

# Steps TOWARD *Convalidation*

**1 Contact** your local parish for an appointment with your pastor or his delegate to discuss the situation and determine what must be done.

**2 Obtain** a new copy of the baptismal certificate for the Catholic party (or parties). Make that request to the parish where the person was baptized. If the parish no longer exists or baptismal records are unavailable, contact the Chancery office of that Catholic diocese for assistance.

**3 Begin** collecting the necessary paperwork for the Pre-Nuptial Investigation for Catholic Churches in the State of New Jersey.

**4 Participate** in formational sessions with a mentor couple, priest or deacon in the parish to prepare you for sacramental marriage; take a Natural Family Planning Class.



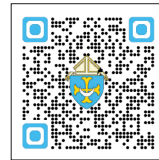
Scan to learn more about  
**Natural Family Planning**  
<https://dioceseoftrenton.org/natural-family-planning>

**5 If there** is a prior marriage for either party, seek a Church declaration of nullity.



**6 As part** of your formational sessions, you may be asked to complete a premarital inventory to identify strengths and areas for growth in the relationship.

**7 If married** civilly two years or less, attend a parish or diocesan Pre-Cana program, or an Engaged Encounter weekend; if previously married, attend the "To Trust Again" remarriage program.



Scan to learn more about  
**Marriage Encounter Weekends**  
<https://wwme.org/apply/>

**8 If married** more than two years it is highly recommended that you attend a Marriage Encounter weekend.

**9 Determine** the date and most suitable type for growth in the relationship. of ceremony. For two Catholics, a nuptial Mass is suggested so that the first meal shared by the couple is the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. Plan a joyful get-together that will follow the liturgical service to celebrate the Church's recognition of your marriage.

**10 Celebrate** the Sacrament of Reconciliation and become actively involved together in your parish community.



## Additional Resources

### For Your Marriage

A full service website for all Catholic married couples, sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
[www.ForYourMarriage.org](http://www.ForYourMarriage.org)



### Catholic Wedding Help

A website for planning your Catholic wedding  
[www.CatholicWeddingHelp.com](http://www.CatholicWeddingHelp.com)



### Tribunal: FAQ

Frequently asked questions about the Trenton Diocese Tribunal and the annulment process.  
<https://dioceseoftrenton.org/tribunal-frequently-asked-questions>



### DIOCESE OF TRENTON

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# *Convalidation*

BRINGING YOUR  
MARRIAGE INTO  
THE CHURCH



# Welcome!

Since you've picked up this pamphlet, you may be wondering: **"Is my marriage recognized by the Church?"** You're not alone. Ordinarily, Catholic Church Law requires baptized Roman Catholics to marry before a priest or deacon. Unless they received a "dispensation from canonical form," Catholics who exchange vows in the presence of other religious ministers or civil officials are not considered validly married in the eyes of the Church. Regardless of what happened in the past, the Catholic Church invites you to bring new meaning to your lives by embracing the graces of a sacramental marriage.

## Why Marry Catholic?

Catholic Marriage is unique among other marital relationships because it is a sacrament. Therefore, it makes Christ present in our world. The relationship between husband and wife mirrors the relationship of Jesus Christ with His people. In the Catholic Tradition, husband and wife accept a role in God's plan for humanity – they are ambassadors of God's love, and are co-creators of life with God! The vows exchanged by the couple are a Sacred Covenant through which the spouses embrace each other, and, together, embrace Jesus. Through their union with Christ, they participate in the unbreakable Covenant between God and humanity – that was sealed in the death and Resurrection of Christ.



## What if There Was a Prior Marriage?

In the simplest terms, if a Catholic wishes to marry in the Church when there has been a previous marriage for either party, the partner in the earlier union must have either: died, or the Church must have issued a declaration of nullity (AKA annulment\*) of the previous marriage. The Catholic Church views all true marriages with respect, and presumes that they are valid. Therefore, it considers the marriage of two Protestant, Jewish, or even non-believing persons (any of whom marry according to their own tradition) to be binding in the eyes of God. Consequently, a tribunal process is required to establish that an essential ingredient in the relationship was missing from the start of the previous marriage. For Catholics with a prior marriage outside the Church, the declaration of nullity is based on what is called a "lack of canonical form." For Catholics with a prior "valid" marriage, the tribunal process is termed a "formal case." Catholics should consult with their pastor if a declaration of nullity is needed.

*\*Receiving an annulment does not render children of the relationship "illegitimate."*

## Benefits of Catholic Marriage

As St. John Chrysostom says, "When a husband and wife are united in marriage they no longer seem like something earthly, but rather like the image of God himself." One of the many benefits of a Sacramental Marriage is the power of God's grace, which helps couples keep their commitment and find happiness together. Social scientists find that couples who recognize God's presence in their relationship experience more satisfaction and are more likely to achieve lifelong marriage. Couples who choose to bring their marriage into the Church receive many gifts – peace of heart, oneness with the Church, the fullness of the sacraments, and God's special blessing upon their marriage, among others.



"It is the presence of the Lord, who reveals Himself and the gift of His grace, that will render your marriage full and profoundly true."

~ Pope Francis

## 3 Things That Make Marriage Valid in the Church

Three things need to be in place for a true (valid) marriage: capacity, consent, and canonical form. A valid Catholic marriage comes into existence when a man and woman who are capable, give consent to a true marriage, including all the essential properties of marriage, and exchange this consent in the proper form for Catholic weddings.

Convalidation is not simply a "blessing" of an existing union. It requires that a new, free act of consent be made.

### 1

## CAPACITY

- Psychological capacity (emotional maturity and stability)
- Physical capacity
- Freedom from impediments (e.g. a prior marriage, vows in a religious order, etc.)

### 2

## CONSENT

- To a lifelong marriage
- To an exclusive marriage
- To a marriage that is open to children

### 3

## CANONICAL FORM

- To be married in the presence of a Catholic bishop, or a priest or deacon delegated by either the pastor or bishop, and two witnesses according to the Order of Celebrating Matrimony.

**NOTE:** Special permission is required for Catholics to marry in a place other than their parish church.