

that could shame or injure her. If he cannot say this, he should confess any past misdeeds at once. Here we are talking of serious things, such as a prison record, the drug habit, etc.

If he fears that he has any tendency towards alcoholism, he should say so, and tell how he intends to combat the evil. He should be prepared to say that his health is good, or to admit to ill health.

Why should a young man do all this? To his prospective bride's father he is, more often than not, almost a stranger. He is asking that father to commit to a stranger's care a soul whom he helped bring into the world, to whose rearing, education, and nurturing he has devoted the best years of his life, whom he loves with a special feeling unlike any other. To ask his consent in this manly fashion immediately reassures the parent in two ways: it shows that the young man quite properly feels that his fiancée is a treasure whom he cannot snatch away without a by-your-leave, and that he is grateful for the years of devotion her father has lavished upon her. There is nothing a prospective fiancé can do that can create a better impression than this. There is nothing wiser a father can do than to require it.

A young couple should give serious consideration to objections made by either family. Such objections may be selfish, frivolous, based on jealousy or insufficient information, but they are not often so. Differences in religion are extremely serious, and will be discussed elsewhere. Differences in racial stock, education, background or aim in life may make a marriage more difficult. Immaturity is the worst hazard of all—and the hardest one for the contracting parties to recognize. If a couple are very young, or unable to support themselves, they should not consider marrying without parental consent, whether they may legally do so or not. The odds against a happy marriage are too high.

CANONICAL ENGAGEMENT

The canonical, or ecclesiastical, engagement is a custom that is part of a recent movement, fostered both by laymen and clergy, to weave the beauty and symbolism of our liturgy into our practice of our Faith and to invest all the important occasions of our life with a religious or sacramental character. Its purpose is to combat the unfortunate effect of the blatant secularism that surrounds us in all areas of living, and which promises to increase rather than decay.

A canonical engagement serves a further good purpose: It emphasizes the true purpose of an engagement as a time of serious and thoughtful preparation for the responsibilities and joys of marriage. It

helps arm the young couple against sins against chastity and purity which tempt the best of us so powerfully and so attractively at this time in our lives.

The point must be made that there is no obligation on any Catholic to make his engagement a canonical one. Many pastors are not yet familiar with the custom. But it is indeed a beautiful and worthy one, deserving the strongest recommendation.

A canonical engagement is a promise to marry at some future date, made freely and without reservations before the altar of the Blessed Mother by the contracting parties, who further promise to guard against sins against purity and chastity at this time. It is signed by the pastor of the church. Like any engagement, it may be terminated at any time before marriage by mutual consent, or by any lawful impediment to marriage later discovered. If a priest is not available to sign such a contract, the signature of two lay witnesses may be substituted.

Following is a description of the suggested form of a canonical engagement, as prepared by the Rt. Rev. Martin Hellriegal.

The Ecclesiastical Engagement

The custom of canonical engagement is growing. We herewith print a suggestion for a program to follow for the event which may be adapted as circumstances indicate.

- I. IN OFFICE OF RECTORY (a week or so before the actual engagement):
 1. The pastor points out the purpose and spirit of ecclesiastical engagement.
 2. He stresses the other promises, indicated on document. Like *four* great cornerstones:
 - a) Frequent reception of holy sacraments and prayer
 - b) Charity
 - c) Mutual respect
 - d) Chastity
 3. He gives the young people a copy of document asking them to read it over carefully and bring it along on the day appointed.
- II. BEFORE THE ALTAR OF THE BLESSED MOTHER, on the day appointed:
 1. The pastor (in surplice and stole, with pen and parish seal on altar) gives brief instruction, once more emphasizing what he said in office.

2. The two to be engaged read aloud their promise (from document).
3. They approach the altar to sign it (man first).
4. The pastor signs it.
5. He blesses the ring (*Benedictio ad omnia*), sprinkles it with holy water.
6. The bridegroom-to-be places the ring on the finger of his bride-to-be, saying: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen."
7. A word of encouragement is given by the pastor, admonishing them to make their time of preparation for marriage one of courtship, not shipwreck.
8. All kneel and say a prayer to our Blessed Mother, asking her for her blessing, help and protection.
9. The pastor congratulates the young people and reminds them of preparing a "Family History Book" (in which the engagement certificate will be the first entry).
10. If convenient, the couple may be asked to the parish house for a hearty chat and a little refreshment. (The greatest things of our Lord were done at the table!)

The following engagement contract form, handsomely printed in two colors on heavy board paper, may be obtained by writing to the Pío Decimo Press, St. Louis, Mo. It reads:

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AMEN:

Before Almighty God and His heavenly Court, and in the presence of the witnesses whose names are affixed to this document, we the undersigned promise to one another by this ecclesiastical engagement Marriage in Christ. We further promise that by the frequent devout reception of the holy sacraments, by prayer and charity, by mutual respect and chastity we shall assist one another in preparing worthily for the blessed day of our Marriage in Christ. We have made this promise before the altar of our most Holy Mother Mary. We humbly ask the Virgin Mother Mary to carry our promise to the throne of God, and to obtain for us His grace and blessing.

Signed: &

Church of

Date

Witnessed by

If a couple wish to have a canonical engagement, they should plan for it some time before the formal announcement of their engagement, to allow time for a visit with their pastor and for the ceremony itself. This should precede the engagement announcement.

FAMILY DUTIES

Immediately following an engagement and prior to the announcement of it, both families should express their pleasure in it to the contracting parties and to each other. The form this expression takes varies with the degree of previous intimacy and place of residence. A woman who has known and loved her prospective daughter-in-law from infancy would not write her a note. But one living out of town would write at once to her new "daughter" along these lines:

MY DEAR ISABELLA,

Philip telephoned us last night to tell us the joyful news. We are so happy for you both! James and I are eager to know you better, and hope that you will be able to visit us soon.

I have sent you a little present to commemorate the happy occasion. It should reach you soon.

Please tell your parents how much we are looking forward to meeting them. Philip has told us so much about them.

Monday

Affectionately yours,
MARGARET BARR

A letter similar in tone should go from the bride's mother to the prospective bridegroom if he lives or works in another city or if they are not well acquainted.

If the parents live in different cities, and are not acquainted, the bride's mother should write along these lines:

MY DEAR MRS. WELCH,

We are so pleased over the children's great news! Harry is a fine young man, whom we shall be proud to call our son. We feel the young people are ideally suited to one another.

My husband and I are eager to know you and Mr. Welch. Can you not, sometime between the announcement and the wedding, plan on spending a weekend with us?

Saturday

Sincerely yours,
ALIDA CURTIS