

In the process of opening up old wounds, it is discovered the wound was not healed, only festering just beneath the surface. Now, the wounds are allowed to heal and properly close on the surface.

Thus, many issues must be honestly confronted and hard decisions made so that former issues that disrupted the prior relationship are not repeated, causing even greater pain.

A possible result of this process is a deeper appreciation of one's self, of others and an understanding of Jesus' teaching of the sanctity of marriage... That is a marriage as intended by God in Genesis, reinforced by Jesus and understood by the Church.

If granted an annulment, what about my children?

A church annulment is about the lack of covenant sacramentality between *you and your former spouse*. It is about your marriage. It has nothing to do with the legal relationship. This means an annulment does not deal with, nor affect the legitimacy of, any children of the union.

So, if I have re-married outside of the Church, what is my status in the Church?

As a baptized Catholic, you are still a Catholic. You are still in communion with the Church. You are just not in *full communion* with the Church.

What, exactly, does this mean? I desire to still be a part of the Church.

By virtue of your baptism, you are a member of the Church. The Church welcomes your attendance at Mass. While not able to receive Holy Communion, you are able to receive Jesus through the Liturgy of the Word. You receive Jesus in those assembled for Mass. And, of course, you can receive Jesus through your own participation in the prayers of Mass.

You are also encouraged to be active in the various ministries of the Church. You may sing in the choir, lector, greet people at the door, be a hospitality minister (usher).

A call to the parish rectory will put you in contact with a whole list of ministries awaiting your participation. Your participation in the Church is most welcome.

I very much want to start on my annulment, but am a bit overwhelmed. Where can I go for help?

For those looking for more information on annulments, Catholic bookstores carry books dealing with the subject including *Annulment: A Step by Step Guide for Divorced Catholics* by Rev. Ronald Smith.

Yet another choice is to schedule a private appointment with your pastor or parish priest in which a one-to-one approach is taken.

Additional information may be

obtained from the Metropolitan Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia by calling 215.587.3750.

Once your initial questions and concerns have been satisfactorily addressed and you are ready to move forward with annulment proceedings you should call the Metropolitan Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia at 215.587.3750 to request an annulment packet be sent to you. The annulment packet will contain a questionnaire and other paperwork necessary to begin the annulment proceedings along with detailed information on the steps of the annulment process.

Of course your pastor and parish priests are available to assist you at any time should you have any questions about the proceedings or information contained in the packet.

Am I really welcome in the Church?

In a very simple and forward answer, "Yes". The Scriptures are rich with Jesus offering reconciliation. The Catholic Church reinforces this through its teachings. Your active participation in the Church benefits not only you, but the entire community as well. It was never intended that anyone should be excluded from the Mystical Body of Christ because the spiritual health of God's community is dependent on all of us. For God's jigsaw puzzle to be complete requires that all pieces be present and in place. This includes you!

ANNULMENTS & DIVORCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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THE NATURE OF MARRIAGE

The Church holds that marriages, when properly celebrated, are presumed to be valid, until proven invalid. This means the Catholic Church recognizes the marriages of non-Catholics as well as Catholics.

The Catechism tells us that “The Sacrament of Matrimony is a sacrament of Service. Each member of the union is supposed to be the servant of the other. Matrimony gives the spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ loves his church. The grace perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens the indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.”

If the above paragraph does not describe a given marriage, it may be that the marriage is not sacramental and not for the “good of the spouses”. In many instances such as described, the spouses divorce.

The Church believes strongly in the sanctity of marriage. That is, the Church believes marriages are permanent.

DIVORCE IN THE CHURCH

Because the marriage bond is sealed by God himself, it is, by its very nature, irrevocable. Therefore,

even though a Catholic may divorce from his or her spouse, the Church still considers the marriage bond between them to be intact.

What are my rights as a divorced Catholic in the Church?

Divorced Catholics lose none of their rights in the Church, except the right to enter a new marriage, until the Church declares them free to marry. **All Catholics, divorced Catholics included, are free to receive the sacraments, provided they are not in a state of serious sin,** (i.e. have not remarried "outside the Church," or are not cohabiting with another partner). If they are in another marital (or cohabiting) union, they are not permitted to receive the sacraments. People in such a situation are encouraged to speak with their pastor.

ANNULMENTS IN THE CHURCH

So, if marriage is sacred and permanent, how can the Church grant annulments? This seems contradictory.

The Church tries to be faithful to Jesus’ teaching regarding marriage: “What God has joined, no human being must separate.” (Mark 10:9) It was also Jesus who reconciled people and gave them hope for new beginnings despite

the mistakes in their lives. The question to be answered is, “Did God join me together to my former spouse?” Sometimes, there are circumstances that occur before a marriage that negatively affect the validity of the union. If you believe this to be true in your case, then you *have a right* to ask the Church to determine whether, in the eyes of the Church, you and your former spouse were joined in a sacred and sacramental bond. If the Marriage Tribunal (the judicial arm of the Church empowered by the Pope to make such determinations) agrees with you, that it was not a “marriage made in Heaven,” a decree of nullity is issued.

Although a civil divorce is required before the annulment request can be submitted, the two are vastly different. The Church does not consider a civil bond as dissolving of the marriage bond. It considers the marriage bond permanent unless declared invalid by the Tribunal.

Why, then, should I seek a Church annulment?

Many people seek an annulment so that they may re-marry in the Catholic Church. They wish to receive the graces that God so abundantly and freely gives to those in the sacred vocation of marriage. Others seek annulments because they *need* the determination of the Church that theirs was not a sacramental marriage.

For many, going through the

annulment process is a healing process. This is because they find that they are not alone in their experience of divorce. (There are approximately seven million divorced Catholics in the United States.) They are not the only ones who have experienced the tragedy of failed relationships. They are not the only ones who realize too late that theirs was not a “healthy” marriage that encouraged spiritual development in the family.

Divorced Catholics who have remarried without having the Church declare their prior marriage annulled are denied access to the sacraments. Therefore, many wish to return to the sacraments.

You mentioned healing, won’t the annulment process just open up old wounds?

For many, the process is a healing process. It allows them to truly let go of the pain, hurt, embarrassment caused by their previous bond or even the perceived social stigmas following a civil divorce.

However, some people enter new relationships carrying with them the baggage of the former relationship. They are surprised to find the process is a help to them in their new relationship. For the first time in their lives they come to understand the nature of true Christian relationships...especially as to how this relates to a person and that person’s spouse in a true marital bond.