



THE M-A FORM: THE PRENUPTIAL INVESTIGATION

Continuing our look at the marriage file and the documents that need to be included, we turn our attention this month to the M-A form, also known as the Prenuptial Investigation, though, in truth, the entire marriage preparation process is an investigation. Through it, pastoral ministers not only assist couples in their preparation for marriage; they investigate whether the parties are canonically free to marry each other. The M-A form is the primary legal document that proves their freedom to marry.

The form should be completed by the priest or deacon preparing the couple for marriage. The minister should interview the parties in person, though, if the minister knows the parties, the interview could also be conducted via phone or video conference. Regardless, both parties must sign the form in the minister's presence to make it official.

The front page begins with basic information about the planned marriage (the parish and church where it will take place, the priest or deacon who will officiate, etc.). It also has sections for the parties' proper pastor to give permission for the marriage to be celebrated outside his parish and for the granting of delegation, if needed.

Next, the formal interview begins. Each party should be interviewed separately and alone so as not to feel pressured to give particular answers by the presence of the other party. Each party should also take the prescribed oath before the interview begins. It is beyond the scope of this brief newsletter to address every question on the form, especially since most are self-explanatory, but we will now look at some of the questions that may not be so obvious.

Parish of residence – In canon law, parishes are generally defined by a geographical area, and a person's parish is determined by where the person lives. While the parties may be registered in a different parish (or not registered in any parish), their parish of residence will likely be that of the Catholic church nearest to where they live. It is the pastor of this parish who must give permission for the marriage to

be celebrated outside the parish.

Sacramental history – For non-Catholics, the only sacramental information needed is that of baptism. If the person was baptized in another tradition but later received into the Catholic Church, that information should be recorded here under Confirmation.

Parents' religion – The question concerning the religion of the parties' parents becomes important if either party's parents are members of an Eastern Catholic Church (e.g. Byzantine Catholic). If so, the party may also be Eastern Catholic, even if he or she was baptized in the Latin Church. If either party's parents are Eastern Catholic and you are unsure how to proceed, please call the Tribunal Office.

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!

