

# DIOCESE OF DALLAS

## RCIA and Previous Marriage Bonds Policy



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## **RCIA and Previous Marriage Bonds**

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Every year, the Catholic Church in Dallas welcomes thousands of new people, many coming into the Catholic Church through the RCIA process as Catechumens or Candidates. These new Catholics energize the Church with their enthusiasm for their new-found Catholic faith. We want to do everything we can to be as welcoming as possible. Yet, many times these potential members can feel frustrated and unwanted, because they discover, before they can enter the Catholic Church, if they are in a marital relationship, that relationship must be presumed valid in the Catholic Church. Thus, it is important that the marital status of each Catechumen or Candidate be determined very early in the RCIA process.

The purpose of this document is to assist the Pastor or other ordained parish cleric to determine the marital status of the Catechumen or Candidate as soon as possible in the RCIA process so that the Catechumen or Candidate will have a clear understanding of her/his marital status in the eyes of the Catholic Church and when, if so desired, entrance into full Communion might be possible.

As you are aware, a person in the RCIA process is either a Catechumen (a non-baptized person seeking to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church ) or a Candidate (an already baptized Christian seeking to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church or a baptized uncatechized Catholic seeking Confirmation and Eucharist.)

The parish Pastor or other cleric assigned to the parish should hold at least two private meetings with every Catechumen or Candidate he is preparing for Baptism and/or the other Sacraments of Initiation to determine, among other things, the marital status of the person, including any possible cohabitation. The decision whether a person should be brought into the Church and/or should complete the Sacraments of Initiation should not be left only to the conscience of that person; nor should that decision be made only by the RCIA director or team, but rather by an ordained parish cleric working directly with the Catechumen or Candidate.

Any Catechumen or Candidate, if living in a conjugal relationship, must be in a presumably valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church. If that person is living in a conjugal relationship that is not a presumably valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church, the Tribunal must be contacted for direction as quickly as possible (214) 379-2840 or [mgillett@cathdal.org](mailto:mgillett@cathdal.org).

Thus, for all Catechumens and Candidates, any previous marriage must be reviewed and declared invalid so the current marriage, or any future marriage, can be a presumably valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church.

Therefore, before making a Profession of Faith and/or completing the Sacraments of Initiation, any Catechumen or Candidate in, or intending to enter into, a marital union that is not a presumably

valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church, must be referred to the Tribunal so any union, current or anticipated, can be a presumably valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church. Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, to include the Profession of Faith) must be delayed until any current, or anticipated, union can be recognized as a presumably valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church.

Please note: only Candidates entering into full Communion with the Catholic Church and/or Catholics completing the Sacraments of Initiation should receive the Sacrament of Penance prior to their full Communion or Initiation.

Note of caution: Remember that any spouse or intended spouse of a Catechumen or Candidate must be free to marry according to the laws of the Catholic Church and must meet the same requirements as those of the Catechumen or Candidate concerning any previous marriage. It is not prudent to administer Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation and/or allow the person to make a Profession of Faith unless the current or anticipated union can be a presumably valid marital union according to the laws of the Catholic Church.

Any marriage of a Catechumen or Candidate requiring convalidation should be convalidated with the appropriate diocesan marriage preparation before that person is brought into the Catholic Church and/or completes the Sacraments of Initiation. An exception might arise with Privilege cases; therefore, please call the Tribunal if a decree has been issued to allow the person to use the Pauline or Petrine Privilege.

Any convalidation must be preceded by the appropriate marriage preparation as required by the parish and Diocese. And the parties must be properly instructed so they can fully understand that they are making a new act of consent in order to marry.

We want to make the Catechumen or Candidate feel especially welcome even if her/his entrance into the Catholic Church has to be delayed while there are attempts through the Tribunal process to recognize the current or future marriage as presumably valid in the Catholic Church.

Please contact the Tribunal at (214) 379-2840, [mgillett@cathdal.org](mailto:mgillett@cathdal.org) with any questions to be sure all Catechumens/Candidates meet the marital requirements of the Catholic Church.

Click on [RCIA & Previous Marriage Bonds Policy - Possible Scenarios](#). Although by no means exhaustive, these scenarios may be encountered when working with the Catechumens and Candidates with previous marriage bonds.