

the Catholic clergy). This also includes marriages where a spouse has obtained an annulment from the Catholic Church for a previous marriage.

My spouse and I are unbaptized and married in a civil ceremony, and neither of us was married before.

***The Church considers a marriage invalid in the following situations:***

Either my spouse or I have a prior marriage and the former spouse(s) is still alive. In this case the prior marriage(s) must be examined for validity and an annulment applied for if required.

Either my spouse or I am baptized Catholic and we were married outside the Catholic Church. If this is the first marriage for both parties, the marriage will have to be convalidated using the proper form. If prior marriages are involved, it may be necessary to first apply for an annulment.

### **How will my marriage status affect my participation in RCIA?**

Everyone is welcome to join us for RCIA, including those whose marriages are not considered valid. However, for those in invalid marriages, participation in the sacraments is not permitted until those situations are resolved. As such, *baptized Catholics in invalid marriages should refrain from the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Communion until their marriages can be blessed in the Church.*

Please note that those candidates who are presently *divorced and not remarried* have no impediment to reception of the sacraments; however, should that person want to get married

as a Catholic, they should make sure that the validity of their previous marriage is determined and dealt with.

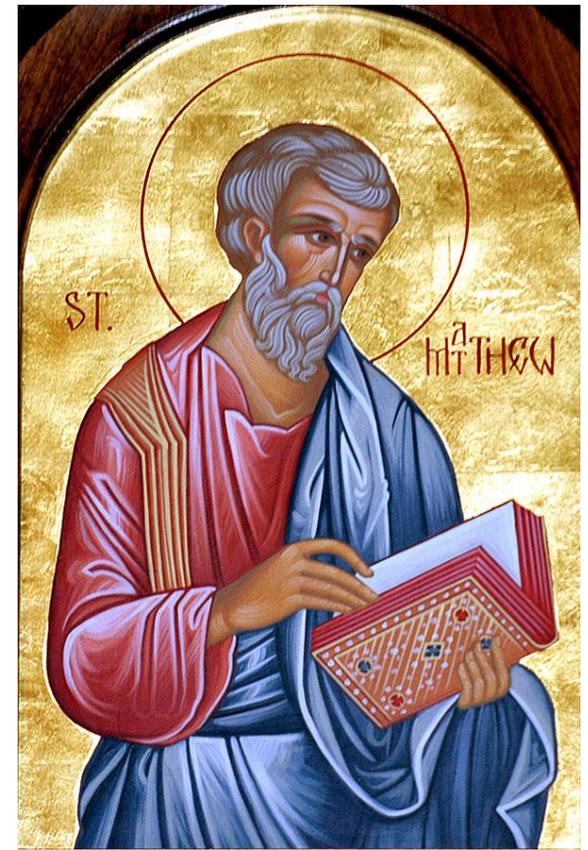
Those RCIA candidates whose marriage situations can be resolved prior to Easter Vigil should be able to celebrate the sacraments at Easter time. For all others, your celebration of the sacraments will be postponed until your marriage situation can be convalidated in the Church.

This should not deter anyone from discerning whether God is calling them to a full life in the Catholic Church, but it does challenge each of us to reflect on whether our marriage truly is a sacrament, a life-giving relationship that reflects the love of Christ and his Church.

If you are in an invalid marriage, or are unsure of your status, please make an appointment with one of the parish clergy.



## **RCIA AND MARRIAGE**



## **SAINT MATTHEW CATHOLIC CHURCH VIRGINIA BEACH**

**You are interested in becoming Catholic or are a baptized Catholic who needs to celebrate first Communion and / or Confirmation. You are presently married, but you have questions as to how the Catholic Church views your marriage.**

## Sacrament versus Sacred Bond

Unlike many Protestant traditions, the Catholic Church is relatively strict in her rules and regulations regarding the institution of marriage. The Catholic Church believes that *the joining of a man and woman in matrimony is a sacred act*. When this act takes place between two baptized Christians, it is a **sacrament**. If neither or only one of the spouses is baptized, then it is not a sacramental marriage, but it is recognized as a **sacred bond**.

*The Church considers marriage, sacramental or not, a valid covenant when a man and woman freely express informed consent, without constraint and unimpeded by natural or church law.* God established this valid covenant, or bond in such a way that once consummated, it can only be dissolved by God through the death of one the partners.

Because of the teachings of the Church on marriage, based on Sacred Scripture and the words of Jesus himself who said, “*What God has joined together, man must not divide,*” divorce is not possible in a valid marriage.

### ***What if my marriage isn’t sacramental?***

Unlike other sacraments that are conferred upon the recipient by a member of the Catholic clergy, the sacrament of matrimony is conferred upon the baptized couple by each other. If they are unbaptized at the time, their marriage is considered a sacred bond. If they are baptized at a later date, their marriage automatically becomes a sacrament.

## What Constitutes a Valid Marriage

### ***Valid Marriage for Catholics***

The question then becomes, “What is a valid marriage?” In addition to the informed consent, without constraint or impediment, *a Catholic must followed the proper Form for the sacrament of marriage*. Simply put, the proper form is to be married before two witnesses and a Catholic clergyman. *If the Catholic does not follow the proper form, the marriage is automatically invalid.*

### ***Valid Marriage for non-Catholics***

What about non-Catholics? The same rules apply as to whether or not the marriage is a sacrament or a sacred bond. *Marriage between two baptized non-Catholics in a Protestant Church is considered to be a sacrament provided that neither party had been married before.* In recognizing the sacramental nature of the marriage the Catholic Church acknowledges the sacredness of all marriages. Just as baptism in a non-Catholic church is considered true baptism, so is marriage in a non-Catholic church considered true marriage.

The Catholic Church requires that all of her married members be in a valid sacramental marriage or a sacred bond. The same is true for all who wish to join the Catholic Church. **For those joining the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults it is necessary to determine whether or not they are in a valid marriage.**

### What if I’ve been married before?

According to Catholic teaching, marriage is a permanent partnership that can be dissolved only by death. Even though divorce may end the civil bond, the spiritual bond continues and the couple remains married in the eyes of the Church. However, the Church also recognizes that a marriage might not have been valid to begin with. If through an annulment

investigation the Church comes to moral certainty that no valid marriage took place, then the parties are free to marry someone else.

### ***What is an annulment?***

An annulment is a declaration by the Catholic Church that after careful investigation, flaws were discovered in the relationship that prevented it from becoming a marriage. It states that the marriage, as the Church understands marriage, was not valid. *Granting of an annulment however does not affect the legitimacy of any children produced within that marital union, nor deny that a civil marriage occurred.*

### What is the status of my marriage?



### ***The Church considers a marriage valid in the following situations:***

As a general rule, the Church considers all marriages to be valid *until proven otherwise*.

I am a baptized non-Catholic Christian married to another baptized non-Catholic Christian, and neither of us has been married before.

I am married to a Catholic and we were married “in the Church” that is, following the proper form (i.e. before two witnesses and a member of