Clergy Advises Pre-Marital Counseling

By MAXINE ELLIOTT

Regardless of its size, a girl's wedding will remain forever a special event in her mind. In order to make the wedding as perfect as possible, certain customs should be observed.

Of course, the wise couple discusses these with the clergyman when reserving the church. However, a certain familiarity with some of the customs should be a prerequisite before meeting with the pastor.

Generally speaking, the couple will be asked to participate in premarital counseling. According to the Rev. James E. Merlin of Eugene's Emerald (American) Baptist Church, counseling "is not a requirement, but I advocate it and, in some instances, practically insist on it." Rev. Merlin said that his view is "probably pretty representative of most Protestant ministers.

Pretty Well Educated

"Usually I meet with the couple for at least one 45-minute session. We'll discuss things such as financial arrangements, employment, family relationships — things like that. . . Birth control? They're usually pretty well educated on this point," he chuckled.

"Most of all, though, I try to emphasize the spiritual aspects of marriage—that it's an institution ordained by God."

According to Rabbi Louis Neimand of Temple Beth Israel, he tries to work out counseling sessions prior to the wedding.

"They're rather elastic, depending on how much time we have and how much interest the couple shows," he commented.

"We assume they know enough about the economic and physiological side of marriage, but we do discuss the religious values of marriage.

"The subject of birth control sometimes comes up," Rabbi Neimand admitted, "but since Judaism has no specific teachings on the subject, our talks usually center around the couple's attitude towards children and the sex relationship as a spiritual concept."

Sometimes a Necessity

A local Catholic clergyman told the Emerald that "pre-marital counseling is a necessity only when a non-Catholic marries a Catholic."

Counseling involves six one-hour sessions during which time the couple are instructed in their mutual rights and obligations in religion.

"We frequently counsel otherwise," he said, "but this is not ordained by church law.

"Birth control is not as big a topic as you might imagine," he said. "Regarding the sex act, we believe that artificial control frustrates the essential meaning and is against nature.

"You realize," he continued, "that the topic of birth control is very involved. I'd suggest that couples discuss this very thoroughly with their priest rather than take my word for it."

Concerning marriage of persons with no religious affiliations, reaction was divided.

Rev. Merlin said he would perform the ceremony if the couple had a healthy attitude toward a religious marriage. "Some pastors won't however," he said.

"Theoretically, I suppose," the priest said, "I could marry such a couple. I mean, they have a license and I'm legally able to do it. I doubt, however, that I would, since there are just so many other things to do."

No Disabilities

Rabbi Neimand pointed out that according to Judaism, there would be "no disabilities in performing such a marriage, if at least one of the persons involved is Jewish heritage. You must realize that in our faith you're always a Jew unless you embrace another faith."

Both Rev. Merlin and Rabbi Neimand agreed that they would marry divorced couples in the Church. Rev. Merlin pointed out that all Baptists, regardless of which branch, are free to marry whomever they choose.

"I'm happy to marry such couples in instances where the divorced person shows real repentence for the failure of the marriage, and understanding of the marriage and subsequent divorce," he said.

The Catholic clergyman pointed out that such marriages are legal under church law only under certain circumstances.

"It depends on whether the former bond was a true one," he explained. "This might include civil ceremonies, death of the former spouse following the divorce, proof that the former spouse actually meant 'I don't" when he said "I do,' or that the former spouse had no intention of having children.

"Again, I advise that the couple discuss this pretty thoroughly with their priest."

Advise Against Large Wedding

The three clergymen admitted that they sometimes perform ceremonies within the church when the bride is pregnant.

"They don't usually tell you she's pregnant, Rev. Merlin said, "and sometimes you wish they would.

"I'd marry them, anyway, since I believe marriage would be the best solution for most couples, but I'd advise them against a large wedding.

"Many brides want one, regardless of whether or not they're pregnant, but it's not really right. Aside from the fact that it isn't proper, the large wedding and accompanying publicity often serves to fix the wedding date in people's minds, and later, they may wish that everyone wasn't so sure of the date," he concluded.

"Most Catholic clergymen wouldn't marry such a couple if there was any evidence that it hinted of a "shotgun' affair," the priest said. "I know I wouldn't.

"But if the couple genuinely wanted to marry," he said, "I might do it, although I would be inclined not to, since pregnancy isn't really a solid foundation for marriage."

Rabbi Neimand pointed out that when a couple comes to him and the girl is pregnant, very often he has found that they have been married previously in a civil ceremony and would like to be married in the church prior to the arrival of the child.

"Of course, there's no question then," he said.

A SPARKLING YOUNG DRESS fashioned of silk linen is modeled here and on the front cover by Carol Edmunds, a senior in history. Flowers with seed pearl centers are appliqued on the center panel of her ivory gown. The proper attire for male members of the wedding party in a formal ceremony—a traditional white tuxedo—is modeled by Henry Drummonds, a junior in political science.

Quaker Ceremony Features Simplicity

The Quaker ceremony is without fanfare. It usually precedes the regular monthly meeting. The bridal couple come down the aisle and take facing seats in front of the meeting. Because the Society of Friends have no clergy, the couple repeat their vows to each other in the presence of the Committee which has been appointed to oversee the marriage.

An "intention to wed" must be read before the meeting at least one month in advance. A committee investigates "the suitability of the marriage" before a definite date is set.

The regular monthly meeting of the Society usually follows the marriage ceremony

Orthodox Wedding

The Orthodox Catholic wedding is much more elaborate than the Roman ritual. The marriage ceremony is preceded by a ten-minute betrothal service in front of the altar screen. The hands of the bride and groom are literally bound together. The phrases are repeated three times, signifying the Trinity. The bride and groom share a cup of wine after reading of the Gospel.