

Metropolitan Tribunal

Dear R.C.I.A. Coordinator,

Every year, as Lent approaches, the Metropolitan Tribunal receives petitions to handle cases of candidates and catechumens who need their marriage situations regularized in order to be baptized or brought into full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. Often, by this time it is too late to begin a case. The marital status of those who desire to become Catholic should be established from the outset in order to avoid last minute surprises and disappointment.

ALL marriage cases should be dealt with immediately when an individual first registers for the R.C.I.A. and the Tribunal should be contacted no later than November 1.

If a candidate has ever been married either in a religious or civil ceremony (i.e., Justice of the Peace, Judge, Civil Magistrate, etc.) he or she will need to have that marriage reviewed by the Tribunal. Whether or not the candidate and his or her former spouse were Catholic, **any previous marriage** needs to be investigated by the Tribunal.

There are several types of annulment cases, ranging from a simple documentary process, called a “Lack of Canonical Form” and which can be completed in a relatively short period of time, to a formal annulment case which generally takes about nine months to complete. Another process, commonly referred to as the Pauline Privilege, may be applied when two unbaptized persons marry, then divorce, and now one seeks to become a baptized Catholic. No matter which type of procedure is required, several documents need to be obtained such as recent copies of baptismal certificates (if the candidate’s former spouse was Catholic) and marriage and divorce decrees. In many instances it is also necessary to make some contact with the candidate’s former spouse and there may be a need to obtain testimony from witnesses. All of this takes time and should be dealt with as soon as possible in order to have the candidate’s marriage situation regularized well before the Easter Vigil, if possible.

It would also assist us to know that a petitioner in an annulment case is participating in the R.C.I.A., which alerts us to the time frame we are dealing with. In most circumstances if a case is initiated in September or early October and we know it involves an R.C.I.A. candidate there is a much better chance of completing the appropriate process on time.

Prompt attention to these matters makes it easier for everyone involved: pastors, candidates and catechumens, R.C.I.A. coordinators and tribunal judges.

Thanking you for your cooperation in this matter and asking God’s blessing on you and your work, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Msgr. Paul A. DiGirolamo, JCD
Judicial Vicar