



Tribunal of the Diocese of Cleveland

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GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY AND PARISH MINISTERS

The changes that Pope Francis put forward in 2015 in *Mitis Iudex* encouraged a more detailed preliminary investigation of a claim of nullity of marriage. Striving to reach that ideal without placing additional burdens on the faithful, in 2022 the Diocese of Cleveland transitioned to a system of “case specialists,” a group of both clergy and lay ministers with special training in submitting cases to the Tribunal. We reduced our number of initial questions for petitioners dramatically, but now heavily rely on the case specialists to help petitioners develop their answers well and bring forward the canonically relevant details that are needed to prove what they claim. If you are not a case specialist or do not have one at your parish, we recommend the following guidelines when a parishioner needs help with their marital status:

- 1. Have a pastoral meeting to listen to your parishioner and their needs.** Many people will naturally come to you wanting guidance about their prior marriages and what they should do. Talk with them and hear their story. Encourage them in the Gospel message and their desire to live a life that corresponds to what Christ taught us. Affirm their understanding that marriage is a serious matter, and that if they believe their prior marriage is invalid they will need to walk with the Church to see if their belief can be proved to be true.
- 2. Refer them to a case specialist to give them canonical advice and help them to prepare and submit their petition.** We have a public [directory of the case specialists](#) on the diocesan website with their contact information for you or your petitioner to directly contact, or you or your parishioner can [submit a request](#) through the website for a case specialist to be assigned to them who is reasonably close to them. Either way, a meeting with a case specialist will be arranged to start assisting them with the canonical process.

Lack of Form cases, where one or two Catholics married civilly without the involvement of the Church, can still be submitted by all clergy without the involvement of a case specialist.

- 3. Offer them continued pastoral and spiritual care.** When your parishioner submits a petition with a case specialist, they can name you as their parish minister and allow you to have full access to their case. The case specialist will also make efforts to communicate with you at significant points as the case progresses. Depending on the needs of your parishioner, you could have additional meetings with them to focus on their spiritual and pastoral concerns.

We plan to regularly offer training for clergy and lay ministers to become case specialists, and encourage you to consider this ministry if your parish or surrounding region has a large number of the faithful that would benefit.