

Toronto Regional Catholic Marriage Tribunal Peterborough Branch Office



Dear Petitioner,

Let me commend you for taking this first step in clarifying your marital status in the Church. We hope that this process will be a time of healing and spiritual growth.

The Catholic Church believes that marriage is sacred and that it affects the family, society, and the Church. In our *Code of Canon Law* marriage is defined as a covenant between a man and a woman by which they establish a partnership for the whole of life, which is for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children; marriage between baptized persons has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament (c. 1055). This teaching forms the basis of the tribunal's work.

Our Lord Jesus teaches that marriage is permanent (Mt. 19:6). Divorce does not bring a marriage to an end, and a properly celebrated marriage is presumed to be valid until proven otherwise. Therefore, before a divorced person can be declared free to marry, it must be proven that the first union is not binding. Catholics, as well as non-Catholics, who wish to marry in the Catholic Church, have the right to ask the tribunal to investigate the possible nullity of their previous marriage.

A marriage can be declared null only if it can be proven through the tribunal's formal inquiry that, at the time of consent, at least one of the parties lacked an intention or capability necessary to establish the binding covenant of marriage. If nullity is declared, both parties are free to enter marriage in the Catholic Church (though in certain situations, restrictions may apply).

A declaration of nullity does not deny that a real relationship existed, nor does it imply that the relationship was entered with ill will or moral fault. It does not seek to place blame or establish guilt. When a marriage is declared null by the Church's tribunal, the legitimacy of any children is not affected and there are no consequences whatsoever in civil law.

The tribunal's process can be emotionally taxing, but it can also bring about healing and new life. The staff at your parish office can help you begin a case and support you through the process. We are willing to work with you. Meanwhile may God be with you in your journey of faith.

Rev. Father Raymond Rick, JCL
Adjutant Judicial Vicar