

## MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

### **MARRIED TO A DIVORCED PERSON? Or PERSONS REMARRIED AFTER DIVORCE(S)?**

Persons who have remarried after divorce(s) may be eligible to validate their marriage as a Sacrament in the Catholic Church. Whether persons are Catholic or non-Catholic, the Catholic Church recognizes the first lawful marriage only as a sacrament. Any subsequent unlawful marriage(s) after divorce are not sacraments. Why? Former marriage(s) and one's present marriage cannot all be sacraments at the same time. There can only be *one lifelong Sacrament of Marriage* for a couple. Therefore, before one's present marriage can become validated as a Sacrament by the Catholic Church, former marriage(s) must first be invalidated. Civil authorities break the legal contract of marriage by a divorce decree, but they can never dissolve the *Sacrament of Marriage*. In Matthew (19:3-9), Jesus clearly prohibits the dissolution of one's marriage by divorce. Only through the Catholic Church can one's former marriage(s) be invalidated when the elements of a Sacrament in the Lord were never present at their outset. Until authorities of our diocese can investigate these former marriages to determine whether or not they were truly sacraments, the Catholic Church is not free to validate one's present marriage. The amount of time of this investigation varies with the circumstances of former marriage(s). There are some five ways by which former marriage(s) may be invalid. Sometimes the lawful norms of one's church may not have been followed properly. At other times, former marriage(s) may appear to be lawful, but are nevertheless still deficient in what is necessary to have true validity as a Sacrament of the Church. Whatever the case, this time is well spent by the Catholic Church as her ministry of healing for those being reconciled to their own inner selves, to God and to the Church. Once our diocese completes its investigation and a "decree of invalidity" of former marriage(s) is issued, the Catholic Church is free to prepare a couple for validation of their present marriage. In the meantime, couples living together without a sacramental marriage are invited to worship with our faith community on Sundays. However, they are asked to *suspend receiving all sacraments before they enter into a valid marriage*. Our parish offers the pastoral care needed by all persons seeking validation.

### **DIVORCED CATHOLICS—NOT REMARRIED?**

Although the state has the authority to render a civil decree of divorce, it does not have the authority to dissolve the Sacrament of Marriage. Consequently, while the contract of marriage is no longer binding by the state with the issue of a divorce decree, the valid Sacrament of that same Marriage is still binding in the Catholic Church. Therefore, the Catholic party who is divorced, but not remarried, is still honoring his/her Sacramental bond of Marriage by not remarrying. Such a Catholic, divorced and not remarried, is *free to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist*.

### **NORMS FOR SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**

All churches have proper norms for marriage. In the Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Marriage requires 6 to 9 months for preparation: meetings with a married sponsor couple, an Engaged Encounter Weekend to facilitate open communication, consultation with a music minister to help in preparations for the Wedding Liturgy, and meetings with a priest, deacon and laity to review this sacrament as one's "Marriage in the Lord." Once a couple fulfills these norms, they may marry. If the couple is of mixed religion (a Catholic and a non-Catholic party), they have two options of where their wedding service may take place. They may marry in a Catholic Church, with a priest or deacon officiating, and with or without a minister from another faith tradition also participating. Or, they may receive a dispensation to marry in another Christian Church, with a minister officiating, and with or without a priest or deacon also participating. In either case, the Marriage is a valid Sacrament. Our Diocese and most all Dioceses do not permit outdoor weddings.

### **CHRISTIAN INITIATION (RCIA) AND MARRIAGE**

Persons married to a divorced person or a person who remarried after divorce(s) are required to receive a "decree of invalidity" for all former marriage(s) before entering into full communion of the Catholic Church. This process may take more than a year. If a person is presently married to a Catholic, but not according to the proper norms required by the Catholic Church, these norms must first be fulfilled before receiving any of the initiation sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). Marriage already contracted between the couple, yet lacking sacramental norms, is of such great importance to their lives as a couple that the Catholic Church places the highest priority in validating it as soon as possible. By validating their marriage first as a priority, the Catholic Church honors the couple's relationship so that they are properly prepared to receive the other sacraments of the Catholic Church. In the meantime, the couple is encouraged to continue worshipping with our faith community each Sunday. However, they are asked to *suspend receiving all sacraments until after their present marriage has been validated*. This is a process and ministry of compassion and reconciliation.