



Diocese of Saint Petersburg Office of the Tribunal Terms to Know

The Catholic Church uses a lot of terms that have come from Latin, the language spoken by the ancient Romans. These words sometimes confuse people just trying to get through the annulment process. Below is a list of key terms used in the Tribunal office.

Marriage: A permanent and exclusive partnership of a man and woman for their whole lives for the good of both spouses and for the procreation and education of children

Tribunal: An office located in every diocese throughout the world that is dedicated to reviewing information about particular marriages that have ended in divorce and to find out if those marriages can be declared invalid.

Baptismal Certificate with Annotations: An updated copy of the baptismal certificate that also lists the other sacraments the person has received in their lifetime.

Canon Law (Church Law): The rules and regulations for governance of the Church, as taken from the Gospels and developed over history.

Decree of Nullity: A declaration from the Roman Catholic Church that a particular union, begun in good faith and thought by all to be a marriage, was in fact an invalid union as the Church defines marriage.

Defect/Lack of Form: When a Catholic party did not follow the rules of marriage as required by the Church. The Church requires that a marriage be:

1. in a Catholic church
2. witnessed by a priest or deacon,
3. in front of two witnesses, and
4. using properly approved vows.

Defender of the Bond: A member of the Tribunal specially assigned to play the role of 'devil's advocate' and argue *for* the validity of the marriage bond.

Formal Acceptance: The second stage of the annulment process (the first stage being the initial application/inquiry). At this stage, the case is recognized as deserving of full consideration and completion, and grounds for nullity are established.

Jurisdiction: The right of a particular Tribunal to apply Church Law to a particular marriage. Jurisdiction is determined by the place of marriage and the residence of both parties. Also known as Competence.



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Ligamen: A situation involving a respondent who was in a prior valid marriage, who now wants to marry a Catholic.

Petitioner: The person who begins the annulment proceedings for his/her former marriage. (See also respondent).

Procurator: A person appointed by the Tribunal who assures that the respondent's rights are honored.

Judge: A lawyer in Church law who weighs the evidence of the case and decides the outcome.

Respondent: The other spouse, who did not initiate the study of the marriage. See also petitioner.

Second Instance Court: A higher court which reviews the judge's recommendations and the observations of the Defender of the Bond. The Second Instance Appeal Court for the Diocese of St. Petersburg Tribunal is the Archdiocese of Miami Tribunal.

Special Witnesses: Professionals consulted before or during a marriage in order to assist a person or couple. Special witnesses may include: doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, professional counselors, priests, ministers, rabbis, etc. (See also witnesses).

Study of a Marriage: An investigation to determine whether or not there is some reason in Canon Law for declaring a previous marriage invalid.

Vicar Judicial: The chief judge who supervises the Tribunal, under the direction of the bishop.

Witnesses: Relatives or acquaintances of the former couple that may assist the Tribunal in obtaining a deeper understanding of the union, its parties, and its breakdown. See also Special Witnesses.