WHAT IS THE TRIBUNAL?

The Tribunal is a diocesan office staffed by persons appointed by the archbishop who have received special preparation to resolve judicial proceedings for marriage cases and other matters of Church (canon) law.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE TRIBUNAL?

The Tribunal serves the Church community and individuals in the protection and defense of rights as prescribed in canon law.

Regarding marriages, the Tribunal assists people who request an investigation of their prior marriage(s). After gathering as much information as possible, the Tribunal makes a human decision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the status of the marriage bond.

Either the marriage will be upheld as valid and binding, or it will be determined that no sacramental marriage bond existed due to certain conditions that render the marriage null.

HOW DO I START A MARRIAGE CASE?

Contact your parish priest, deacon or tribunal parish liaison who will assist you with information about preparing a marriage case, and can explain the appropriate Church process involved. You may also contact the Metropolitan Tribunal directly by calling (651) 291-4466 or email tribunal@archspm.org.
**WHAT IS A DECLARATION OF NULLITY?**

A declaration of nullity, commonly known as an annulment, is a statement issued by the Tribunal that one of the essential elements of marriage was not present at the time the Parties’ exchanged matrimonial consent. This declaration does not assign moral judgment or blame to either of the Parties nor does it deny that a legal bond existed.

**WHY SEEK A DECLARATION OF NULLITY?**

A person seeks a declaration of nullity in order to obtain a definitive statement on the sacramental nature of his/her prior marriage(s). This statement clarifies whether a person, Catholic or non-Catholic, is free to marry in the Catholic Church. Any divorced person who seeks possible remarriage in the Catholic Church must have each prior marriage examined by the Tribunal.

**DOES A DECLARATION OF NULLITY HAVE ANY CIVIL EFFECTS?**

Marriage cases that have been declared invalid through the Church process have no civil effects in the United States. Issues such as child support and visitation, property rights and alimony are not affected by this process. A copy of the final divorce decree must be submitted to the Tribunal for each prior marriage.

**DOES A DECLARATION OF NULLITY AFFECT THE LEGITIMACY OF CHILDREN?**

Children are a gift from God and are entitled to the love and support of parents and the faith community. If a marriage is declared invalid, children of that marriage are not considered illegitimate.

**MUST THE TRIBUNAL CONTACT THE OTHER SPOUSE?**

Yes. The other spouse must be notified that a marriage case has been submitted to the Tribunal, since both Parties can exercise certain rights given in Church law. The person initiating the process must make every effort to provide an accurate, current address for their former spouse. Online databases, some of which charge a small fee, are often helpful in locating former spouses.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF THE FORMER SPOUSE REFUSES TO PARTICIPATE?**

It is advantageous for both Parties to participate fully. However, if the former spouse either refuses to participate or decides not to respond after being notified, the Tribunal may proceed with the process.

**ARE WITNESSES NECESSARY?**

Yes, witnesses are asked to provide statements regarding their observations of the Parties’ marriage. This helps the Tribunal have a fuller picture of the relationship.

**CAN ANYONE BE A WITNESS?**

Witnesses should be persons who knew one or both of the spouses before or at the time of the wedding, or during the early years of marriage. If possible, it is best to include a mixture of family, friends, and even counselors. Children born of the marriage are never asked to be witnesses for their parents.

**ARE CASES ALWAYS DECIDED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE?**

Only when the Tribunal reaches moral certitude about a marriage’s invalidity can an affirmative decision be issued.

**IF A DECLARATION OF NULLITY IS ISSUED, ARE THE PARTIES FREE TO MARRY?**

Yes. However, in some cases, certain conditions may be placed on one or both Parties before they can marry in the Church, especially if serious psychological or relational difficulties were evident in the former marriage.

**DOES THE PROCESS BRING HEALING?**

It is designed to be a fact-finding process with the goal of discovering the truth about the validity of a marriage. The process provokes introspection, which many find challenging; other people find that the process brings healing and leads to closure.