

Memorandum

To: Priests, Deacons, RCIA Directors, Parish Volunteers
From: Rev. Christopher Fraser, JCL ; Judicial Vicar
Date: 11/16/2010
Re: Addendum to Fall Letter from the Tribunal

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify a few issues that were brought to the attention of the Diocesan Tribunal and other departments of the diocese regarding the recommended path of reception of the Sacraments of Initiation for individuals in invalid marriages and those needing an annulment.

Some confusion was created by my proposal regarding divorced and remarried catechumens and/or candidates who were interested in becoming a part of the RCIA process in our parishes. As noted in my letter, divorce and remarriage is an “impediment” to receiving Catholic Sacraments. For instance, a Catholic who is divorced and remarried no longer may avail themselves of the Eucharist or Reconciliation until their marital status is clarified and they convalidate their marriage in the Catholic Church. Since the Catholic Church recognizes the inherent permanence and goodness of “all” marriages, when anyone approaches the Catholic Church to either complete their sacraments of initiation or to be become baptized and enter the Catholic Church, any and all previous marriages must be evaluated and assessed.

From time to time, divorced and remarried persons are welcomed into the RCIA program, only later to realize that they cannot proceed in receiving the Sacraments of the Church due to a present invalid marriage. Thus, the question was posed for clarification, **“to what point is the divorced and remarried catechumen or candidate welcome to proceed in the RCIA process; and at what stage must they stop before moving forward to full initiation in the Catholic Church?”** My Fall letter gave the impression that divorced and remarried persons were disqualified from becoming a part of the RCIA until their marriage status was clarified through a formal annulment proceeding. This is certainly not the case. However, it is imperative that the Pastor or RCIA Leader discuss any marriage issues as early in the RCIA Process as possible. With the assistance of the Family Catechesis and Parish Leadership Support offices, I have drafted this addendum to the letter in order to clarify the pertinent issues and to suggest a course of action in working with these couples.

The following are the guidelines in dealing with divorced and remarried persons who desire Full Communion with the Catholic Church.

(NB: It would be presumed that a person in need of an annulment would have met with a priest, deacon, or nullity minister at the parish in order to explore the options for an annulment petition and to put the process in motion while the person is seeking to become a Catholic. It is imperative that the Pastor or RCIA Leader discuss any marriage issues as early in the RCIA Process as possible).

For Catechumens: Those persons wishing to be baptized and fully initiated can be welcomed into the RCIA and can be a part of the liturgical celebrations of RCIA up until the point of the Rite of Election. Therefore, they cannot be incorporated as members of the Elect, because they are impeded from receiving the sacraments due to a present marriage that is invalid. A person in this particular situation could proceed in the following manner:

- 1) Complete Pre-Catechumenate; 2) Rite of Acceptance; 3) Complete the Catechumenate
- 4) The RCIA Process Pauses before the Rite of Election.

For Candidates: Those baptized Christians wishing to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church can also be welcomed into the RCIA, and to take all of the catechetical instructions, but cannot receive the sacraments until their marriage status has been resolved through an annulment process. This necessarily means that they are welcome to complete the instructions, but until they resolve their marital status, they cannot receive Confirmation, Holy Communion, or Reconciliation. Once a declaration of nullity is received for any and all prior marriages, can the couple proceed to convalidation and reception of the Sacraments for which they had prepared.