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A missed opportunity to celebrate a young couple

Joe Ferullo | Apr. 15, 2013 NCR Today

It doesn't seem to make sense for Catholic hierarchy to prevent young couples from marrying in the church -- it doesn't bode well for that whole "children are our future" thing we keep talking about -- and yet I heard an interesting story on just that subject.

I was at a church function and sat down next to two friends, a couple. They were involved with planning their daughter's wedding. It had a lot of complications.

For one, she was getting married back East, in Washington, D.C., which meant the mother -- living here in Los Angeles -- could not help as much as she liked with details like the dress, the bridesmaids and the catering.

Then there was the little matter of finding a church. The couple approached several parishes, but they required the young couple to be active members for at least six to nine months.

"What kids in their 20s belong to a parish? We didn't," the mom told me. She's right -- we all know Catholic youths drift away from the church after high school or college, come back to get married and reform close bonds when they start a family.

On top of this, the groom isn't Catholic -- this added another layer of complications. Requirements for conversion were dense and daunting. Some priests were open to conducting a joint religious ceremony, but their pastors were against it, and -- of course -- no church would host such a thing inside its walls.

So now the ceremony will take place at a Quaker meeting house in Washington. A priest won't be part of the equation, but it looks like a nun will take part to keep some Catholicism in the mix. It has been, it seems, a frustrating ordeal for a young couple trying to find their own way to hold onto traditions that still have meaning for them.

Now, I know, I know: If these young people were really committed to the church, none of these obstacles would matter. And the church -- well, it can't open the door to young cafeteria Catholics unwilling to sit down and eat the full meal. And, heck, what is this bride doing falling in love with someone who isn't Catholic in the first place?

If only life and love followed the rules we lay out for them. But inasmuch as they don't now and never have, it seems the church would be smart to help out this couple and many others like them. If a parish back East had been more flexible and welcoming and created a positive experience, that could have been a turning point in the spiritual life of these two young people and the family they will someday form.

But that opportunity seems to have been frittered away. To what end, I don't know. For whose good, I'm not sure.

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