



**THE M-A FORM:
THE PRENUPTIAL
INVESTIGATION (cont.)**

This month, we continue our look at the M-A form, also known as the Prenuptial Investigation. It is beyond the scope of this brief newsletter to address every question on the form, but we will look at some of the questions that may require an explanation.

Religious practice – The questions concerning the religious practice of the parties have no canonical significance and are purely pastoral in nature. That said, the question concerning the last time that the parties received the Sacrament of Penance arguably violates the seal of the confessional and should no longer be asked outside the context of a sacramental confession.

Prior marriage – When asking the parties if they have ever been married before, the priest or deacon should stress *in any way*. Since canon law presumes that all marriages are valid unless proven otherwise, even a purely civil marriage must still be resolved and the freedom of

the parties to marry determined by the tribunal before proceeding, unless the former spouse has died, in which case proof of death (i.e. a death certificate) should be included in the marriage file.

The nature and obligations of marriage – This question deals specifically with the canonical obligations of permanence (marriage is for life), exclusivity (fidelity), the good of the spouses, and openness to procreation. All of these should be discussed with the parties prior to completing the M-A.

The intention to have children – The procreation and education of children is one of the essential ends, or purposes, of marriage (canon 1055). It is not the only purpose, however, nor can either party guarantee that children will be born to the marriage. Children are a gift from God; the parties can only intend to give God the chance to bless them with children by intending to engage in acts of sexual intimacy that are capable of conceiving a child. That is why the most important part of this question is “God willing.” What if it is clear that God is *not* willing to bless a marriage with children, such as the case of an elderly couple past childbearing age? Unless their names are Abraham and Sarah, it would be absurd to

expect them to intend the impossible, so this question may be omitted in such a case.

Psychological counseling - People undergo psychological and psychiatric counseling and therapy for many reasons, and there is nothing wrong with seeking such help when needed. This question seeks only to make sure that the parties are currently in a psychological state that enables them to understand, critically evaluate, and freely choose marriage. If a party suffers from a severe psychological condition that might impair the ability to do this, the priest or deacon should request that the person obtain a letter from his or her doctor, therapist, or counselor stating that he or she is capable of the necessary judgment to consent to marriage.

That’s all we have space for this month. Tune in next time when we will continue our journey through the M-A form. Until then, keep the faith, love God’s people, and always honor the code!

