



ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

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Office of Tribunal

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OUTLINE MARRIAGE NARRATIVE

- 1. Be concise:** This is an outline prepared to assist you in writing a concise narrative story of your former marriage (no more than 8 pages, or less than 4) which will serve as the basis of your petition for the declaration of its nullity. The narrative is meant to provide the Tribunal with some preliminary information about your former marriage. Its main purpose is to help the Tribunal identify possible grounds for a potential declaration of nullity. During the process you will be interviewed in person at the Tribunal. At that time Tribunal personnel will ask you to expand on those aspects of your narrative that are deemed most relevant to the case.
- 2. Be thorough:** Please address ALL (but only) those points raised by the outline that are applicable to your former marriage.
- 3. Be respectful:** Under Church law (Canon Law) your former spouse has the right, although not the obligation, to participate in the nullity process. This is required to allow for the lawful exercise of his right of defense. If he/she participates fully in the proceedings he/she in most cases will be given the opportunity to review your narrative and deposition. Therefore, please avoid any harsh, incendiary or defamatory language while composing your narrative.
- 4. Dates are very important.** To the best of your recollection, please follow the chronological order suggested in the outline and provide all relevant dates.
- 5. Review it before you send it.** It is highly recommended that your narrative also be reviewed by your “case sponsor,” if you have one. In the Archdiocese of Washington, petitions for the declaration of nullity of a marriage are usually prepared with the help of a parish priest or someone designated by them. They will be happy to assist you in writing the narrative and review it before you submit it.
- 6. Please do not use this outline as a questionnaire.** You should compose a narrative, following the proposed outline. Only typed (no hand-written) narratives will be reviewed. Please use type letter size 12.

NARRATIVE OUTLINE

I. PRELIMINARY INFORMATION:

1. **You:**

Your present name (provide maiden name for woman), address and telephone numbers (provide work phone number). Date and place of your birth. Your baptismal status and religion. Your parents' names (mother's maiden name).

2. **Your Former Spouse:**

The present name (provide maiden name for woman), address and telephone numbers (provide please work phone number). **If this information is not available to you**, please provide the name, address and telephone number of a relative of your former spouse, or your former spouse's last known name and address (if you provide the last known address, please make sure to indicate this). Date and place of his/her birth. His/her baptismal status and religion. His/her parents' names (mother's maiden name).

Obligation to Locate the Respondent

Canon Law requires that every effort must be made by the Petitioner to discover and inform the Tribunal the current address of the former spouse to the impugned marriage (the Respondent) so that he/she may be invited to participate in the annulment proceedings. Canon Law recognizes that this is a matter justice and every person's right of defense. No case will be entertained if the Petitioner does not allow the Tribunal to do its best to contact the Respondent. Care should be taken to inform the Tribunal promptly of any change of name or address.

3. **Marriage:**

Date and place of marriage. If you married in a church, please provide the name and church denomination. If this marriage involves a *Catholic* who married a *Protestant* in a Protestant church with a "*dispensation*," please indicate the Catholic church/diocese that granted the dispensation.

Was your marriage to the Respondent your first marriage? Was the Respondent married to anyone before you? If either you or the Respondent were ever married to anyone before this marriage (whether a civil or a religious wedding), please list information about each prior marriage.

What was your religion or denomination at the time of the wedding? What religion or denomination do you now observe or practice? What was the Respondent's religion or denomination at the time of the wedding? What religion or denomination does the Respondent now observe or practice?

4. **Nullity:**

Is your former spouse aware that you will introduce a petition for the declaration of nullity of your former marriage? To the best of your knowledge, is your former spouse in agreement with a possible declaration of nullity? Is he/she opposed to it?

II. BEFORE THE MARRIAGE:

1. You:

Family background: What were your parents like and how did they get along? Which parent was the dominant person in the family? How did you get along with your parents? If you were born in another country, when did you move to the United States? Did you have any emotional illness or serious physical illness while you were growing up? When did you begin to date; how frequently? Did you have any traumatic experience/s growing up? Describe your attitudes toward sex, alcohol, drugs, breaking the law.

Educational background: how far did you go in school and how well did you do? How did you get along with your fellow students, teachers?

Personality and character: How would you describe your personality and character (describe strong and weak traits)?

2. Your Former Spouse:

Family background: What were his/her parents like and how did they get along? Which parent was the dominant person in the family? How did he/she get along with his/her parents? If he/she was born in another country, when did he/she move to the United States? Did he/she have any emotional illness or serious physical illness while he/she was growing up? When did he/she begin to date; how frequently? Did he/she have any traumatic experience/s growing up? Describe his attitudes toward sex, alcohol, drugs, breaking the law.

Educational background: How far did he/she go in school and how well did he/she do? How did he/she get along with his/her fellow students, teachers?

Personality and character: How would you describe his/her personality and character (describe strong and weak traits)?

III. THE MARRIAGE:

1. **Courtship and engagement:**

When and how did you meet? When did you begin to date? Describe your dating habits. How would you describe your relationship while dating? When and how did you decide to marry? Was there a formal engagement, and how long did it last? What was your understanding of marriage? What role, if any, did your faith play on your views on marriage? Did you receive any formal preparation (classes, workshops, etc.) prior to marriage? Where?

In describing this period of your relationship it is very important that you address **ALL** the following questions that may be applicable to your particular situation

Did you live together prior to marriage, and for how long? Were you sexually active? Was there an unplanned pregnancy? Was there any pressure from any person or circumstance to marry? What were the attitudes of each toward having children? Were there any outward signs of an intention against having children (i.e., the procurement of an abortion)? What were your attitudes about getting a divorce if the marriage did not work out? Did the two of you ever talk about this? Did you or your former spouse deliberately conceal something that had you or your former spouse known about it, the marriage would not have taken place (i.e., concealment of sterility, grave contagious illness, children from a previous relationship, incarceration)? Were you or your former spouse unfaithful while dating? Were there any instances of verbal, physical or emotional abuse? What part did each play in the wedding preparations? What were the attitudes of your two families toward the marriage? What did your friends think of it?

2. **The wedding day:**

What did you think and how did you feel as you were dressing for the wedding, during the ceremony and at the wedding reception? Did anything unusual/out of the ordinary happen before, during or immediately after the wedding?

3. **The honeymoon:**

Did you go on a honeymoon? Describe your feelings about it. Was there any difficulty with regard to sexual relations while on the honeymoon?

4. **Your married life:**

How would describe your relationship after marriage? Describe your communication, mutual affection and sexuality during your marriage. What were the attitudes of each toward work and the responsibility of married life? What were your spouse and your attitudes about having children? What were your marital problems? If you identified and addressed any problems in the “courtship or engagement” section, did those problems stopped, continue and/or worsen after marriage? Did new problems emerge after marriage? Explain. Did you ever seek professional help to address and solve your marital problems (when and where)? Where there any temporary separations, and how long did they last?

5. **Final separation and divorce:**

What did finally cause the demise of your marriage? When (exact date, or at least month and year) was the final separation? When (exact date) and where was the final divorce granted? On what grounds? Have you or your former spouse remarried since the divorce? How many times? Are you seeking the annulment because you would like to remarry in the Catholic Church?

In one paragraph, why do you think your former marriage should be declared null?

IV. WITNESSES

1. **The Church's law** normally requires the testimony of trustworthy witnesses to corroborate statements made by parties to a case brought before the Tribunal. In marriage cases, both the Petitioner and the Respondent are expected to submit the name and contact information of witnesses, after obtaining the agreement of the witness to be interviewed.
2. **Witnesses can be of varying degrees:** a) those who have known both parties from before the marriage; b) those who have known one of the parties before the marriage; c) those who have known the parties from the beginning of the marriage; d) those to whom the parties (or one of them) have spoken of the marriage; e) those who can testify to the character of the parties (or one of them). Relatives and friends are potentially good witnesses.
3. **It is important:** a) not to speak about your marriage with a witness once he/she has agreed to serve; b) never ask a witness to say this, that or the other; but only to say what he/she knows to be the truth; c) the witnesses have to be contacted by you and asked to testify; remember to tell them, however, that their actual interview may not take place for a considerable time since much has to be done before the evidence is collected.
4. **Submit a list** of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of at least two potential witnesses that are willing to testify on your behalf. It is very important that these are people who know you and/or your former spouse and are also knowledgeable about the story of your relationship to your former spouse before and after marriage.

Please know that Canon Law requires that the name of the witnesses proposed by one of the parties be communicated to the other

V. DOCUMENTS:

- Your narrative story
- Signed and dated "Petition" (*Libellus*). Otherwise, we cannot process your Petition.
- Copy of the marriage certificate
- Copy of final decree of divorce
- Baptismal certificate, if applicable

Submit all the documentation to:
Archdiocesan Tribunal
P.O. Box 29260
Washington, DC 20017-0260

Keep a copy of all the documents submitted for your own files

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR THE PETITIONER

1. **The Marriage Nullity Process**

Once your petition (including your narrative statement) has been accepted by the Tribunal, the investigation of your petition for the declaration of nullity of your former marriage will be set in motion. There can be, however, no guarantee that a decree of nullity will necessarily be granted. The Tribunal begins with the assumption made in Canon Law (Church law) that every marriage is valid. The obligation to prove the contrary rests on the Petitioner (you), who must do so within the context of the procedural norms of the “marriage nullity process” under the guidance and assistance of Tribunal personnel (judges, canon/church lawyers, etc.). To help the Tribunal arrive to a just conclusion about the status of the marriage under review you will be asked to substantiate your arguments with proofs. These proofs include your own deposition, the testimony of witnesses and sometimes reports from experts like doctors, etc.

2. **Setting a Date for a Future Marriage:**

In order to avoid any embarrassment or ill-will, the following is the Archdiocesan policy: **NO DATE SHOULD BE SCHEDULED FOR A FUTURE MARRIAGE** when an individual, who has a prior marital bond, approaches a member of the Parish Staff.

A DATE CAN BE SCHEDULED ONLY AFTER THE PRIOR MARRIAGE IN QUESTION HAS BEEN DECLARED NULL BY THE TRIBUNAL

3. **Possible Delays During the Process:**

Sometimes the complex nature of a case is a cause of delay. At other times a case may be held up because of lack of evidence as when a Petitioner has not presented the correct names and addresses, or because the proposed witnesses live in other parts of the country/world. Also, please keep in mind yours is not the only case being adjudicated. Our Tribunal judges hundreds of cases each year. Every case is urgent!

4. **An Important Note About Confidentiality:** Generally speaking, the process is confidential. However, it does not come under the sacramental seal of confession or the priest-penitent privilege recognized in some civil law jurisdictions. The tribunal is not exempt from moral and legal obligations to report the abuse of minors and other vulnerable persons.

5. **Do not be afraid of what you are undertaking:** You will be guided step by step by our trained staff. We are well aware of the depth of suffering that is often the result of a marriage breakdown. The marriage nullity process does not seek to “assign” blame for the demise of the marriage. Our only interest is to discover the truth about the marriage under review and arrive thus to a just a sound and just decision. To that we are bound before God and our consciences.

**PETITION
(Libellus)**

I, _____, residing in the (Arch)diocese of _____,
(Your maiden name) (Arch)diocese

hereby petition the Archdiocese of Washington for an ecclesiastical declaration of nullity of my marriage to

_____, residing in the (Arch)diocese of _____,
(Your former spouse's maiden name) (Arch)diocese

I will be represented by a Procurator-Advocate who can be reached through the offices of the Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Washington at 5001 Eastern Avenue, Hyattsville, Maryland, 20782 (mailing address: P.O. Box 29260, Washington, D. C., 20017-0260).

I understand that the matrimonial covenant is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring and that the essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility.

In accord with the provisions of Canon Law, I understand the Judge will determine the grounds upon which this case is to be adjudicated.

In support of this petition I have provided more detailed information about the history of this marriage and the names of witnesses who can give testimony about my relationship with my former spouse.

Your signature (maiden name)

Date
