

## MARRIAGE ISSUES

One of the things that keeps people away from the Church today is their marriage situation. Yes, not having your marriage recognized by the Church cuts you off from the sacraments but does it have to be that way? Can we help you with your marriage situation?

There are three scenarios to look at. One is a civil or religious marriage where you never contacted your parish or priest. If both of you are free to marry (no other marriages other than your present bond), then we can work with you to convalidate (most people say “bless”) the marriage. Give us a call at the Rectory and we’ll be glad to work with you.

The next two scenarios involve divorces. For those who are divorced and want a present marriage recognized by the Church, they need a declaration of nullity, commonly called an annulment. There are two kinds. One kind is granted when the previous marriage was that described above. A Catholic bride or groom did not work with the Church and the marriage wasn't recognized by the Church. Most of the work of this type can be done in the parish. Again, call us at the Rectory and we’ll be glad to get you started. Please note that one of the people in this scenario *must* be Catholic to begin this type of procedure.

The last scenario is admittedly the most involved one. This is when there was a marriage of one or two Catholics that was recognized by the Church and now one or both parties wish to get an annulment. This also would apply to two non-Catholics who were married in any type of ceremony to each other and now one wishes to marry a Catholic. You may have heard news about annulments based on Pope Francis’ new decrees for the upcoming Year of Mercy. While most of those decrees will make things go a bit more quickly, they won’t have a great effect on the speed of this annulment process here in Philly since, quite frankly, the people who handle this stuff are really, really good! And, yes, there is also the fact that the process will take you to a place that isn’t pleasant, namely, the former relationship. This isn’t meant to renew the hurt but to help come to healing, especially with the present relationship. The following text is from the office that handles these types of annulments: The Metropolitan Tribunal. Of course, if you want guidance or support from the parish during this time, feel free to stop in and talk. And take note that Pope Francis has decreed that all annulment proceedings are FREE. There is no cost for this process.

**DO YOU KNOW YOUR TRIBUNAL?** The Tribunal is a group of specially qualified Catholics whose responsibility is to come to the help of people who have experienced divorce and who may wish to remarry in the Catholic Church. When a divorce occurs, the Catholic Church always seeks to balance two realities. One is the unbreakableness of the bond of marriage. This is God's law. It cannot be broken by human intervention. On the other hand, the Church is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the people involved. Was this a true marriage? Even though a Catholic marriage was celebrated, was there perhaps some deficiency in the consent of the parties involved? The annulment procedure addresses this problem. If you are divorced or remarried outside the Catholic Church and want to marry in the Church, please telephone the Tribunal Office.

THE TRIBUNAL  
222 NORTH 17<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103  
TELEPHONE (215) 587-3750

## PROCEDURE FOR INVESTIGATING A CHURCH DECLARATION OF NULLITY

### 1) PRELIMINARY STEPS

- ✚ Contact the Tribunal directly or talk with your parish priest about your marriage situation to see whether you need an annulment. Before a case is initiated at the Tribunal, you must have already obtained a civil divorce. If you are already divorced and wish to begin annulment proceedings, call the Tribunal at (215) 587-3750. You will be sent a questionnaire to fill out. Complete this questionnaire, which will ask for the basic facts and a brief explanation of the events of your marriage, and return it to the Tribunal. You will then be scheduled for an initial hearing held in the Tribunal office.
- ✚ During this interview, you will be asked about your family background, the courtship, the marriage itself and its termination.

### 2) THE TRIBUNAL PROCESS

- ✚ The other party, your ex-husband or ex-wife, is sent a letter by the Tribunal asking his/her participation and testimony. If he/she refuses, the case continues on its own merit without his/her cooperation.
- ✚ Four witness questionnaires are given to you for family, friends, or anyone else who can verify your basic testimony or add additional information about your marriage. These forms are notarized by a priest or civil notary and returned by mail to the Tribunal by the individual witnesses.
- ✚ The length of the whole procedure is about nine to twelve months and the present cost is \$800.00. In cases of true need, verified by your parish priest, requests for reductions in these court costs can be made to the Tribunal.
- ✚ In some cases, as part of the final decision in the case, the person receiving the annulment and the person he/she would like to marry in the Catholic Church are asked to meet with a counselor to evaluate their readiness for remarriage in the Catholic Church.

### 3) THE ROLE OF THE TRIBUNAL

- ✚ The Tribunal process does not put you in the role of placing blame on the other party. The Decree of Nullity has no effect on the legitimacy of children or other matters such as custody or property settlements which are decided by civil law. An affirmative decision allows the parties to marry in the Catholic Church and to receive the Eucharist.