

## **If I am married out of the Church, how do I return to the sacraments?**

The Catholic Church would love to welcome you back to the sacraments. Please contact your parish priest or deacon for a meeting to express that desire. If either you or your spouse has been previously married, the priest or deacon will assist you with preparing a petition for an annulment to be sent to the Tribunal. If both of you have never been previously married or your former spouses are deceased, the priest or deacon will prepare you for marriage in the Church so that you may receive the sacraments. Once annulments are completed, if you are married out of the Church, you may then begin preparation for marriage in the Church.

### **Remember:**

**Even though the annulment process may seem daunting, the most important benefit for our souls is the reception of the Eucharist and the other sacraments.**

### **Members of the Tribunal**

**Fr. J. Kenneth Walker, MCL, JCL**  
Judicial Vicar

**Fr. Jason Gries, JCL**  
Adjutant Judicial Vicar

**Mary Gen Blittschau, MCL, JCL**  
Director of the Tribunal and Judge

**Fr. Stephen Lintzenich**  
Associate Judge

**Fr. James Tobolski, MCL, JCL**  
Defender of the Bond

**Deacon Thomas Holsworth, PhD, HSPP**  
Court Psychological Expert

**Rhonda Fehrenbacher and Alanna Rohlf**  
Ecclesiastical Notaries

## **What is the Tribunal?**

The Tribunal is the Church court of the diocese which is responsible for the work involved in assisting those who petition for declarations of nullity and dissolutions of marriage. Canon lawyers are appointed by Bishop to serve the diocese.

If you wish to have a previous marriage investigated by the Tribunal for the possibility of a declaration of nullity (annulment) or a dissolution (a marriage of at least one non-baptized person), please contact your parish priest or deacon who will assist you to submit the case to the Tribunal where the investigation begins. Your petition includes the reasons you believe that a partnership of life never existed in the marriage. To assist you in surfacing possible grounds for nullity, you will answer a detailed questionnaire. The Tribunal then determines if grounds and sufficient proofs are present to accept the case and proceed with the investigation.

## **Diocese of Evansville Office of the Tribunal**



**4200 N. Kentucky Ave.  
P.O. Box 4169  
Evansville, IN 47724-0169  
(812) 424-5536**

## **What is an annulment (declaration of nullity)?**

An annulment (declaration of nullity) is a judgment made by the Tribunal that one's prior marriage is invalid according to the laws of the Catholic Church. Proof must be presented that one or both of the parties lacked the capacity to consent to marriage or that one of the essential elements of marriage was lacking; other reasons may exist. Grounds must be present in order to declare a marriage invalid according to Church law. A thorough investigation will take place in order to determine whether invalidity is proven or not based on the evidence. An annulment does not have any civil effect, including the legitimacy of children.

## **How do I petition for an annulment?**

The first step is to contact your parish priest or deacon who will assist you with gathering the necessary documents as well as providing assistance and support as you answer the questionnaire. The official investigation does not begin until all required information is submitted to the Tribunal.

## **May I set a date for a new marriage in the Church once the Tribunal has accepted my case?**

No. Only after the declaration of nullity has been completed may a date be set.

## **Will my former spouse be contacted?**

Yes. Your previous spouse must be contacted to officially notify him or her that a petition has been presented to the Tribunal, requesting an investigation regarding the invalidity of the prior marriage. Several letters are sent during the nullity investigation. As a principal party, he or she has several rights in canon law and is assured of the right of defense. However, your former spouse is not required to participate in order to proceed with the case.

## **How will I be kept updated about the status of my case?**

Letters are sent to you and your former spouse about each stage of the investigation.

## **How long does a declaration of nullity take to complete?**

No guarantee is ever made that an annulment will be granted. It may not be possible to prove the invalidity of the former marriage. Otherwise, circumstances vary. Presuming strong evidence, formal nullity cases run just over one year from the time you receive the first letter from the Tribunal for the investigation to be completed.

## **Is there a cost?**

No. At the request of Pope Francis and supported by Bishop Siegel, there is no fee.

## **May a divorced Catholic receive the sacraments?**

If a Catholic is divorced and has not remarried, one may receive the sacraments; one must be in the state of grace as all Catholics are called to be.

If a Catholic has divorced and remarried without an annulment or is currently living together with someone, he or she must first obtain an annulment as well as his or her proposed spouse.

Marriage preparation is then given to exchange vows in the Church.

If you have additional questions, please contact the Tribunal.



## **What if the person I want to marry is not Catholic but was previously married?**

In order to be married in the Catholic Church, all prior marriages, whether or not they took place in the Catholic Church, must be investigated for the possibility of a declaration of nullity. Both Catholic marriages and non-Catholic marriages are presumed to be valid unless proven otherwise by a declaration of nullity.