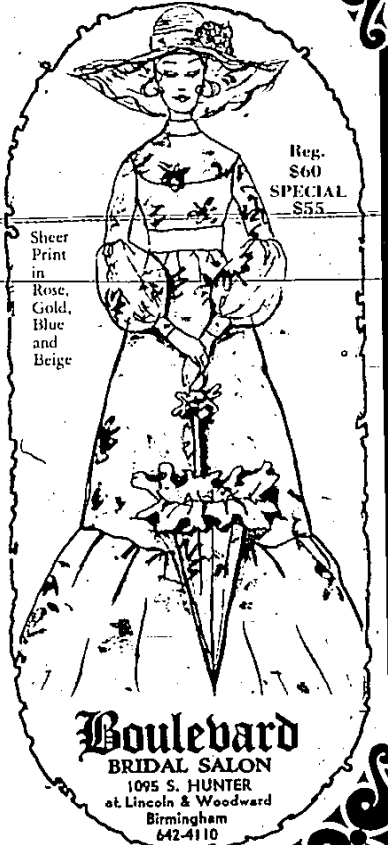


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Pastor Roger Schleeef, of Livonia's Faith Lutheran Church, expects the couples he marries to have extensive premarital counselling before their wedding date.

"I will not agree to do the wedding unless they come in three to five times for counselling or attend a series of classes on marriage which is given by the church, except when there are extenuating circumstances," Pastor Schleeef said. Needless to say, he continued, a twinkle in his eyes, I don't perform many ceremonies on short notice.

Despite changing times, couples getting married today are "as starry-eyed as they have ever been," the pastor believes. "They are somewhat unaware of any obstacles and unwilling to discover the areas where possible conflicts may develop."

To help the prospective bride and groom face their life together more realistically, Pastor Schleeef has each one fill out a questionnaire which he uses as a basis for his counselling.

THE MAN AND woman are asked questions regarding family, health and religion in addition to their knowledge of sex, the background of their romance and their current and prospective financial status. Pastor Schleeef said that many couples fill out the questionnaire together, but he prefers it to be done individually and in the absence of the other.

Questions such as "Is there anything in your life that you have concealed from your future spouse that you would like somehow to clear up at this time?" and "Do you feel that you are adequately prepared for the responsibilities of marriage? If not, what in your judgment is lacking?" are designed to bring problem areas out into the open where they may be shared.

"It has been my experience that sex and money are the areas in which conflicts arise most quickly," Pastor Schleeef said. "When couples are alerted to this, they can handle it

better when it comes up."

Pastor Schleeef readily admitted that only a small percentage of the couples he sees come to him with a real concern for counselling. "They are thinking about their wedding. I am thinking about their marriage."

The pastor noted an increase in the number of people who have had formal sex education. "Often I find, that it has been on a very academic level and not personally applicable to them," he declared. On the other hand, "it is not infrequent for the couple I am counselling to already be living together when they come to me."

Are the chances for a successful marriage greater because a couple has already experienced living together?

"I don't think it can be determined on that alone," Pastor Schleeef thoughtfully began. "For some, living together could be beneficial. But it really comes down to what kind of commitment they are willing to make to one another. Are they willing to make it public, to bind themselves together in a legal way?"

"I think it takes about five years of living together to really know one another, to know what it means 'to love.'"

Pastor Schleeef has noted fewer guilt feelings toward premarital sex and a more natural attitude toward birth control in the people he has counselled in recent years. He also finds a lessened feeling of obligation to have children.

AS PART OF his job, the pastor tries to help the couple view realistically the basic responsibilities in making up a home. He gets them to discuss household chores in order to explore their attitudes.

"Sometimes I find the traditional domineering male who will not see himself in a domestic role. If this is the case, then his wife-to-be had better know about it in advance. But more and more I see them dividing the responsibilities. How do you feel about vacuuming, about making dinner?"

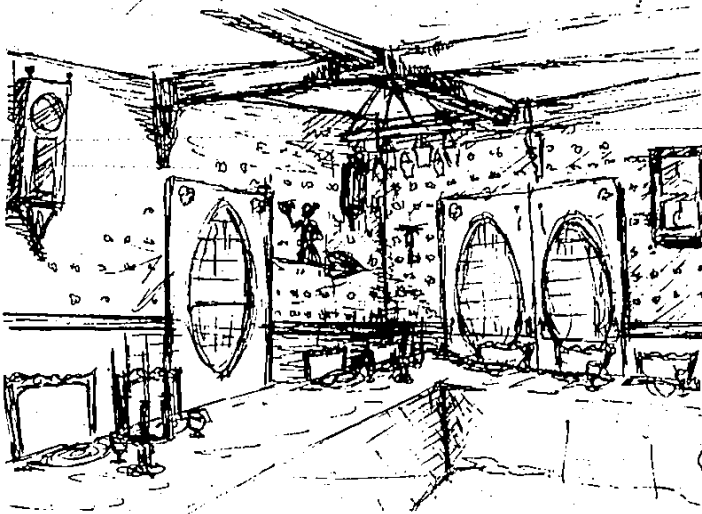
Is marriage an outmoded institution as statistics on divorce might indicate? According to the pastor, it depends on how the individuals look at the relationship.

"If a couple can see their marriage and how it relates to other people and the whole human community, then till death do they part is not impossible."

Pastor Schleeef is a firm advocate of post-marriage encounter groups such as the ones which the Catholic Church sponsors. "They relieve the every day stresses and strains and re-open avenues of communication for couples of every age and at every stage in a marriage," he said.

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