

Church Teachings Regarding Catholics who are Separated or Divorced

The following information is intended to educate our Catholic community on the Church's teachings, and to encourage those who are separated or divorced to feel welcomed and engaged in parish life.

"I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and with solicitous care, to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can and indeed must share in her life. They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer...to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother and thus sustain them in faith and hope."

-Pope John Paul II, On the Family, #84

I. Catholics who are separated or divorced, and who **have not remarried outside** of the Church:

- Are in good standing in the Church, can receive all of the sacraments, including Holy Communion, and are encouraged to fulfill their Catholic commitment to attend Church on a weekly basis.
- Are encouraged to fully participate in all aspects of parish life and are invited to serve in any ministries including Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and Catechists.
- May serve as Godparents or sponsors for Baptism and for Confirmation.
- Catholics who are separated or divorced are not excommunicated.

II. With regard to a **Catholic Annulment** after a civil divorce:

- An annulment is not a "Catholic divorce." Rather, it is process by which the Church judges that the elements necessary to constitute a valid marital bond were not present at the exchange of consent.
- You may be eligible for an annulment even if you were married for a long time; or have children.
- If you have an annulment, your children may still be baptized and are legitimate in the eyes of the Church and in the eyes of God who has made them in His image.
- If you have received an annulment you are free to enter into a sacramental Church marriage.
- Most annulments do not take years to process, and only a rare few have to be reviewed by Rome.
- The annulment process can still proceed even if your "ex" chooses not to participate.
- Annulments do not cost thousands of dollars, and no one is ever denied this opportunity based on their inability to cover the administrative costs.

III. Catholics who are civilly divorced and **have remarried without an annulment** from the Catholic Church:

- Are welcome at Mass and all Church activities.
- Are not considered to be **in full union** with the Church regarding marriage, and therefore should refrain from receiving Holy Communion.
- Cannot avail themselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Anointing of the Sick, until or unless they are reconciling their marital situation with the Church.
- Cannot serve as sponsors at Confirmation or Baptism.
- Can have their children baptized in the Catholic faith.
- Can have a Catholic funeral ceremony and can be buried in a Catholic cemetery.

Please Note: Anyone with questions about where you stand with regard to any of these matters is encouraged to meet with a priest. He can offer clarity regarding your personal relationship with the Lord and with the Church community, and can discuss any unique circumstances that may apply to your situation.