



**THE MARRIAGE FILE:  
THE TRUTH IS IN  
THERE**

Occasionally we receive questions at the tribunal about the marriage file prepared by pastoral ministers preparing a couple for marriage. Specifically, people ask us what documents need to be included in it. Many pastoral ministers have also had the special joy of reading Msgr. Magraw's famous notes attached to a marriage file he has returned, instructing them to include something they have omitted. In this issue, we will go over what documents need to be included in the marriage file. Over the next few issues we will then look in more detail at each document and how to complete it properly.

Please note that we will be examining the marriage file purely from a canonical perspective. Questions or concerns of a more pastoral nature, such as questions about Pre-Cana or FOCCUS, should be directed to the Family Life Office.

It can be helpful to consider the purposes of the marriage file in order to better understand the reasons that specific documents must be included. Canonically speaking, the marriage file is meant to ensure that the parties are free to marry each other and that they do so according to the demands of both canon and civil law. The file also provides a record of the marriage and potential canonical issues involved should it be necessary to investigate the marriage, as in an annulment case, for example.

Given those purposes, the following documents should be included in the marriage file:

- **Proof of the required formation process:** A certificate from Pre-Cana, Engagement Encounter, etc.;
  - **Baptismal certificate:** For Catholic parties, original, updated, and annotated;
  - **Proof of the death of the former spouse or of an annulment:** For a party with a prior marriage;
  - **Civil marriage license:** The portion kept by the minister; the return of marriage should be sent back to the courthouse, and the marriage certificate should be given to the parties.
- **M-A form:** The record of the required pre-marital interview establishing the freedom of the parties to marry;
  - **M-B form:** An affidavit of witness verifying the baptismal and marital status of a Non-Catholic party or a Catholic party whose status is unknown to the pastoral minister; two M-B forms should be included for each party needing it;

That's it for our look at what documents to include in the marriage file. Tune in next time when we will look in more detail at the forms themselves. Until then, keep the faith, love God's people, and always honor the code!

