religion real in and through the home.

WHAT HAS GOD TO DO WITH MARRIAGE?

William Scott Chalmers and Bonnell Spencer, O.H.C.

10 cents. Holy Cross Press, West Park, New York. Ways in which God reveals Himself through marriage.

MARRIAGE—A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE, Ethel Miller Nash.

15 cents. Forward Movement Publications, 412 Sycamore St., Cincinnati 2, Ohio.

HARMONY IN MARRIAGE, Leland Foster Wood, PhD and Robert L. Dickinson, MD.

120 pages, paper cover, \$1.00. Round Table Press, 76 Ninth Ave., N. Y., N. Y. Physical, mental and spiritual harmony—meaning of parenthood.

FOR FURTHER READING

Consult your rector. Excellent books are available.