

Everyone knows all about Annulments as these statements show... or do they?

- ▶ An annulment is only the Church's way of letting Catholics divorce
- ▶ A former spouse can veto an annulment
- ▶ Children of an annulled marriage are automatically illegitimate
- ▶ Excommunication automatically follows a divorce
- ▶ Having an affair enables you to get an annulment
- ▶ Having children prevents a marriage being annulled
- ▶ The Church doesn't recognise any marriage between non-Catholics
- ▶ You have to have money to get an annulment

NONE of these statements is actually true!
If any of this has come as a surprise to you, you're not alone.

In today's world an increasing number of marriages have broken down, some regrettably involving Catholics. Following divorce, either or both parties would like to move on, but can't see a way of overcoming the difficulties whilst remaining in good standing with the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church believes that it has far-reaching pastoral responsibilities, therefore, to offer help in the context of

marriage it has in every Diocese a Marriage Tribunal which addresses problems arising from misunderstandings such as these. If you would like to know more then perhaps the Tribunal can help.

Let's start at the beginning

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church a valid marriage lasts "until death us do part," therefore, no one can enter into a second valid marriage whilst his or her first spouse is alive. Even though the civil contract may be dissolved through divorce, the spiritual bond endures and consequently the couple are considered married as far as the Catholic Church is concerned.

HOWEVER, the Catholic Church also recognises there may be reasons why a wedding ceremony may not have resulted in a valid marriage - due to the circumstances relating to one or both of the parties at the time the wedding took place. If after careful investigation, reasons are discovered which prevented it from being a valid marriage then the Catholic Church can declare it to be invalid. An annulment has only ecclesiastical effects, and for practical reasons no application for an annulment will be accepted before a civil divorce has been granted.

What could those reasons be?

One could list some of the formal reasons why annulments have been granted but here that might not be helpful. After all we're talking about a very personal situation and

therefore, whilst there could be a number of reasons that MIGHT be relevant, it's very important to ensure that whatever is done is done for YOU and to address YOUR individual circumstances at the time of your wedding.

There are however two broad categories and the procedures are different for each.

1. If the Church's rules for the marriage of Catholics have not been followed then it is possible for the Church to declare the marriage null based solely on the documentary evidence provided.
2. On the other hand, there may be either an impediment to a marriage or there may be something not entirely correct in the exchanging of consent to marriage at the time. In these circumstances enquiries will need to be made and only after these have been completed can a marriage possibly be adjudged to be invalid. Until such time the Catholic Church presumes all marriages to be valid.

So what does this mean?

In declaring a marriage to be invalid the Catholic Church is concerned with the personal and spiritual aspects of marriage. Accordingly an annulment does not 'erase' the civil contract, and it does not render any children illegitimate. It merely states that after a thorough investigation, the Catholic Church has decided that a marriage, as it understands marriage, was not valid from the outset.

Once this has been done then the parties are free to marry in the Catholic Church someone else who is similarly free to marry.

How could this affect me?

As stated earlier the Catholic Church believes it has a pastoral responsibility to ALL of its members. This extends to divorced non-Catholics who may wish to marry a Catholic, or who have already remarried a Catholic (either in a civil ceremony or in a non-Catholic church service).

This means that if;

- ▶ you are a divorced Catholic and want to be free to marry again
- ▶ you are a divorced non-Catholic and would like to marry a Catholic who is free to do so
- ▶ you are a divorced Catholic who has remarried in a civil ceremony and now wish to be married in the Catholic Church
- ▶ you would like to marry a Catholic who has been divorced
- ▶ you married a Catholic in a civil ceremony or a non-Catholic ceremony and now wish to be married in the Catholic Church

whether or not there have been any children and however many years ago your wedding took place, YOU can certainly ask the Church for advice.

How should I proceed?

Of course you can talk to your local Parish Priest and that may be ideal for you; however, if you prefer, you could talk directly to:

**The Tribunal Administrator
Bishop's House, The Upper Drive, Hove
BN3 6NB**

Telephone: 01273 859703

tribunaladministrator@abdiocese.org.uk

A preliminary talk with a member of the Marriage Tribunal will, of course, be confidential and without any obligation whatsoever. At the end of this talk it may be possible to give some preliminary indication of whether there are realistic grounds on which to base a case.

If, as a result of such a discussion, you decide that it is appropriate to proceed further with a formal case, the process will be explained to you.

Applicants are asked to contribute toward the costs involved in their case; however financial considerations should not discourage anyone – where there is genuine hardship the Tribunal will waive part or all of this contribution.

We have also allocated part of our website to help anyone interested in annulments:

www.abdiocese.org.uk/curia

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ANNULMENT A Fresh Start?

