

7) What is spiritual communion?

Spiritual communion is a devotional practice where a person prays to be united to God. This prayer can be spontaneous, or from multiple forms that can be found online, and it can be said at any time. Often this prayer is said when a person is unable to receive Holy Communion, i.e., actually consuming the body and blood of Jesus. At Mass a person who is only receiving Christ spiritually can either remain in the pew during communion, or they can come forward with their arms crossed in order to receive a blessing from the communion minister.

8) Can a Catholic marry a non-Catholic who has been divorced?

Yes, once the non-Catholic has received an annulment. The Church believes that a person can have only one valid marriage in one's lifetime, (except for death of one's spouse). The non-Catholic marriage must undergo the same review as the Catholic marriage and be declared invalid before one is allowed to marry in the Catholic Church.

9) How do I start the process? How long does it take? Is it very expensive?

The process begins in the parish. A priest, deacon, or pastoral minister will assist you in preparing documents that will need to be submitted to the Tribunal. The length of time varies with each case. There is no cost for an annulment.

10) What happens after my case is sent to the Tribunal?

The Tribunal seeks to find the truth regarding the question of the validity of the

marriage. The process involves contacting the former spouse, gathering written testimony from the parties and witnesses. All testimony is reviewed by Church officials trained in the areas of Canon Law, Theology, or Social Sciences. The Church judge will then issue a decision, with moral certainty, regarding the validity or invalidity of the marriage.

11) Are all cases granted an Affirmative Decree of Nullity (Annulment)?

No, the grounds for granting an affirmative decision need to have been present from the beginning of the union. In a few instances cases do not have testimony that supports the claim that from the onset of the marriage something was missing in the eyes of the Church.

12) What should I do if I have more questions?

The Diocese of Des Moines is here to support you in this process. We understand that petitioning for an annulment can be difficult on occasion, but this process has been developed at the service of mercy and justice. If you have any further questions please contact the Tribunal directly (see below). We are here to assist you and walk with you through this process!



For more information contact:

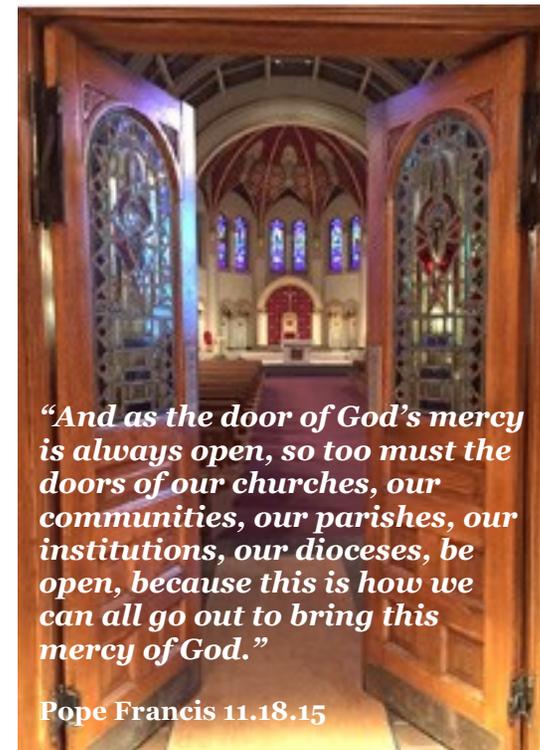
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Frequently Asked Questions About Marriage and Annulments in the Catholic Church



“And as the door of God’s mercy is always open, so too must the doors of our churches, our communities, our parishes, our institutions, our dioceses, be open, because this is how we can all go out to bring this mercy of God.”

Pope Francis 11.18.15



Office of the Tribunal

Diocese of Des Moines

My friends,

Experiencing the breakdown of a marriage is difficult to say the least. One's hopes and dreams are placed in the sacramental relationship that's expected to last a lifetime. Divorce, then, is an experience that can be traumatic and full of grief.

The Catholic Church recognizes the pain and hurt associated with divorce and offers healing for those who want to move on, while retaining the dignity of marriage. An annulment, or declaration of nullity is a decree from the Church stating that from the beginning of the union an element, intention, or understanding of marriage was missing. It is my sincere hope that the annulment process is found to be healing, and that all people know that they are welcomed and loved by the Church.

Sincerely In Christ,

+ *Richard E Pates*

Richard Pates
Bishop Diocese of Des Moines

1) What is an annulment?

It is a judicial (legal) decree from the Church. It is issued at the end of a process that studied the details of the marital relationship. It determines from the beginning of the union an element, intention, or a correct understanding of marriage was missing. When a Catholic person marries outside of the Church without permission, he or she can receive a "lack of form" annulment which is a simple process that can usually be completed in less than sixty days.

2) What is the difference between a "formal" annulment and a "lack of form" annulment?

A marriage can be considered null because of either internal or external factors. All Catholics are required to be married following Catholic Form (the Catholic rite of marriage). When this element is lacking an external factor was clearly absent. Practically that means these situations are more easily addressed, and a "lack of form" annulment is approximately a sixty day process with no lengthy investigation. This is just a matter of gathering pertinent documents. If however, Catholic form was followed, the Tribunal must discern whether an internal factor was absent, in which case a more detailed study is necessary.



3) Is a divorced Catholic excommunicated?

No, civil divorce does not mean a person is excommunicated. A civil divorce in itself does not damage a person's communion with the Church. Divorced persons can participate in the entire sacramental life of the Church.

4) Can a Catholic who has been divorced marry again?

Yes, once an annulment has been issued by a Diocesan Tribunal.

5) Why does the Church require an annulment for a person to be married a second time in the Church?

The Church believes that once a valid marriage is entered into, only death can end the marriage, and all marriages are assumed valid until shown to be otherwise. Therefore a civil divorce does not change the Church's view of a couple's marital status. The Church acknowledges that divorces happen, and people often desire to marry again after a divorce. In these cases the Church can study the details of the first marriage to see if a valid marriage actually did occur in the eyes of the Church. This study is meant to be an act of justice and mercy, and not meant to impart guilt or invalidate all aspects of the former relationship. This has no effect on the status of the children.

6) What does it mean if I've remarried without an annulment?

Remarrying after divorce without receiving a prior annulment does effect a person's communion with the Church, not because the Church rejects this person but because he or she has chosen to live in a relationship that contradicts his or her previous wedding vows. All of us struggle to live in full accord with the gospel. A person in this situation is still a beloved member of the parish community, and should participate in parish life as fully as possible. A person who persists in a sexual relationship outside of marriage, in any situation, including remarriage after divorce without an annulment, should not present themselves for sacramental communion but instead should seek a spiritual communion, praying for God to dwell more fully in his or her heart.