



## Hints for Utilizing the Tribunal Processes

(Revised July, 2024)

1. To introduce a case for the examination of a matrimonial bond as to its possible invalidity or nullity, select a Case Sponsor at a local Catholic parish. Your home parish should be your first choice, but if you are not comfortable with having the clergy or lay staff in your own parish introduce your case, you are free to approach another parish with the request for help – please let them know that you are seeking their help because you do not wish to approach your own parish (due to concerns regarding anonymity, etc.). If you are not successful in locating another one on your own, please call the Tribunal so that you can be put in contact with potential Case Sponsors at another parish. Your Case Sponsor is usually designated to serve as your Procurator-Advocate for the case.
2. Complete the *Petition for Investigation of a Matrimonial Bond* and the appropriate *Petitioner's Questionnaire*. The Tribunal forms are fillable and you're encouraged to type them. But if it is not feasible, please print using black ink. Use extra sheets of paper if necessary for your Questionnaire answers. Writing your answers by printing in black ink will suffice for Tribunal purposes, **as long as it is legible**. Keep photocopies of all materials you submit to the Tribunal.
3. In telling your story, give the necessary facts. Know that the Tribunal does not seek to place blame on either party. You do not have to build up yourself at the expense of the other party, or make yourself seem faultless. When you are writing your declaration, remember that your former spouse will be able to read it, as you will be able to read the declaration of your former spouse. We ask that you be entirely frank and honest.
4. Include whatever information is pertinent, regardless of how personal it feels to you or someone else. The Tribunal is better able to assist you if you provide the necessary information. Your Case Sponsor/Procurator-Advocate can guide you in writing full, complete, and honest answers.
5. If possible, alert your former spouse ahead of time to expect contact from the Tribunal and enlist her/his support. The Tribunal will need the verified current address of your former spouse.
6. Provide the complete names and verified current addresses of at least four “fact witnesses” who are knowledgeable about you and your former spouse while you were dating and at the time of your wedding. The best “fact witnesses” are usually family members and friends you have known for a long time. **Prior to proposing a witness and listing the person's name and contact information, you must secure his or her agreement to testify.** Your witnesses will be submitting written testimony but may be asked to appear at the Court in person in rare instances. It is crucial for the integrity of your case to avoid any attempt to “help” a witness remember the details of your early life, courtship, and marriage. Compromised or “coached” witness testimony can result in the canonical equivalent of a mistrial.
7. Consider releasing “expert witnesses,” such as counselors or health professionals, clergy, social workers, etc., who in their professional capacity might know something about your marriage.
8. When your case has been submitted, your Procurator-Advocate will be your liaison with the Tribunal. Periodically contact your Procurator-Advocate so that he or she can check on the case, instead of contacting the Tribunal.
9. Do not set a date even tentatively for a wedding in the Catholic Church (including a wedding via a convalidation) until you have received a final decision from our Tribunal **and any stipulations placed by the Court have been fulfilled.** Stipulations can take time to fulfill or resolve, so please do not rush to set a wedding date once you receive an initial letter from the Tribunal. Parish clergy and staff in our diocese know that they must wait until all stipulations are fulfilled or resolved before they can assist you with planning a wedding in the Catholic Church.
10. Inform the Tribunal as soon as possible in writing of any changes of address for yourself, your former spouse, or any of your witnesses.