



## ANNULMENTS: GETTING STARTED

This brief document explains how to begin the annulment process. There are several other documents on our diocesan website, but this one will help you get started.

### **First: Understand What You Are Getting Into**

An annulment—rather, a request for a declaration of nullity—is an official petition to a Tribunal that is composed of judges, canon lawyers, professional legal personnel, experts, etc. The petition is a request for judgment in a particular case. It asks the question, “Is my marriage null from the beginning for this specific reason?” The trial that follows a petition is just like most other trials. There are time limits, rights, witnesses, paperwork, etc. This is a process that will take many months, and could quite easily extend beyond a year. It is fundamentally a search for a true answer to the question that is asked in the petition. Sometimes that answer is affirmative and sometimes it is negative.

### **Second: Understand Who Can Help You**

Our Tribunal has an in-house staff. This staff can be of some help, but primary help comes from our Annulment Sponsors ([see our website for a list and contact information](#)) and also from our parish priests, deacons, and staff. There is an understandable information and experience gap between our Tribunal and those who send us petitions. Our Annulment Sponsors and parish priests and deacons are a very useful help in overcoming this gap. A person does not have to seek help, but the help is there for a reason—it is useful!

### **Third: Understand How to Be Involved**

Sometimes, there is a notion that an annulment is a gift granted or a grace conferred. *This is not the case at all.* The trial that follows a petition is a serious judicial process with two thousand years of history. Our primary form of communication is by letter in hard copy. But, we are also available via phone and email. All official communication happens by letter—both to and from

the Tribunal—but asking questions before getting started and along the way can be helpful for everyone involved.

**Fourth: Understand the Process**

Most cases are tried under what is called the *Ordinary Process*. This is a process of gathering testimony and evidence and then coming to a decision. Some cases are treated under what is called the *Shorter Process*. This is for cases which meet the criteria that both former spouses consent to the process, the marriage is clearly and obviously invalid, and the evidence which proves this beyond any reasonable doubt is immediately at hand. The use of the *Ordinary* or the *Shorter Process* is at the discretion of the Tribunal. The Tribunal will choose the process which best fits the case at hand.

**Fifth: Understand What the Tribunal Can Do for You**

The Tribunal can answer the question posed in your petition. That is all. We cannot change the past, change the truth, or ignore the procedural law which governs our activities. We try to be meticulous, attentive, and patient. We deeply value each person's right to self-defense and right to judgment, and we consider confidentiality to be of paramount importance. Sometimes answering a question leads to more questions. Hopefully, it finds the truth. Sometimes this truth is painful and stirs up what seem to be impossibly difficult emotions and memories. You should expect that it may be an emotionally trying process. You may have to ask old friends and family members things which are intensely personal. We can help you in this, but you should be prepared for it, too.

If you keep the above in mind as you prepare to submit a petition for a declaration of nullity, you will be starting from a good place. If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to contact our Tribunal.