



*Office of Canonical Affairs
and the Tribunal
Diocese of Arlington
200 North Glebe Road, Suite 524
Arlington, VA 22203-3728
703-841-2555*

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A FORMAL ANNULMENT PETITION

I. INSTRUCTIONS

To initiate a petition for a declaration of marriage nullity, you must first consult with a parish priest or deacon who will assist you in the preparation of your case and act as your advocate in the process. It would be most helpful for you to discuss with him the circumstances which led to the decision to marry.

The preliminary paperwork for such a declaration includes filling out a fact sheet and answering a questionnaire (application form), composing a petition and a narrative essay, as well as providing some supporting documents. The meeting with the priest or deacon must be done before the application and essays are completed. He will conduct a final review of the entire paperwork and then submit it to the Tribunal Office.

The most recent version of the Tribunal forms can be downloaded from the Diocesan website at <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/canonical-affairs-and-tribunal/forms-and-documents>. You may fill out the forms by hand or electronically. **Use of older versions and reformatted forms will not be accepted.**

The forms can be completed using the program Adobe Reader which can be downloaded for free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader>.

If you choose to handwrite the forms, print and write your responses legibly in black ink only.

Either way you choose, please be sure to review all information carefully, sign and date your documents manually. Electronic signatures will not be accepted.

You may also request from your local parish a small booklet published by the Arlington Tribunal entitled *Understanding the Annulment Process* and use it as a guide in understanding the process of our Tribunal.

As a gentle reminder, the Tribunal cannot guarantee how long the process will take or what the outcome will be. Therefore, do not set a date for another marriage until a declaration of nullity has been issued.



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II. PETITION (*LIBELLUS*)

In composing your petition (*libellus*), please use the provided template (do not use a separate sheet of paper) and follow the outline *exactly* as depicted.

In the space provided on the form, begin your petition with this paragraph:

I, (your full name), being a baptized Catholic (or insert baptismal status and religious affiliation) living in (city and state), petition that the Arlington Tribunal investigate the canonical validity of my marriage with (full present name of former spouse), a baptized Catholic (or insert baptismal status and religious affiliation) who now lives in (city and state). This marriage was contracted on (date) in (city and state), at (name of church or hall). At the time of the wedding, I was (#) years old and my spouse was (#) years old. [If this wedding was later convalidated or "blessed" in the Catholic Church, add the following: This marriage was convalidated at (Church name), (city and state), on (date).]

In the petition, include the following information. (Items A-F should be in paragraph form.)

- A. Length of dating period, and cohabitation period, if applicable
- B. Length of formal engagement before the wedding
- C. Number of children born during the marriage and their dates of birth
- D. Dates of final separation and final decree of divorce
- E. Whether or not either party has remarried
- F. In simple terms, the reasons why this marriage should be declared null. Also describe in what ways this marriage differs from your hopes and expectations of each other that you had at the time the marriage took place. **Since a copy of the petition must be sent to your former spouse, please express the reasons truthfully but diplomatically. To deliberately provoke your former spouse by using excessive or prejudicial comments can result in a prolongation of the process.**
- G. List the names of three (3) knowledgeable and cooperative witnesses who are willing to testify and indicate your relationship with each person.
- H. Print, sign and date your petition manually. **Electronic signature will not be accepted. Do not write below the signature line. The Decree of Acceptance is to be completed by the Tribunal only.**



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III. NARRATIVE ESSAY

The Narrative Essay is a more detailed account of your reasons for thinking why your marriage was not a marriage as understood by the Catholic Church. It should be no more than two pages long. This account, though brief, should include any information which you think will assist us in understanding your situation, i.e., your family background, your relationship with your parents and siblings, how your family interacted, any significant family problems, whether or not you had a happy childhood, your educational background, your occupational experience, other relationships you might have had, your personal health and maturity, etc. Similar facts about the Respondent's personal and family history are also important. Please use the provided template, print, sign and date each page manually. **Electronic signature will not be accepted.**

IV. FACT SHEET AND PRELIMINARY APPLICATION

In filling out the Fact Sheet and Preliminary Application, it is asked that the entire form be completed, and ALL the questions be answered completely. The more complete the application, the better understanding the Tribunal has of your former marriage, and the more expeditious the case can be resolved. One or two-word replies are not helpful, and there will have to be significant clarification of these replies before the petition can be accepted.

So as to not jeopardize the integrity of the process and the outcome of our investigation, your former spouse must be contacted, or proof must be given of a reasonable attempt to make contact. Please be sure to provide your former spouse's full name and complete current address on the application form. If you do not know it, use different internet search engines.

The application must be signed and dated manually by you and your advocate.

V. SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS FOR CONVALIDATION

If the marriage was convalidated ("blessed") in the Catholic Church after a wedding ceremony by a civil official or non-Catholic minister, you must complete and submit the supplemental questions with your application form.

VI. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Use the checklist on the last page of the application to ensure that you are submitting all the necessary materials. Please retain copies of all documents for your records before your advocate submits them to the Tribunal.