



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

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GENERAL DECREE

Particular Law Regarding the Minimum Age for Marriage & Blessing of Engaged Couples

The universal law of the Catholic Church permits Catholic weddings for men from their sixteenth year and women from their fourteenth year (*CIC*, c. 1083, §1; *CCEO*, c. 800, §1). In many cultural situations, however, it is not prudent to allow persons to marry at such young ages. For this reason, the *Code of Canon Law* (c. 1083, §2) and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (c. 800, §2) allow for certain Church authorities to raise the age for the licit celebration of marriage. At this time, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which is competent to establish a higher age for licit marriages, has not done so.

Nevertheless, the *Code of Canon Law* states in canon 1071, §1, that a Catholic minister is not to assist at “a marriage which cannot be recognized or celebrated according to the norm of civil law” without the “permission of the local ordinary” (c. 1071, §1, 2°).

In accordance with the laws of the State of Tennessee, a marriage ceremony cannot be conducted for persons who are not legally married according to civil law unless the parties have obtained a license from a county in the State of Tennessee.

Furthermore, in the State of Tennessee, civil marriage is not permitted for anyone under the age of seventeen, and marriage licenses are not issued for the marriage of anyone between the ages of seventeen and eighteen without the consent of a parent or another legally qualified person.

Therefore, I declare and decree the following as particular law (*lex*) for the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee:

In the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee, no marriage may be celebrated without the prior written consent of the diocesan bishop if either of the parties to the marriage is under the age of eighteen. This law applies even if the parties to marriage have been legally married in another state or jurisdiction.

In the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee, any cleric who, without the prior written consent of the diocesan bishop, assists at a marriage when either of the parties to the marriage is under the age of eighteen, is to be punished with a just penalty which may even include suspension and/or deprivation of office.

The Order of Blessing of an Engaged Couple is found in Appendix II of the second typical edition of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. This rite is not a marriage ceremony and should not be celebrated in a manner similar to a marriage ceremony. Furthermore, the celebration of this rite does not impose on the parties a moral obligation to marry. Nevertheless, an engaged person, especially if said person is young or immature, could mistakenly believe that this rite of blessing implies an obligation to marry or permission to have conjugal relations.

Therefore, I declare and decree the following as particular law (*lex*) for the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee:

In the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee, the rite of blessing of an engaged couple shall not be celebrated if either of the engaged persons is under the age of eighteen.

These laws are to be promulgated by publication on the diocesan website.

Given at the Chancery in Memphis on the 23rd day of June 2023

+ *David P. Talley*

Most Rev. David P. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.
Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee

Anna Lynn

Mrs. Anna Lynn, J.C.L.
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