

# STATEMENT CONCERNING THE R.C.I.A AND MARRIAGE CASES

prepared by the Archdiocesan R.C.I.A. Team  
and the Matrimonial Tribunal  
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**In justice to a person seeking to enter the Church and out of respect for the integrity of both the R.C.I.A. and the marriage nullity processes, it is imperative to balance a pastoral approach with fidelity to the law. Any inquirer - baptized or unbaptized - who must resolve a marriage issue through a formal nullity process should complete this process prior to celebrating any of the formal rites of the Church (i.e., Rite of Acceptance, Rite of Election, Scrutinies)**

## **Establishing the Facts - Initial Interview**

Besides getting to know an inquirer, the initial interview should address the person's call to conversion, pastoral needs, spiritual formation, and marital status. The Church regards any marriage as a sacred, natural bond and a permanent commitment - whether or not the persons are baptized. It is pastorally sensitive and prudent to establish the marital history of each person who seeks to become Catholic in this initial interview. This marital history should include that of the inquirer's present spouse or fiancé. The interview process provides an opportunity to offer a brief summary of the Church's teaching on marriage, and to explain that the Church does not accept civil divorce as an end to marriage. If it is established that the inquirer is in an irregular marital union, that person should immediately be referred to the pastor (or associate or procurator/advocate, as the pastor directs) to determine what kind(s) of marriage case(s) may be involved.

## **Deciding What to Do Next**

Resolution of the marital issue for an inquirer in an irregular marital union before acceptance into the R.C.I.A. process is the norm. However, until the marriage case is resolved a parish may respond to the pastoral needs of an inquirer by doing one or more of the following:

- 1) **Ongoing Inquiry:** This is a year-round process which is based on the needs and questions of the inquirer and provides for loose connection to the community. In this case, the inquirer could remain in this period during resolution of a marriage issue. This intervening time also allows the person to further explore the desire to enter the Church.
- 2) **Parish Companion or Sponsor:** The parish could provide a companion or sponsor who would assist the inquirer by getting to know him/her, answering questions about being Catholic, inviting him/her to parish functions, etc. The R.C.I.A. coordinator or team member would maintain contact with the companion and the inquirer.
- 3) **Small Christian Communities (e.g., Renew Group, Prayer Group):** The inquirer could be invited to participate in one of the parish small Christian Communities in order to maintain contact with the parish. The R.C.I.A. coordinator or team member would facilitate this process and be in contact with the small Christian community and the inquirer.

## **Implications**

Not every marriage can be declared invalid. It is important to clarify with the inquirer all that is involved. It is extremely difficult for a person to participate in both processes at the same time. Each parish must consider how it can most sensitively meet the individual needs of an inquirer.

**Convalidation:**

After an inquirer/candidate's previous marriage has received a declaration of nullity, he/she may participate in the celebration of the Rite of Acceptance (provided there is no marriage case still needed for the intended spouse). When a catechumen/candidate's current civil spouse is Catholic, then a convalidation of marriage will be necessary. This should be accomplished as soon as possible after receiving notification of the declaration of nullity or canonical dissolution. A convalidation is very simple and only requires the consent of the couple found in the *Rite of Marriage* and received by a priest or deacon and two witnesses. (See *Rite of Marriage*, nos. 60-61; 161-163) If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Sr. Victoria Vondenberger at the Tribunal or Rev. Steve Angi at the Chancery.