



MEDICAL PROCEDURES WHICH PREVENT SOMEONE FROM VALIDLY ENTERING INTO MARRIAGE

In the ritual for the Sacrament of Marriage, the husband and wife to be are asked 3 questions (commonly referred to as vows) regarding their intent to enter into the marriage, which address three important and crucial areas inherent to the sacrament: ***Permanency*** (are you entering this marriage for the fullness or total remainder of your life); ***Exclusivity*** (you will remain faithful and exclusively for each other throughout the marriage); and ***Procreation*** (are you open to children—the gift of God’s love and creation). While the first two subjects (permanency and exclusivity) are pretty self-explanatory, within the U.S. Catholic Church today, there are still many misconceptions or misunderstandings amongst the faithful concerning what constitutes “*being open to children or procreation*”.

The general rule is that the conjugal act within marriage needs to be open and oriented toward procreation. Why? The first purpose of the conjugal act is procreation (e.g., our full cooperation in God’s divine plan for the creation of life) and the second is bonding with one's spouse, so that the two can become one flesh (Mark 10:8; Matthew 19:5).

The Catholic Church prohibits contraceptive means and/or measures, because they contradict the possibility of procreation (creating life) and the true meaning of the conjugal act. Artificial birth control can never be justified under any situation in a marriage. It is a mortal sin.

Vasectomies, tubal ligations, etc., for the purpose of birth control (e.g., any human means of intervention solely for the purpose of sterilization) are against the faith and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In some situations, the Church recognizes that a medical procedure may be needed for the life and health of the patient (e.g., ovarian, uterine or testicular cancer, etc.) which, unfortunately and as a secondary consequence to the surgery, may cause the person to be unable to have an appropriate marital conjugal act. It is important to highlight here however, the medical procedure (hysterectomy, etc.) was primarily a medical necessity for the health and life of the patient, it was not pursued by the patient solely as a means of birth control.

Especially in today’s sometimes rather lackadaisical approach to the sanctity of human life and regardless of how people “feel” about it, the conjugal act within marriage needs to be open to life and unity. There are very good reasons for this. Pope Paul VI issued “*Humanae Vitae*”, in which he condemned artificial birth control, as well as abortion and other attacks on human life. Here we are over 50 years later and what situations do we find ourselves in today? As he accurately predicted, we have an increase in abortions, voluntary human sterilizations and, sadly for many, a significant indifference to the respect, sanctity, and the gift of life: God’s gift to us.

The intimate “oneness” that a man and woman share is not to be treated or viewed lightly. It has been ordained by God since creation, to be between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage, for procreation and unity/bonding of the spouses.

With this in mind, couples who come forward to contract a valid marriage (or to have their existing civil marriages convalidated within the Church), where one or both future spouses have voluntarily elected to surgically alter their bodies to preclude procreation (e.g., vasectomy; tubal ligations; birth control devices; etc.) cannot honestly or truthfully answer “yes” to the ritual’s marital consent question:

Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?

Fully complying with the Canon Law of the Church, a person or couple who maintains such an “altered” physical condition — which overtly prevents procreation — creates an impediment (a serious obstacle) – which precludes them from contracting a valid marriage. This “altered” physical condition furthermore, precludes any ordained member of the clergy within the Roman Catholic Church from witnessing such a marriage; because it would be an invalid marriage.

To remove or resolve such a serious impediment, the couple preparing for their marriage within the Catholic Church will be asked to:

1. Meet with their parish priest to discuss their situation and begin their Marriage Preparation process, as outlined in diocesan sacrament preparation guidelines.
2. During this meeting, the couple will be advised that they must *actively* pursue and participate in the consultation with an appropriate physician/surgeon to reverse the “altered” physical condition; thereby enabling their full and open cooperation in the conjugal act towards procreation, before marriage can be contracted; otherwise it would be an invalid marriage.
3. Provide a medical letter or report from the physician or surgeon to the Church (for inclusion in their marriage preparation parish file folder) detailing the results of their efforts.

In closing, if you are planning to be married, and one or both parties have already undergone a surgical alteration of the body, which prevents the procreation of children, we urge you to please contact your parish priest, as soon as possible.

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