

*Some Clarifications for Those Who are Divorced
and Those Who are Married "Outside the Church"*

- Once a Catholic, always a Catholic – unless one deliberately renounces one's Catholic faith. Divorce or marriage "outside the Catholic Church" (before a Protestant minister or civil official) is not grounds for excommunication.
- Civil divorce is a civil matter and does not affect one's status in the Catholic Church. A divorced Catholic, living singly, has every right to participate fully in the Church, including receiving the sacraments of the Church.
- A Catholic who marries in the Catholic Church and becomes divorced is not free to marry again unless his/her prior marriage is declared invalid (or his/her former spouse dies).
- A divorced Catholic who remarries without a decree of invalidity (commonly but misleadingly referred to as an "annulment") remains Catholic, but is unable to receive the sacraments.
- A Catholic is not free to marry a divorced person who is not Catholic unless that person's first marriage is declared invalid (or his/her former spouse dies).
- A Catholic who marries a divorced person who is not Catholic and does not have a decree of invalidity remains Catholic, but is unable to receive the sacraments.
- A decree of invalidity is granted to a divorced person when it can be proven through a judicial process that an essential element of marriage was missing **at the time of consent**.
- A divorced person who has received a decree of invalidity is free to marry in the Catholic Church (as long as the other person also is free to marry in the Church).
- A Catholic who, without obtaining a dispensation (permission) from the Catholic Church, marries someone outside the Catholic Church is unable to receive the sacraments.
- Those who are unable to receive Holy Communion or serve as a liturgical minister are urged, nonetheless, to participate in the Mass as fully as they can.
- Catholics who marry outside the Church are able to receive the sacraments once again if they seek and obtain a decree of invalidity (if necessary), celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, and validate their civil marriage in the presence of a priest or deacon.
- The judicial process that investigates the validity of the bond of marriage has no effect on the legitimacy of any children from that union.
- Ideally, the judicial process provides pastoral and spiritual care, helps bring healing and closure to an often-painful past, and helps prepare divorced persons for future healthy relationships.